

The Impact of Community of Practice on Ethical AI Marketing Strategy: The Mediating Role of Corporate Social Responsibility

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ABSTRACT

The core aim of this thesis was to examine the impact of Communities of Practice on ethical AI marketing strategy, with the mediating role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This study adopted a secondary qualitative method based on constructivist philosophy and inductive reasoning. Data were obtained from academic sources and analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis to generate conceptual understanding of the relationships among Communities of Practice, CSR, and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy. The analysis reveals four themes: collaborative learning and the development of ethical capabilities, CSR as responsible AI governance, stakeholder trust in ethical AI marketing and the institutionalisation of ethical AI marketing practices. Based on the findings obtained, Communities of Practice help build the ethical capacity of the organisation through appropriate knowledge sharing, cross-functional collaboration, and fostering ethical competencies in the community. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) supports this with a system of responsible governance that turns internal ethical learning into commitments of stakeholders. These strategies, when combined, can help build trust-based, transparent, accountable, private, and fair AI marketing campaigns. For the future, it is recommended to use other methods such as interviews and in-depth analysis for obtaining sufficient data and results.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing modern marketing by providing businesses with the tools to create personalized customer experiences, predictive analysis, and automated decision-making. However, with the increasing role of AI in marketing, as it becomes more prevalent, ethical issues related to transparency, algorithmic bias, accountability, and consumer privacy have become more relevant, making ethical AI marketing more of a necessity than a choice. According to Hermann (2022), ethical AI marketing is the balance between the efficiency of the AI technology and the well-being, trust and value creation of the stakeholders and society. Such practices require not just technology but also an organisational learning environment that enables the sharing of ethical knowledge and responsible decision-making. Communities of Practice (CoP) is a concept that offers a valuable tool for fostering the co-creation, dissemination and institutionalisation of ethical knowledge in the context of AI adoption. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020) stated that collaboration in the learning community helps to build knowledge integration, problem-solving skills and responsible organisational practices, as it is a continuous process. This means that organisations with well-established Communities of Practice will be better equipped to integrate ethics into their AI-powered marketing initiatives, rather than viewing ethics as a compliance task. This relationship is further enhanced by Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which translates the internal values of the business into external responsible business practices. Kim and Ferguson (2024) noted that CSR programs with an AI element boost organisational warmth, trust from stakeholders and positive behavioural intentions. Hence, CSR could act as a mediator between Communities of Practice and ethical AI marketing practices, which is an important theoretical relationship that is not well explored in the current marketing literature.

Research Problem

While AI has revolutionized customer targeting, personalization, and decision-making in marketing, it has also heightened concerns about ethical issues such as algorithmic bias, data privacy, transparency, and accountability. Many organisations still focus on efficiency and the use of AI, rather than on ethical governance, which poses risks to the trust of stakeholders and the long-term legitimacy of the organisation, Hermann (2022) said. While organisations have adopted ethical AI principles, the actual application of these principles is not uniform, as ethical knowledge is distributed across departments instead of being shared collectively in the organisation's learning systems. Schultz and Seele (2023) pointed out that there is a significant disconnect between the development of AI ethics frameworks and their implementation in organizational practices, which restricts the responsible use of AI. Moreover, previous research has investigated ethical AI, CSR and marketing in isolation, but there is limited empirical research that investigates how Communities of Practice can be used to create ethical AI marketing strategies through collaborative knowledge sharing. Du and Sen (2023) pointed out that responsible AI should be more closely connected with CSR to meet the wider societal expectations, but the connection between internal organisational learning and CSR is under-researched. This lack of understanding of the mediating role of CSR leaves a huge gap in theory and practice, limiting organisations from creating sustainable and ethically responsible AI marketing strategies.

Research Aim and Objectives

Research Aim

- To examine the impact of Communities of Practice **on** ethical AI marketing strategy, with the mediating role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Research Objectives

- To examine the effect of Communities of Practice on the development of ethical AI marketing strategy.
- To investigate the influence of Communities of Practice on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within AI-driven marketing.
- To assess the mediating role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the relationship between Communities of Practice and ethical AI marketing strategy.

Research Questions

- How do Communities of Practice influence the development of ethical AI marketing strategy?
- What is the relationship between Communities of Practice and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in AI-enabled marketing environments?
- Does Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) mediate the relationship between Communities of Practice and ethical AI marketing strategy?

Research Rationale

While the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in marketing has brought about many opportunities for personalization, predictive analytics, and customer engagement, it has also raised ethical concerns about algorithmic bias, privacy, transparency, and accountability. Organisations that adopt AI technologies for efficiency without robust ethical oversight can face a loss of stakeholder trust and sustainability, as Hermann (2022) warns. Despite the fact that ethical AI is a key research topic, current research is largely taken up with technological frameworks and not organisational mechanisms that facilitate ethical implementation. Despite the

clear importance of ethics principles in AI, there is still a significant disconnect between ethics principles and their institutionalisation in organisational practice, as Schultz and Seele (2023) pointed out. The disparity emphasizes the need to explore the role of Communities of Practice in enabling collective learning, knowledge sharing, and ethical decision-making within AI-powered marketing contexts. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020) pointed out that social learning communities play a crucial role in building and spreading organisational knowledge, which is applicable in the context of ethical AI governance. Moreover, CSR has been increasingly perceived as a strategic tool for organisations to showcase responsible AI usage to stakeholders. Kim and Ferguson (2024) emphasized that CSR programs backed by AI have a positive impact on trust and reputation among stakeholders. The theoretical and practical significance of exploring the mediating effect of Communities of Practice on the relationship between ethical AI marketing strategy and sustainable and responsible AI adoption is evident.

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is structured as a typical five-chapter dissertation. The research background, problem statement, aim, objectives, research questions, rationale and significance of the study are introduced in Chapter One. The literature review is conducted in Chapter Two, which focuses on the critical examination of the works related to Communities of Practice, ethical AI marketing strategy and CSR and the conceptual framework is developed. Chapter Three describes the method of the research conducted such as research philosophy, design, sampling, data collection and analysis techniques. The results of the research are presented in Chapter Four and discussed in Chapter Five. The results, conclusions, theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and recommendations for further research are discussed in Chapter Five.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review in this chapter critically examines the literature that supports the relationship between Communities of Practice (CoP), Ethical AI Marketing Strategy and CSR to provide a theoretical basis for the study. The review analyzes the current evidence on the impact of collaborative learning on responsible use of AI in marketing and the role of CSR in ethical organizational practices. Hermann and Puntoni (2025) argue that ethical AI in marketing necessitates a governance framework that ensures transparency, accountability, and value for stakeholders throughout the implementation of AI. In addition, recent reviews highlight that there is a lack of integration between the concepts of organisational knowledge sharing and responsible governance in the current research literature, suggesting a need to explore the interconnections between CoP, CSR and ethical AI marketing practices, as well as to identify the theoretical and empirical gap in the field.

Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice (CoP) are groups of people with a similar professional interest, who meet regularly and who create knowledge together to enhance their practice and to address organisational issues. CoPs are not formal organisational structures, but they can be useful tools for the creation of knowledge and development of capability within an organisation through continuous learning, sharing, and engagement. Communities of Practice are dynamic social learning systems that enable knowledge sharing, innovation, and professional development through the interaction of people who share knowledge and have similar objectives (Nicolini et al., 2022). Communities of Practice are rooted in social learning theory which views learning as a social process and not an individual cognitive process. The idea was first introduced by Lave and Wenger, but today's studies have taken the theory of CoP beyond informal learning to strategic organizational knowledge management and cross-functional working. Aljuwaiber (2021) claimed that modern Communities of Practice have become a long-term strategic planning approach to intentionally facilitate organisational learning, capability building, and innovation as a knowledge management practice. The CoP framework is frequently understood in three related aspects: shared domain, community, and practice. The common domain is the area of shared expertise which gives members of the group a sense of common purpose and identity. The community dimension is about the relationships, trust and regular interactions that allow for collaborative learning and sharing of knowledge.

Practice is the common resources, experiences, tools and problem-solving methods that members acquire as a result of ongoing participation. Nicolini et al. (2022) emphasized that these dimensions are interdependent, working together to establish sustainable learning settings in which knowledge is continually produced, developed and shared between and across organisations. There is a growing body of literature that acknowledges the role of Communities of Practice as an important mechanism for organisational learning and innovation. Employees share tacit knowledge, which is often hard to formalise in organisations, through regular interaction. Co-learning has a positive effect on decision-making, innovation capability and the adaptability of the organisation in the fast-changing business environment. Aljuwaiber (2021) found that organisations that successfully use Communities of Practice have better knowledge sharing, cross-functional collaboration, and alignment between the goals of the organisation and the knowledge of its employees. Communities of Practice have become more relevant in organisations that are implementing AI technologies. The implementation of AI needs to be a collaborative effort between various disciplines, including technical, marketing, legal, and managerial, to deal with the technological complexity and ethical considerations. Organizational learning is crucial for the successful adoption of AI, as it enhances the quality of decisions and organizational capacity by combining human knowledge and expertise with intelligent systems (Wijnhoven, 2022).

Ethical AI Marketing Strategy

Ethical Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the development and design of AI systems that are ethical, fair, transparent, accountable, private and promote human well-being. Ethical AI Marketing Strategy means using these ethical guidelines in AI marketing strategies, so that the innovations in AI respect consumer rights, organisational duties and societal expectations. Ethical AI marketing is not only about respecting the regulations; it's about embedding ethical governance into every aspect of the marketing process, from opportunity identification, the creation of marketing strategies, to the interaction with customers and the evaluation of its effects. In marketing, AI is being used in a variety of ways, including customer segmentation, personalized recommendations, dynamic pricing, demand forecasting, chatbots, content creation, sentiment analysis, and automated advertising optimization, among others. These technologies offer the ability for organisations to enhance marketing efficiency, create better customer experiences and assist with data-driven decision-making. As Kumar and Suthar (2024) explained, AI has revolutionized marketing, enhancing its ability to deliver highly personalized customer experiences through predictive analytics and machine learning, making it more efficient and effective. But there have been a lot of ethical concerns with all the benefits of AI. However, AI marketing can also result in biased outcomes and if it is not transparent and explainable, it can hinder the consumer's understanding of how the AI is making decisions, which can be a factor in discriminatory marketing. There could be a lack of transparency and explainability, and consumers might not have a good understanding of how AI is used to make their decisions, potentially resulting in discriminatory marketing; or algorithmic bias might result in discriminatory marketing outcomes. In addition, the problem of accountability arises when decisions are made without human supervision and/or oversight. Another privacy issue is the amount of consumer data that is gathered and dealt with, which can lead to its misuse and possible infringement of privacy laws. Al Haj Eid et al. (2024) pointed out that privacy, fairness, transparency, accountability, and data security are the biggest ethical issues that face AI-powered marketing. As a result, many organisations have realised that ensuring moral approaches to AI is a necessary component of sustainable marketing performance. Ethical governance boosts consumer confidence, the image of companies, reduces legal and regulatory risks, and establishes long-term relationships with stakeholders. Hermann and Puntoni (2025) suggested the ASSURANCE framework, which highlights autonomy, security, sustainability, representativeness, accountability, non-discrimination, crediting, and empowerment as key principles for the responsible use of AI in marketing. Similarly, Ejjami (2024) stated that by combining human creativity and ethical governance, organisations can create innovation without compromising transparency, inclusivity and consumer confidence, which helps to create a sustainable competitive advantage.

Corporate Social Responsibility in AI Marketing (300 words)

CSR is the responsibility of the company to create economic value and fulfill its ethical, social and environmental commitments to interested parties. Modern thinking on CSR considers it as a strategy and a way of thinking that embeds CSR in the decisions made by the organisation, not just philanthropy. Ghanbarpour et al. (2024) state that CSR helps build stakeholder relationships by creating value for customers, investors, employees and society

over the long term, which enhances the legitimacy of the organisation and sustainable competitiveness. With the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the function of CSR has become more significant in tech-equipped organizations and the power of AI is influencing business processes and customer relations. Although AI systems can provide opportunities for innovation and efficiency, they have also raised ethical concerns regarding data governance, algorithmic fairness, privacy, and accountability. Organisations are now increasingly expected to realize responsible governance in AI development and deployment. Wirtz and colleagues (2023) suggested that the new concept of Corporate Digital Responsibility (CDR) builds on the traditional concept of CSR and focuses on the ethical use of digital technologies, responsible data use, transparency and consumer protection across AI-supported business ecosystems. With the expectations of stakeholders for organisations to use AI to defend consumers' rights and benefit society, responsible AI has now become a part of CSR. Du and Sen (2023) highlighted that AI needs a CSR lens to examine the relationship between technology and ethical values, accountability and stakeholders' interests. This view sees CSR as a key governance tool to address the risks associated with AI and build trust and legitimacy within the organization.

Theoretical Framework

The Communities of Practice (CoP) theory by Lave and Wenger is the primary theory that underpins this study, which has been developed by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020). The theory suggests that knowledge is a social construct, as it is created through ongoing interaction, collaboration and shared learning of people with shared professional interests. CoP focuses on the knowledge creation, sharing and institutionalisation within organisations, rather than on the learning of the individual. Communities of Practice offer a way to integrate multi-disciplinary expertise into responsible decision-making where ethical concerns are often raised due to algorithmic bias, privacy concerns, and accountability issues in AI-driven marketing environments. In addition, Nicolini et al. (2022) claim that CoPs will enhance the learning process of the organisation by providing support for the sharing of knowledge, trust, innovation and cross-functional collaboration, which are crucial for governing complex AI technologies.

The study also relies on stakeholder views of the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which argues that businesses must not only engage in economic activities but also be responsible to customers, employees, regulators, and society. Modern CSR goes beyond philanthropy and involves incorporating ethical considerations into organizational strategies and governance (Ghanbarpour et al., 2024). In the context of AI-driven marketing, CSR serves as a framework to implement responsible data practices, transparency, fairness, and consumer protection. This view is expanded upon by Wirtz et al. (2023), who state that the use of AI by organisations should include responsible digital governance as part of their CSR efforts. In a similar vein, Du and Sen (2023) argue that AI governance, as it relates to CSR, should be considered from a CSR perspective, as responsible implementation of AI has a direct impact on stakeholder trust and the legitimacy of the organisation.

Ethical AI Marketing Strategy is the dependent construct used in the study and is complemented by the growing ethical AI governance frameworks. For ethical AI marketing, it is important to balance the efficiency of the technology with the interests of the stakeholders, transparency, accountability, and creation of social value, as Hermann (2022) explains. Similarly, Hermann and Puntoni (2025) suggest the ASSURANCE framework that highlights autonomy, security, sustainability, accountability, representativeness, non-discrimination, crediting and empowerment as principles for responsible implementation of AI. Ethical AI is not a technical solution, but also an organisational learning and responsible governance process.

This study suggests that Communities of Practice positively impact Ethical AI Marketing Strategy by improving collaborative learning, ethical consideration and knowledge integration between organizational functions. Moreover, CSR is anticipated to moderate this connection, as the common ethical expertise developed in Communities of Practice is translated into responsible organisational policies and AI governance for stakeholders. Therefore, the theoretical framework combines organisational learning theory, CSR and ethical AI governance to understand how collaborative knowledge sharing contributes to creating sustainable and ethically responsible AI marketing strategies in contemporary organizations. The proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1) shows the conceptual mediating role of CSR in translating knowledge generated via CoP into Ethical AI Marketing Strategy.

Conceptual mediation pathway from Communities of Practice to CSR and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy

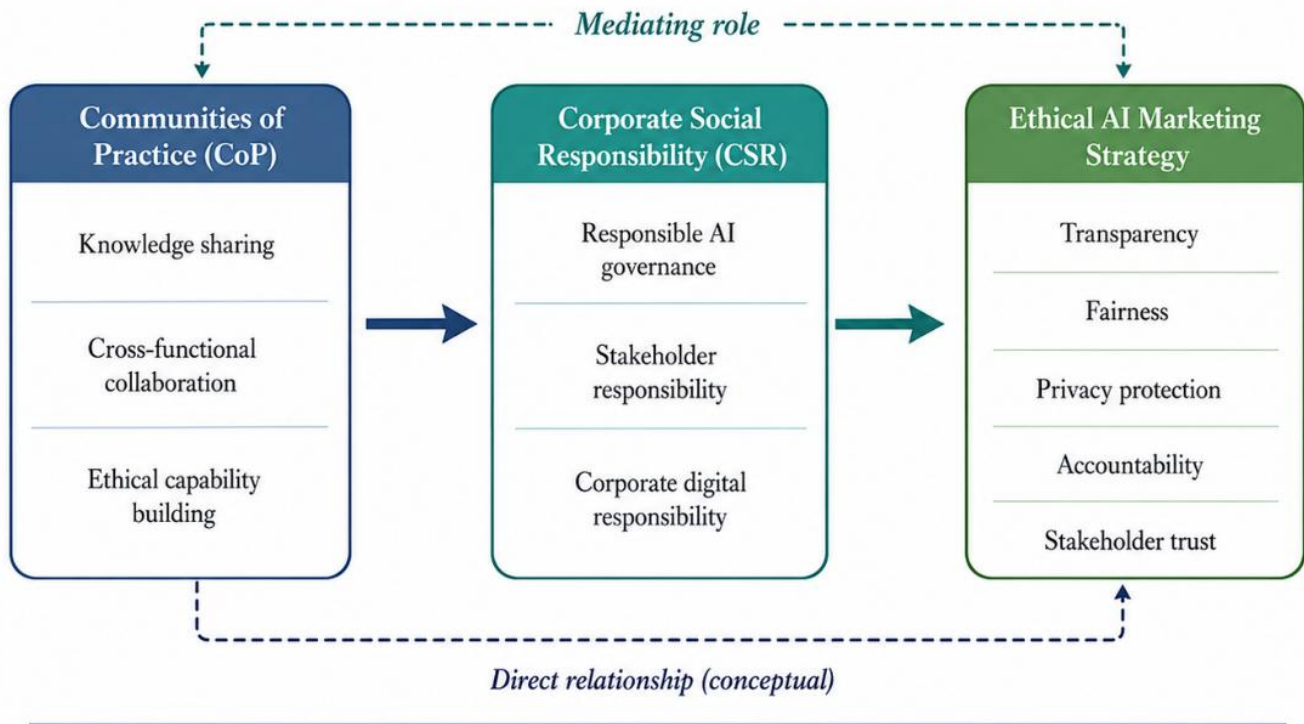


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework (Source: Author)

Literature Gap

The literature shows that there has been significant work on Communities of Practice, CSR, and Ethical AI as individual research fields. Previous research has examined Communities of Practice as a tool for organisational learning, CSR as a tool for responsible business and ethical AI as a governance issue in digital transformation. However, there is a limited amount of empirical research that combines all three of these constructs in an AI-based marketing arena. Systematic reviews conducted in recent years have underscored the pressing need for interdisciplinary studies focusing on the relationship between organisational learning and responsible governance of AI and marketing ethics. Furthermore, the relationship between CSR and how Communities of Practice mediate the relationship between Ethical AI Marketing Strategy has not been extensively studied. This theoretical and empirical disconnect limits the knowledge of the organizational processes which enable responsible use of AI, justifying the present study.

Conclusion

The literature review in this chapter critically analyzed the existing literature on Communities of Practice, Ethical AI Marketing Strategy, and CSR, laying the theoretical groundwork for the study. The review illustrated how Communities of Practice enable organisational learning and ethical knowledge sharing, and how CSR enhances responsible governance and stakeholder trust in organisations using AI.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides the methodological framework used to analyse the mediating role of CSR in the relationship between Communities of Practice (CoP) and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy. It clarifies the research philosophy, approach, design, strategy, data sources, inclusion and exclusion criteria, data collection methods, analysis methods, measures of trustworthiness, and ethics of the study. Given the novelty and still limited use of ethical

AI marketing and the lack of literature that fully considers CoP, CSR, and responsible AI governance, a qualitative secondary methodology was chosen to bring together evidence and develop conceptual understanding of how the study variables relate. As the study is conceptual, it does not empirically test the proposed relationships. Future studies should validate the framework using primary data, such as interviews, surveys, or case studies, to examine the mediating role of CSR.

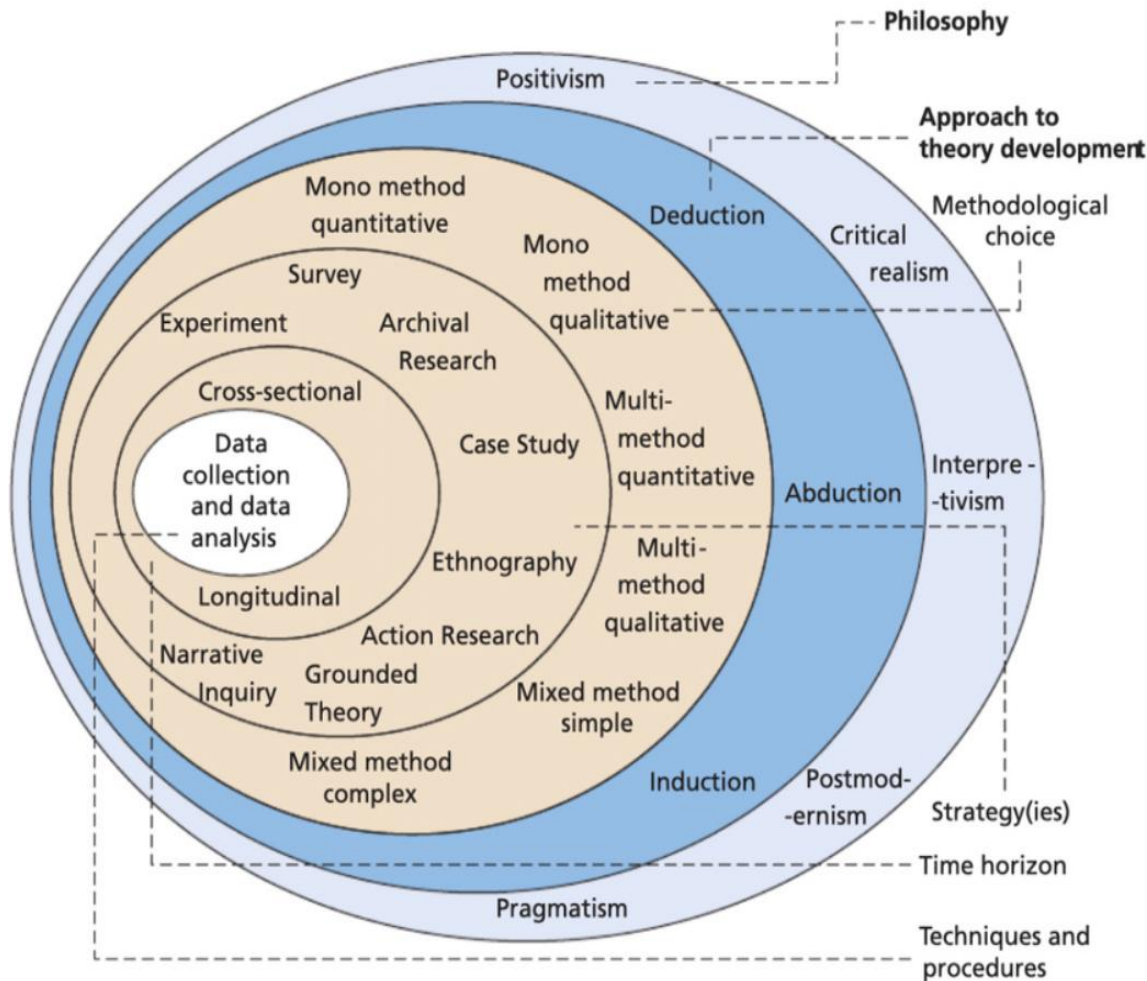


Figure 2. Research Onion. (Adapted by Saunders et al., 2009)

Research Philosophy

Research philosophy serves as a basis for decisions regarding methodology as it is based on the assumptions that guide the researcher regarding the nature of reality, how knowledge is produced, and how to investigate social phenomena (Saunders et al., 2022). These assumptions shape the research design, data gathering, data analysis, data interpretation, and reporting of results. In management research, positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, and constructivism are among the various philosophies used. The positivism principle posits that there is an objective reality that can be observed and measured, which is ideal for quantitative studies aimed at finding causal relationships (Park et al., 2020). Yet, it is less applicable in studies that involve socially constructed organisational phenomena.

Interpretivism is concerned with subjective meanings and acknowledges that reality is constructed through the lived experiences of individuals and social interactions. Pragmatism is a philosophy that focuses on the practical application of solving problems and methodological flexibility to allow for the use of approaches that best solve the research problem (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). However, pragmatism is more commonly linked to mixed-methods studies and might not necessarily offer the philosophical grounding for qualitative secondary research.

This study is based on a constructivist philosophical approach. Constructivism posits that knowledge is not a natural discovery, but a social process that depends on interaction, collaboration, and shared experiences

(Williams, 2024). This is a helpful lens as it supports Communities of Practice, which are based on social learning processes that involve participation, engagement and problem-solving together (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020). Organisational cultures, stakeholder expectations and governance structures also shape ethical practices of AI marketing. Ethical AI is therefore seen as context-dependent and continually developing in the process of organisational learning. Epistemologically, the study uses the subjectivist approach that aims to create conceptual understanding by interpreting and synthesising evidence found.

Table 1. Research Paradigm Alignment

Component	Selected Approach
Research Philosophy	Constructivism
Research Approach	Inductive
Methodology	Qualitative
Research Design	Secondary Research
Research Strategy	Literature-Based Inquiry
Data Analysis	Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Research Approach

Research methods give a rational basis for the construction and interpretation of knowledge. They are usually divided into deductive or inductive. Deductive research is used to test existing theories by empirical investigation while inductive research is used to develop conceptual understanding by the interpretation and synthesis of evidence (Saunders et al., 2022). This study uses an inductive approach because it aims to build a better understanding of the relationship between CoP, CSR, and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy through literature. While ethical AI has garnered much scholarly research, the literature has mainly addressed aspects of transparency, fairness, and accountability, with little research dedicated to the study of how ethical implementation is supported by organisational mechanisms (Schultz and Seele, 2023). The inductive approach allows literature to surface recurring concepts and themes, which assist in the development of theory, integration, and deepening the understanding of how collaborative learning helps in the field of responsible AI marketing in CSR.

Methodological Choice

Research design is a general plan for collecting, analysing, and interpreting data to systematically answer research questions (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). There are broadly three types of research designs: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. The type of research design used in this study is secondary research with a qualitative approach. Secondary qualitative research is the systematic analysis and interpretation of previously published materials to create new theoretical insights and conceptual understandings. Secondary qualitative studies are not hands-on, do not engage with the people being studied, but rather use existing evidence to examine relationships and to uncover new patterns. A secondary qualitative design was chosen because of several considerations. Ethical AI marketing is a nascent field of study, with its literature fragmented and spread across the marketing, information systems, organisational learning, and CSR fields. Combining these sets of knowledge offers a chance to create a more comprehensive understanding of the responsible implementation of AI.

Secondly, secondary qualitative research allows for access to a variety of sources of evidence such as peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, industry reports, and policy publications (Ruggiano and Perry, 2017). The wide range of evidence makes it easier to explore organisational learning processes and mechanisms of ethical governance related to AI-driven marketing practices. Thirdly, qualitative secondary research is very useful in theory-building studies whose main purpose is to clarify and integrate concepts (Johnston, 2017). The lack of comprehensive empirical research on the relationship of Communities of Practice to ethical AI marketing strategy makes secondary analysis a solid methodological basis for further research in this space.

Research Strategy

Research Strategy is the systematic way of looking for, selecting and analysing evidence to solve research questions (Saunders et al., 2022). The study adopted a literature-based qualitative inquiry strategy to identify,

review and interpret existing scholarly evidence related to Communities of Practice, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy. It facilitates the integration and interpretation of diverse bodies of knowledge, enabling researchers to generate conceptual insights and develop a deeper understanding of emerging phenomena (Snyder, 2019). Literature was searched from major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, SpringerLink and Google Scholar because they offer access to high-quality literature in the areas of marketing, management, artificial intelligence, organisational studies and sustainability. Combinations of keywords were used in searches for Communities of Practice, Corporate Social Responsibility, Ethical AI Marketing, and AI governance. Boolean operators “AND”, “OR”, and “NOT” were employed to narrow, broaden, and to make the searches as methodologically transparent as possible during the literature selection process.

Time Horizon

Research time horizon is the time aspect of a study and whether data is collected at one time of the study or across a longer period of time (Saunders et al., 2022). The cross-sectional time horizon was used in this study because it was not a longitudinal study but rather the study was conducted by reviewing the literature for a given period of time. The studies selected mostly span from 2020–2026, allowing the research to reflect recent trends in the fields of CoP, CSR, and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy. The cross-sectional perspective was deemed appropriate, based on the exploratory and conceptual nature of the study.

Data Sources

The study employed a variety of secondary data sources for breadth, depth and conceptual richness. The academic journal articles were found to be the main source of evidence as they had a rigorous peer-reviewing process and they also contributed theoretically. To provide foundational insights, books and edited volumes on CoP, ethical AI, stakeholder theory, and CSR were also included. The current progress in the responsible governance of AI was captured by analysing industry reports from international organisations and professional bodies.

Institutions including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), UNESCO, the European Commission and the World Economic Forum were tapped for publications due to their substantial involvement in the global debate on AI ethics and responsible technological innovation. Studies published from 2020-2026 were given priority to make the studies relevant to the present time. But seminal work was also included where it had theoretical foundations, such as the work on Communities of Practice and CSR.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Peer-reviewed journal articles	Blogs and opinion articles
English-language publications	Non-English publications
Studies published between 2020–2026	Duplicate studies
Ethical AI studies	Irrelevant disciplines
CSR and CoP literature	Unverified online sources

The application of inclusion and exclusion criteria ensured consistency and enhanced the quality of evidence incorporated into the study.

Data Collection Procedure

The study involved the identification, selection, organisation and examination of relevant literature drawn from academic and professional sources. No interviews, surveys or direct participation with the subjects was conducted as in primary qualitative studies. The first step consisted of in-depth searches of pre-defined keywords and search strings in selected databases. Relevant publications were reviewed to determine their alignment with the objectives of the study. The publications that explicitly referred to Communities of Practice, ethical AI, CSR, organisational learning or responsible governance were kept for further consideration.

The second stage was the full-text assessment, which was a process of determining the alignment with the

conceptual framework of the study. The conceptual framework guided the selection and organisation of evidence by mapping the proposed relationships between Communities of Practice, CSR, and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy. Sources that did not have enough relevance to the research variables were excluded. Reference management software was used to organise and manage selected studies for systematic categorisation and retrieval. Information about study objectives, theoretical perspectives, methodologies and main findings was extracted and documented for analysis. This systematic process helped to increase transparency and to ensure that literature selection was still in line with the purpose of the study.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

To analyse the selected literature, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) developed by Braun and Clarke (2019; 2021) was used. RTA was deemed appropriate as it offers a systematic, flexible method for pattern detection and interpretation in qualitative datasets. Grounded theory, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, and discourse analysis were also rejected as not being suitable for this study which seeks to synthesise existing evidence rather than to build theory or explore lived experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2021). The analysis process used the six stages of Braun and Clarke's analysis process: familiarisation, coding, developing themes, reviewing themes, defining themes and reporting.

Table 3. Reflexive Thematic Analysis Process (Source: Braun and Clarke, 2021)

Stage	Purpose
Familiarisation	Repeated reading of literature
Coding	Identification of meaningful concepts
Theme Development	Grouping related codes
Theme Review	Examination of coherence
Theme Definition	Refinement of themes
Reporting	Interpretation and synthesis

Trustworthiness

The credibility and rigour in qualitative studies are enhanced by trustworthiness. The criteria used in this study were taken from Lincoln and Guba (1985) which are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Peer-reviewed literature from the marketing, sustainability, artificial intelligence and management fields was used to ensure credibility. The transferability was facilitated by the detailed description of search strategies, inclusion criteria, and the analytical procedures. Systematic documentation of literature selection and analysis processes added a level of dependability through the development of an audit trail that enhanced transparency (Nowell et al., 2017). Reflexive analysis and careful interpretation of evidence throughout the study also enabled the confirmability of the findings.

Table 4. Trustworthiness Measures. Adapted from Lincoln and Guba (1985)

Criterion	Strategy
Credibility	Peer-reviewed literature and source triangulation
Transferability	Detailed methodological description
Dependability	Audit trail and systematic procedures
Confirmability	Reflexive interpretation and documentation

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were also relevant even though secondary data were used. No human subjects were used in this study, and informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality were not relevant. The ethical integrity was maintained by the proper representation of findings, proper acknowledgement of original authors and adherence to academic integrity principles. To maximise the scholarly rigour, credible and verifiable sources were chosen and objective interpretation was used to minimise bias and selective reporting.

Chapter Summary

The methodological framework used for this study has been described in this chapter. This study adopted a secondary qualitative methodology grounded in constructivist philosophy and inductive reasoning. Data were obtained from academic and professional sources and analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis to generate conceptual understanding of the relationships among Communities of Practice, CSR, and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy. Trustworthiness and ethical integrity were incorporated across the research process to strengthen the transparency, rigour and conceptual credibility. Although the methodology provides a robust conceptual foundation, empirical validation of the proposed mediation model remains beyond its scope and represents an important direction for future research.

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

Introduction

The results of the secondary qualitative analysis of the academic and professional sources of CoP, CSR and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy are presented in this chapter. The results are presented in a thematic structure to highlight the role of collaborative learning in developing the capability for ethical AI, the role of CSR as a responsible governance mechanism, and the role of transparency, accountability, privacy protection and stakeholder trust in the outcome of ethical AI. The analysis reveals four themes: collaborative learning and the development of ethical capabilities, CSR as responsible AI governance, stakeholder trust in ethical AI marketing and the institutionalisation of ethical AI marketing practices.

Overview of Thematic Findings

The synthesis yielded four related findings instead of separate summaries of the sources. The first observation is that Communities of Practice have a positive impact on ethical AI marketing practices, by facilitating the sharing of knowledge and fostering cross-functional discussion and collective interpretation of AI-related risks. This finding is in line with the CoP literature, in which knowledge is not viewed as a resource to be acquired but as a practice that is constructed through participation and problem-solving together (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020; Nicolini et al., 2022). The second is that CSR is seen as the governance mechanism for internal ethical learning in terms of organisational policies, stakeholder commitments and responsible digital practices.

This aligns with research on CSR and Corporate Digital Responsibility, which shows that responsible technology use is related to privacy, fairness, accountability and stakeholder value (Wirtz et al., 2023; Du and Sen, 2023; Kunz and Wirtz, 2024). The third discovery is that trust among stakeholders is the main outcome of ethical AI marketing. Consumer acceptance of AI advertising, personalisation and pricing attributes is found to be influenced by transparency, privacy assurances, fairness and user control (Saura et al., 2024; Teepapal, 2025; Lim and Kim, 2025). The fourth finding is that CSR conceptually serves as a mediation of the relationship between CoP and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy as it is the process of converting shared ethical knowledge into formal responsibility mechanisms.

Table 5. Summary of Themes and Research Question Alignment

Theme	Focus of Finding	RQ Alignment
Collaborative learning and ethical capability building	Communities of Practice support ethical AI knowledge sharing, AI literacy and cross-functional judgement.	RQ1
CSR as responsible AI governance	CSR translates internal ethical learning into stakeholder-oriented digital responsibility and governance.	RQ2
Stakeholder trust and ethical AI marketing	Transparency, privacy, fairness and accountability shape consumer trust in AI-enabled marketing.	RQ2/RQ3
Institutionalisation of ethical AI marketing practices	CSR formalises CoP learning into policies, reporting, accountability and ethical marketing routines.	RQ3

Theme 1: Collaborative Learning and Ethical Capability Building

The clearest result from the literature on the Communities of Practice is that ethical AI marketing capability can be achieved only by combining formal rules. It relies on the continuous exchange of knowledge between experts who have expertise in various aspects of the AI marketing process. Aljuwaiber (2021) demonstrates that organisational CoPs can facilitate knowledge management by providing a context for interaction, learning and exchange of knowledge based on experience. Nicolini et al. (2022) also suggest that CoPs are a process in which, as well as domain, there is a shared area of concern and the development of a common practice and repertoire of professionals. In the context of AI marketing, it means that the ethical knowledge of algorithmic bias, explainability, consumer privacy and automated targeting is enriched when discussed outside of the technical, legal or marketing silos.

All the sources analysed show that ethical AI marketing is a cross-functional approach. Marketing teams know the customer journeys, persuasion strategies, data scientists the behaviour of the model, compliance teams the legal constraints and CSR teams their interpretation of the consequences for stakeholders. Schultz and Seele (2023) identify knowledge gaps between business ethics and operational AI practice as essential for organisational AI ethics. This is confirmed by Morley et al. (2023), who cite implementation challenges including lack of clarity regarding accountability, poor incentives, and challenges with applying abstract principles of AI ethics in real-world decisions. Communities of Practice offer a forum to discuss the impact that AI systems have on consumers in practice, and not as a standalone statement of ethics.

Another discovery is that CoP enhances reflective judgement, which is a component of ethical capacity. When adopting intelligent systems, organisational learning is crucial, as employees need to learn how to work together with the machine-generated output, as shown by Wijnhoven (2022). The study of Stahl et al. (2022) also reveals that the organisational responses to AI ethics are not uniform, and they may be weak if they do not become part of organisational practice. This is supported in recent governance research which separates responsible AI principles from responsible AI governance practices, and suggests that operationalising such principles needs to involve structural, relational and procedural mechanisms (Papagiannidis, Mikalef and Conboy 2025). CoP is particularly relevant to the relational dimension as it links people, knowledge and shared accountability. It is not only that CoP enhances communication, but it also fosters the ethical capacity to understand the risks of AI and prevent them from compromising consumer trust or the legitimacy of the organisation.

Theme 2: CSR as a Responsible AI Governance Mechanism

The theme shows that CSR is used as a translation process between internal organisational learning and responsible conduct in the external environment. CSR has gone beyond philanthropy to strategic responsibility, taking stakeholder engagement and long-term value creation to the next level. According to Ghanbargpour et al. (2024), CSR has a varying impact on stakeholders in different business contexts; however, the core of CSR is to improve legitimacy and stakeholder relationships. In the context of AI in marketing, this translates to CSR taking action on the knowledge gained in CoP and turning it into a formal commitment for fair targeting, responsible data usage and transparent communication. Du and Sen (2023) suggest that AI should be studied in the context of CSR because AI decision-making impacts consumers and public policy, not just operational efficiency. This is aligned with the result that CSR offers the normative framework within which organisations make decisions about what responsible AI marketing is in practice.

With the advent of Corporate Digital Responsibility, the job of CSR becomes more specific. Wirtz et al. (2023) describe CDR in terms of ethical, fair and protective use of data and technology in digital service ecosystems, with a focus on privacy, fairness and data flows as key responsibilities. In addition, Kunz and Wirtz (2024) shed light on the problems generative AI poses for the CDR: responsible business restructuring, service automation, customer profiling, and AI misuse prevention, which still require human intervention. The results are significant because consumer data, automated content, predictive targeting and algorithmic optimisation are key aspects of AI marketing. In this sense, CSR is not separate from marketing strategy; it is an element of the governance system that shapes the design and use of AI tools, their monitoring and communication. AI can also present opportunities and challenges for CSR communication, as the very tools that enhance communication can also amplify concerns about authenticity and stakeholder manipulation, as per Xiangzhou et al. (2024).

An important discovery is that CSR can turn into a symbol unless it is tied to responsible AI practice. Kim and Ferguson (2024) demonstrate that CSR applied through AI can boost the perceived organisational warmth and positive public reactions, but this is also a risk that firms may resort to using CSR-related AI communication reputationally. A more precise view is given by Lim et al. (2025) who demonstrate that stakeholder perceptions of institutional and algorithmic responsibility increase trust in the perceived stakeholder engagement in corporate data responsibility communication. This shows that CSR communication is more impactful when the stakeholders are convinced that the organisation is truly responsible for data and AI systems. It is therefore contingent that CSR plays a role in ethical AI marketing, provided it is accompanied by governance, stakeholder engagement, and organisational learning, but not if it is a branding exercise.

Theme 3: Stakeholder Trust and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy

The other theme is stakeholder trust, which is the most apparent result of ethical AI marketing. To promote social good, AI in marketing must be accompanied by a sense of responsibility and value for stakeholders, alongside technological efficiency, as argued by Hermann (2022). Hermann and Puntoni (2025) agree with this stance regarding generative AI, highlighting the principles of autonomy, security, sustainability, representativeness, accountability, non-discrimination, crediting and empowerment. More recent evidence relating to marketing shows these principles. Al Haj Eid et al. (2024) define ethical AI-driven marketing as privacy, fairness, transparency, accountability and data security. Kumar and Suthar (2024) also point to issues of ethics and legality regarding data protection, bias, transparency and consumer rights. The takeaway is that transparency and accountability are not just communication tools, but they are essential to the legitimacy of AI marketing.

The repeated concerns identified in the sources analysed include privacy and fairness. Saura, Skare and Ozretic Dosen (2024) highlight a data privacy paradox in AI-driven digital marketing, wherein practices like tracking, behavioural analytics and smart content are not always associated with data privacy. Based on empirical evidence, Lim and Kim (2025) suggest that the negative impacts of using AI-powered personalisation can be mitigated by ethical guidelines for AI and by empowering consumers. Empirical evidence indicates that trust can be reduced due to AI-powered personalisation through perceived discrimination and privacy concerns, which can be mitigated through ethical guidelines for AI and consumer empowerment, as suggested by Lim and Kim (2025). Similarly, de Lucas Lopez et al. (2026) demonstrate how the dynamic pricing with AI has become not just an optimisation problem but an ethical problem of fairness, transparency and consumer trust. The results suggest that measures of consumer privacy and fairness serve as tests of the ethical nature of AI marketing practices.

Personalisation is also dependent on trust, as it is seen to be useful, relevant and responsibly managed. In Teepapal's (2025) study, trust and usefulness are the factors that influence engagement, with trust and privacy concerns being driven by AI-powered personalisation. An and Ngo (2025) also conclude that perceived personalisation does not directly create trust, but rather trust is created indirectly via relevance and usefulness. In the personal care and cosmetics industry, O'Higgins and Fatorachian (2025) demonstrate that transparency and ethical AI governance and enhanced privacy measures are key drivers of consumer trust. This is echoed by Hari et al. (2025) who found trust to be a prominent result in the literature regarding AI and marketing ethics. Thus, there is a need for an ethical AI marketing strategy that integrates performance with tangible ethical protections. Personalisation is not enough if consumers feel that they are being tracked, targeted, or manipulated.

Theme 4: Institutionalisation of Ethical AI Marketing Practices

The final theme is an explanation of the mediating role of CSR conceptually. Communities of Practice foster collective moral consciousness; they need institutional support to influence marketing strategy. CSR does this through governance structures, stakeholder commitments and responsible communication, as a result of internal learning. Therefore, the mediation pathway that was identified from the sources is CoP to CSR to Ethical AI Marketing Strategy. CSR mediates this relationship by converting informal ethical learning within Communities of Practice into formal governance structures, policies and responsible AI marketing practices. This is echoed by Schultz and Seele (2023) who claim the need to institutionalise ethics in AI and Du and Sen (2023) who suggest using a CSR lens to assess the consumer and public-policy implications of AI.

CSR also institutionalises learning by establishing policies, reporting, accountability and stakeholder engagement. In responsible digital practice, Wirtz et al. (2023) argue that standards, protection of privacy, external audits, and equitable power relationships within the digital service ecosystem are essential. Responsible AI governance entails both structural, relational and procedural practices, Papagiannidis, Mikalef and Conboy (2025) explain. CoP mainly focuses on the relational element through the creation of shared interpretation, and CSR mainly focuses on the structural and procedural elements by integrating responsibility into governance procedures. The authors of Amin et al. (2025) also highlight the need for ethical guidelines, organisational readiness, employee upskilling, and an AI-ready culture when adopting AI in marketing. The conclusion is thus that ethical AI marketing is the result of a reinforcement between social learning and formal responsibility mechanisms.

The mediation pathway concept has been supported in the literature but there are limited empirical studies of it. Previous research focuses on CoP, CSR and ethical AI marketing in isolation. CoP literature helps to understand knowledge sharing, CSR literature helps to understand responsibility governance, and AI marketing literature helps to understand the impact of transparency, privacy and fairness on trust. Their synthesis reveals that CSR is the process by which collaborative ethical knowledge is institutionalised as a responsible AI marketing strategy. But the lack of a large-scale empirical study of the entire pathway should not imply that the proposed relationship is a statistically proven conclusion but rather a theoretical finding.

Chapter Summary

The results highlight four interrelated themes. Communities of Practice help foster ethical AI marketing through knowledge sharing, cross-functional collaboration and ethical capability building. CSR is then seen as a form of responsible governance which takes the ethical learning within the company to a commitment that is geared toward stakeholders. The key outcomes of ethical AI marketing strategy are stakeholder trust, transparency, accountability, privacy and fairness.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that Communities of Practice contribute to Ethical AI Marketing Strategy primarily by creating the organisational conditions through which ethical knowledge can be shared, interpreted and applied. This is vital because, as well as being a technical challenge, ethical AI marketing is an organisational learning challenge. Addressing AI-related threats including bias, violation of privacy rights, opaque targeting and automated discrimination is impossible to do effectively if knowledge is compartmentalised in the technical teams or compliance departments, the literature consistently states. Communities of Practice are a way to link the marketing community, data professionals, CSRs, compliance officers and managers to engage in shared learning and group problem solving. This echoes the perspective of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020) that adding value in a social learning space is through participation and shared practice. It also resonates with the work of Nicolini et al. (2022) who assert that Communities of Practice are supported by the interplay of domain, community and practice. The domain is ethical AI marketing, and the community is defined as the group of people involved in ethical and responsible use of AI, and the community's practice is the collection of common procedures, practices, and protections generated by the community's collaboration.

A key implication of this finding is that ethical AI marketing strategy requires more than formal ethical principles. While many organisations are now talking about transparency, fairness and accountability in their policies around AI usage, the real hurdle is how that translates in the day-to-day decisions around marketing. To institutionalise the ethics of AI, knowledge gaps between business ethics and operational AI practices must be bridged by both groups, say Schultz and Seele (2023). This is underscored by Morley et al. (2023), who highlight barriers, including: responsibility is not clear, weak incentives, and abstract ethical principles are challenging to operationalise. Communities of Practice (CoP) do some of this, enabling staff to address practical questions like what to do with consumer data and how algorithmic recommendations are to be made transparent and explained and how automated targeting might impact vulnerable groups. For this reason the connection between CoP and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy is not simple and direct in a technical sense, but rather through ethical capability development, shared judgement and organisational learning.

The findings also show that CSR acts as a critical governance mechanism in AI-enabled marketing environments. CSR is the expression of internal ethical learning in formal organisational commitments, stakeholder-oriented policies and responsible digital practices. This validates Du and Sen's (2023) stance that AI must be viewed from a CSR perspective as AI decisions impact consumers, public policy and broader societal expectations. Likewise, Ghanbarpour et al. (2024) prove that CSR enhances the relationship and legitimacy among stakeholders in all business scenarios. Legitimacy is particularly significant in AI marketing, where consumers might not comprehend how AI systems gather information, customise messaging, or influence decisions regarding pricing and other choices. Thus CSR can provide the normative framework and practice that organisations frame as acceptable and responsible use of AI. However, some studies argue that governance structures alone cannot guarantee ethical AI outcomes, as organisational culture, regulatory enforcement and leadership commitment also influence responsible AI implementation (Stryker, 2026).

The discussion also suggests that CSR is becoming increasingly digital in nature. According to Wirtz et al. (2023), Corporate Digital Responsibility is an expansion of CSR into data governance, privacy, fairness and responsible technology usage. Kunz and Wirtz (2024) also demonstrate that generative AI raises the intensification of corporate responsibility issues pertaining to customer profiling, automation, human oversight and misuse of AI. This is crucial, as AI marketing heavily depends on data-driven personalisation, predictive analytics, automated content creation, and algorithmic decision-making. Therefore, the separation of CSR from decisions of marketing technology is no longer possible. Rather, CSR needs to be integrated into the design, integration and monitoring of AI marketing systems. But the results also indicate that CSR might become symbolic when it is used primarily as CSR for reputation management. This could be problematic as while Kim and Ferguson (2024) demonstrate that CSR can positively influence perceptions of the warmth of the organisations, the use of AI could potentially lead to corporations further propagating the use of CSR without any transformation in the ways in which AI is used. Thus, CSR is not a meaningful mediator without governance, accountability or stakeholder engagement.

The most crucial stakeholder trust was highlighted as the most significant outcome of Ethical AI Marketing Strategy. This aligns with Hermann (2022), who argues that AI in marketing needs to be both technologically effective and socially good and good for the stakeholders. Hermann and Puntoni (2025) also highlight the principles of ethical designing, including: autonomy, accountability, non-discrimination, security, and empowerment. This is evident in marketing-specific studies which indicate that transparency, fairness, accountability, privacy and data security are key elements of ethical AI-driven marketing (Al Haj Eid et al., 2024; Kumar and Suthar, 2024). The evidence suggests that consumers are more accepting of AI marketing when they perceive that organisations are being clear about data usage, that they are responsible for the results of algorithms, and that privacy is a priority.

The results also reveal that personalisation is not sufficient to gain trust. Saura, Skare and Ozretic Dosen (2024) uncover a data privacy paradox regarding digital marketing with AI, where profitable practices might clash with privacy expectations. Lim and Kim (2025) demonstrate that AI-based personalisation can proactively lead to a decrease in consumer trust due to both perceived discrimination and perceived privacy concerns, and that there are ethical guidelines and empowerment for AI to mitigate these negative impacts. Teepapal (2025) likewise notes that personalisation through AI impacts trust and engagement, with privacy worries still playing a major role.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

Summary of Key Findings

The study found that Communities of Practice play an important role in supporting Ethical AI Marketing Strategy by enabling knowledge sharing, cross-functional collaboration and collective ethical learning. Consumer privacy, fairness, transparency, accountability, and stakeholder trust are all part of the considerations in making AI-related decisions, and technical expertise alone cannot be used to develop ethical AI marketing. Communities of Practice are used to connect organisations to pool various types of expertise within their marketing, data analytics, compliance, CSR and management divisions. This facilitates better and knowledge-informed decisions and aids organisations to take a step away from general AI ethics principles and toward responsible marketing practices.

The study also found that CSR acts as a governance mechanism that connects internal ethical learning with external stakeholder responsibility. CSR contributes to the process by making knowledge developed by Communities of Practice more formal, through commitments, policies, reporting mechanisms and accountability practices. Thus, CSR is a conceptual mediator between Communities of Practice and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy. An additional result revealed is that stakeholder trust is a key outcome of ethical AI marketing. Trust is based on transparency, privacy protection, fairness, accountability and responsible personalisation rather than on AI efficiency alone.

Study Implications

The findings have important theoretical and managerial implications. Theoretically, the study contributes to the literature by linking three components that are usually discussed separately: Communities of Practice, CSR and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy. It demonstrates that ethical AI marketing is an organisational learning and governance challenge and not just a technical or legal one. The study also introduces the idea that CSR can serve as a mediating process, converting common moral awareness into ethically responsible marketing activities with AI.

For managers, the findings suggest that organisations should not rely only on written AI ethics policies. Establish internal learning environments to facilitate communication and discussion on the risks associated with AI among employees from various departments, thereby cultivating shared ethical thinking. AI marketing design, data management, and consumer communication and performance measurement are other areas where organisations can incorporate CSR and digital responsibility. This can help to foster consumer confidence, mitigate reputation risks and promote sustainable responsible innovation. Organisations should also establish cross-functional AI ethics committees, conduct regular algorithm audits and integrate CSR metrics into AI governance to ensure continuous monitoring and responsible decision-making (Henderson, 2025).

Research Limitation

The main limitation of this study is that it is based on secondary qualitative source analysis. Hence, the results are conceptual and interpretive and not derived from primary research conducted with the organisations, managers, or consumers. The study gathered and dichotomised the literature and identified patterns and relationships; however there was no statistical testing for the mediating role of CSR. Therefore, the proposed mediation pathway should be considered a theoretically derived pathway.

Yet, another challenge is that ethical AI marketing is still a new area. The literature is rapidly evolving and a number of studies are dedicated to AI ethics, CSR or Communities of Practice individually. This implies that there is still not much evidence available on how Communities of Practice are exactly related to CSR and Ethical AI Marketing Strategy. The results can also differ by industry, culture, and regulatory settings, as the expectations of CSR and the practices of AI marketing differ from one setting to another.

Future Recommendations

The relationship between Communities of Practice, CSR and ethical AI marketing strategy should be empirically tested in the future with primary data. A quantitative study may then be useful to investigate the possible statistical mediation between CSR and ethical AI marketing outcomes. To validate the proposed conceptual model, surveys of marketing, CSR, AI and digital transformation professionals could be conducted.

Future qualitative research may also involve interviews or case studies to delve into the actions organisations take to form Communities of Practice for AI ethics and the involvement of CSR teams in AI governance. Research spanning retail, banking, healthcare, hospitality and e-commerce would be helpful as the benefits and dangers of AI marketing are industry-specific. Consumer insights should further be explored, as how CSR communication, transparency and privacy protection mechanisms affect consumers' trust in AI-driven marketing is of interest. Lastly, future research should explore how Corporate Digital Responsibility can be further examined, given that it will likely grow more influential as generative AI, predictive analytics and automated decision-making become more entrenched in marketing strategy.

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