

Harnessing AI-Powered Data Capabilities for Outside-In Marketing: A Qualitative Exploration

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Abstract

As firms increasingly deploy artificial intelligence (AI) to navigate complex market environments, understanding how AI-powered data capabilities shape outside-in marketing processes has become theoretically consequential. Employing a qualitative design with in-depth interviews across diverse industries, organizational sizes, and geographic contexts, this study addresses the knowledge gap. Grounded on the Resource-Based View, Dynamic Capabilities perspective, and Relational View, we develop an integrative framework of AI-powered data capabilities with two core dimensions (AI intelligence and AI action). Research findings clarify how these capabilities enable market sensing, customer profiling, customer linking, and partner bonding. Based on this framework, AI-powered data capabilities are *adaptive, relational, and ecosystem-enabling dynamic capabilities, rather than static strategic resources*. The study also reveals four boundary conditions that moderate the impacts of AI-powered data capabilities: regulatory constraints, the ripple effects of privacy initiatives, social privacy sentiments, and AI interoperability. These findings offer both theoretical advancement and practical guidance for AI-powered marketing strategy.

Keywords

outside-in marketing, AI-powered data capabilities, dynamic capabilities, data management, partner bonding, customer linking

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Introduction

Contemporary firms operate in an increasingly dynamic environment shaped by evolving customer expectations, emerging market signals, and complex ecosystem relationships. Firms must align their internal operations and products/services with market needs to improve responsiveness and performance (Dang-Van et al., 2023). It is within this context that outside-in marketing has gained theoretical and managerial prominence (Mu et al., 2022; Nangia et al., 2024). Outside-in marketing is defined as “*the belief in and practice of listening to customers and the market, leveraging data for customer segmentation and profiling, and co-creating value through relationship development with customers and external partners, all of which can be evaluated by customer-oriented measures tied to firm performance*” (Quach et al., 2020, p. 108).

Along with technological advancements, AI has emerged as a transformative enabler of this outside-in marketing orientation by converting vast amounts of diverse data into meaningful intelligence. AI amplifies firms’ capacity to sense market conditions, anticipate customer demands, and optimize decision-making at scale (Lee & de Villiers, 2025;

Trainor et al., 2011). Consequently, it enhances marketing agility and responsiveness in turbulent, uncertain environments (Mu et al., 2022; Nangia et al., 2024). Yet despite this growing recognition, the existing literature exhibits three significant, interrelated gaps that this study aims to address.

First, while AI’s role in marketing is widely acknowledged, existing research lacks a coherent conceptualization of AI-powered data capabilities as a distinct theoretical construct. Prior work has treated data resources, analytics, and customer responsiveness as largely separate phenomena (Jayachandran et al., 2004; Quach et al., 2020; Rust, 2020).

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