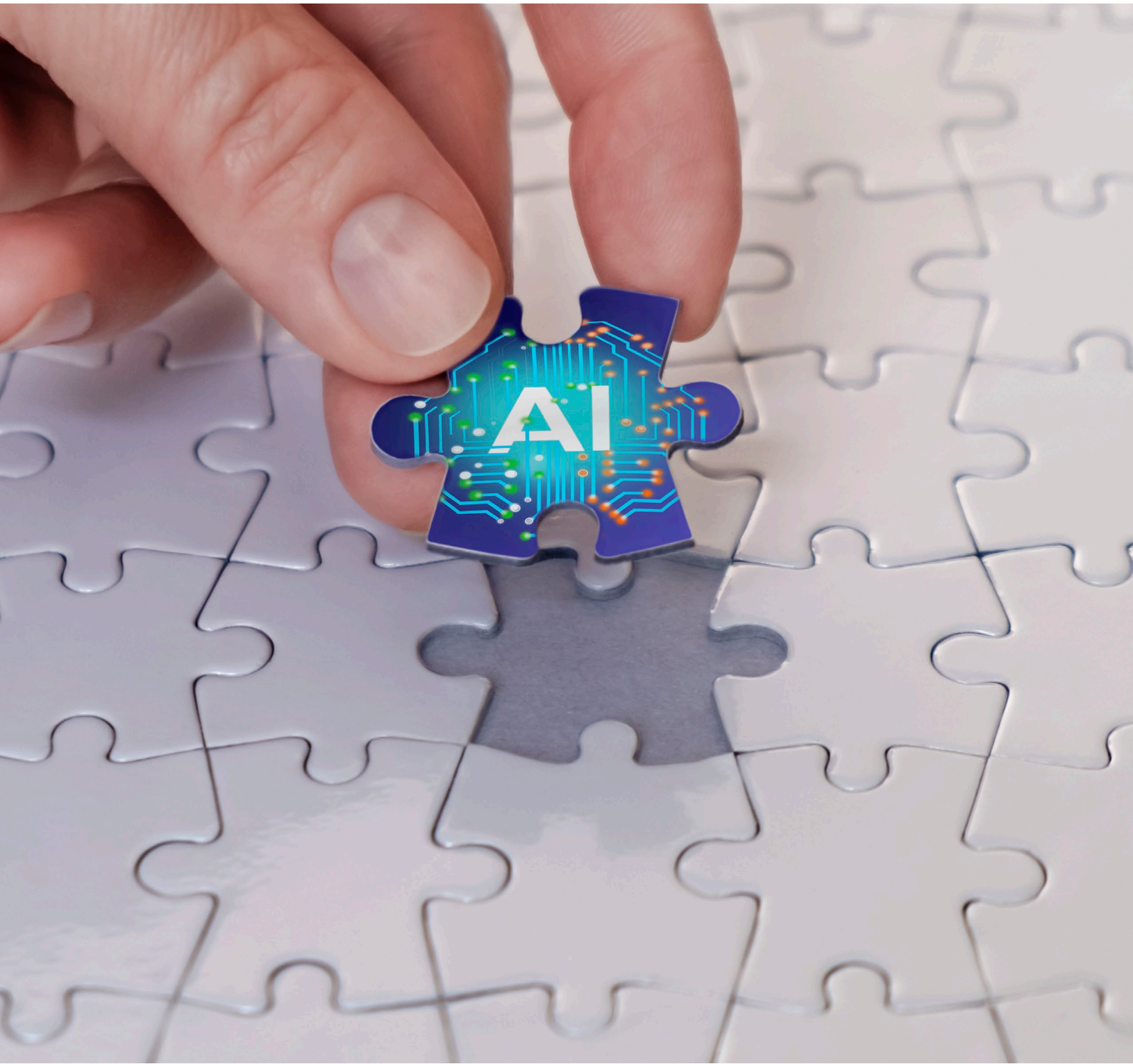
Ragan

THE CONFERENCE BOARD

Marketing & Communications Center

AI in Marketing & Communications:

Boosting Productivity—and Creativity, Too?



The recent emergence of AI, especially generative AI, provides marketing and communications teams with new opportunities while also posing new risks. This benchmarking report, based on a survey of marketing and communications professionals by The Conference Board in collaboration with Ragan Communications, shows widespread AI use and experimentation, though there are concerns. Our survey shows that expectations about AI's impact on creativity are positive overall, although some do voice more pessimistic views.

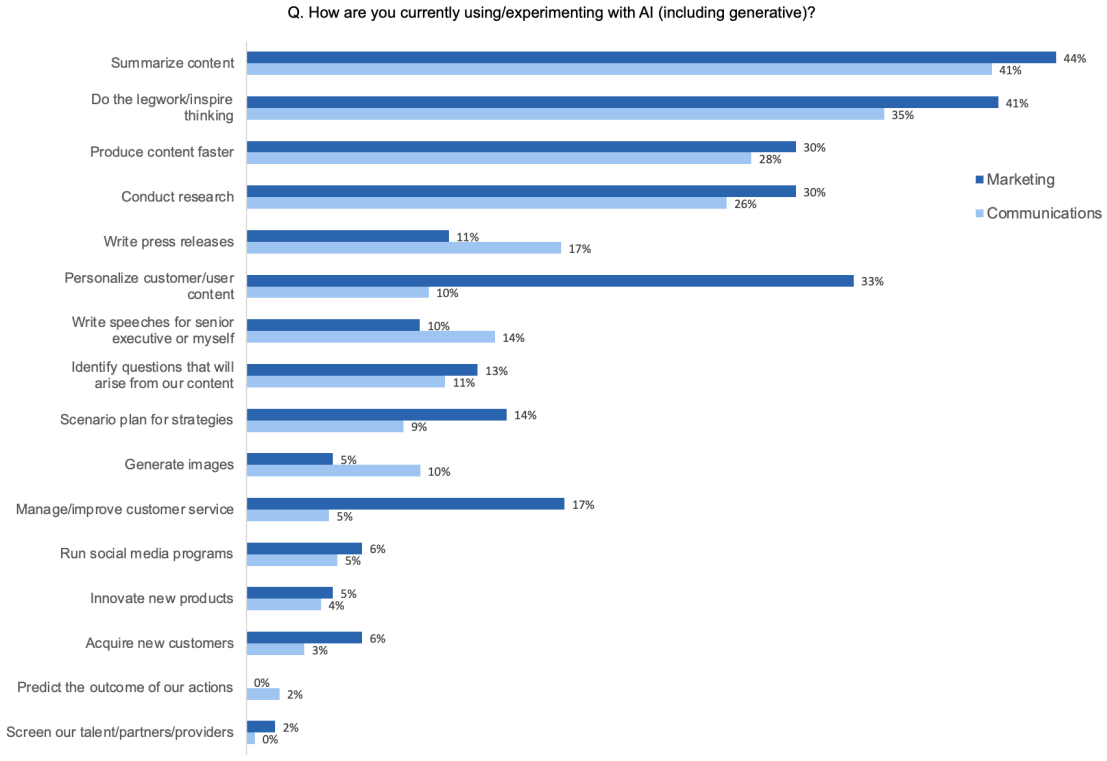
Insights for What's Ahead

- **For marketers and communicators, AI currently serves mostly as a productivity enhancement tool.** Uses include summarizing content, doing the legwork/inspire thinking, and producing content faster, freeing up time for strategy and creative work. Half of our survey respondents say AI will help in future product and services innovation. Just 16 percent see AI as having a negative impact.
- **While they anticipate productivity, learning, financial, and innovation benefits as familiarity with AI use grows, marketers and communicators are less certain about its impact on work quality and creativity**. On the downside, 40 percent see AI as having a negative impact on jobs in their function. Just 4 percent see a positive job impact.
- **Midlevel/junior marketers are at the forefront of adopting AI in their work, ahead of senior marketers**, positioning them to shape the adoption and evolution of AI within their organizations. Compared to their junior peers and their communications colleagues, senior marketers are more optimistic about AI improving innovation, work quality, and creativity in the future.
- **Misinformation/lack of accuracy, legal uncertainties, and data security are marketers' and communicators' top AI concerns, suggesting cautious use and the need to be prepared to manage increased risks.** As AI and regulations develop, the level of concern is likely to decline.
- **Most marketers and communicators are currently using a self-taught approach to learning AI,** but in this rapidly evolving field, professionals could benefit from organized peer and knowledge exchange groups.

AI's Current Use Serves Mostly Productivity Goals But Also Has Potential for Strategy Input

Figure 1

AI is widely used, including for experimentation, by 87 and 85 percent of marketing and communications professionals, respectively, for at least one application. While marketing professionals use AI more for personalization and customer service, communications professionals use it more frequently for content and image creation.

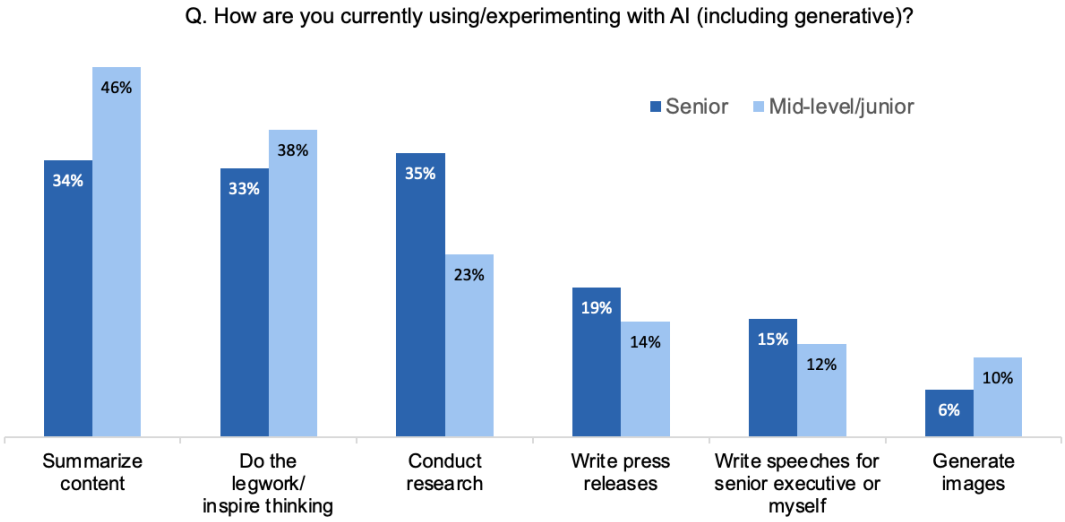


Based on 283 respondents
Source: AI in Marketing and Communications Survey, June 2023, The Conference Board

- AI serves mostly as a productivity tool, freeing up time for strategy and creative work. Ultimately, AI can aid product innovation by supporting idea exploration and providing input.

Figure 2

Mid-level/junior professionals see AI even more as a productivity enhancement tool than their senior colleagues. The latter use AI more as a research tool, presumably to explore topics and gather input for more strategic projects.



Based on 283 respondents
Source: AI in Marketing and Communications Survey, June 2023, The Conference Board

Productivity Is the Most Widely Anticipated Benefit of AI, While Impact on Work Quality and Creativity Remains Uncertain

Figure 3

Communicators and marketers agree on the future benefits of AI for productivity, learning, financial results, and innovation—and on the negative impact on the number of jobs. But they are more divided on how AI might change creativity and work quality. Human intelligence, supplemented by AI, might be synergistic and help elevate creativity—if creatives can find ways to leverage AI as an assistant.

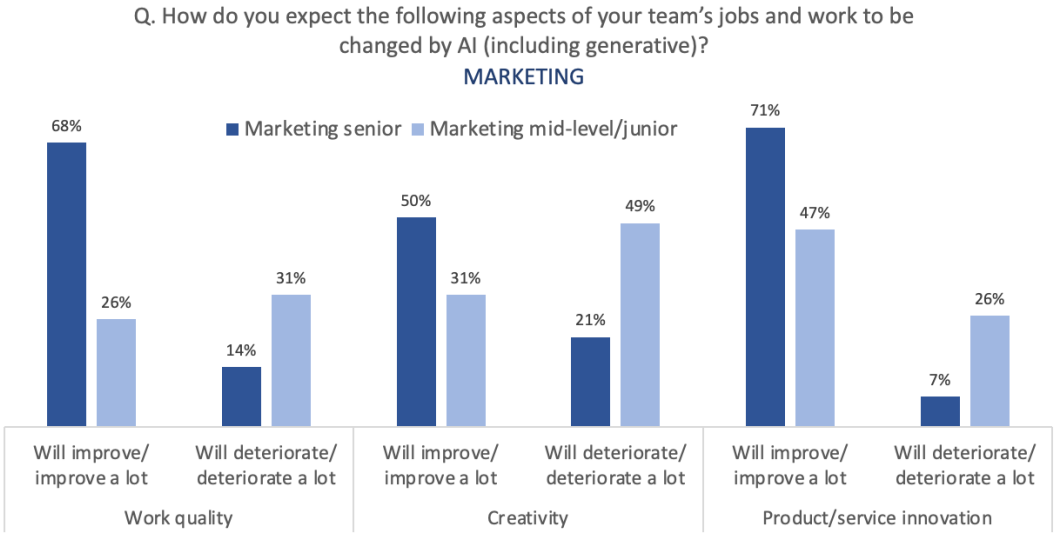
Q. How do you expect the following aspects of your team's jobs and work to be changed by AI (including generative)?

	Will improve/ improve a lot	Will deteriorate/ deteriorate a lot
Productivity	82%	4%
Learning and development	54%	17%
Business/financial results, ROI	51%	5%
Product/service innovation	50%	16%
Work quality	43%	27%
Creativity	42%	29%
Enjoyment of the type of work	39%	20%
Required qualification	33%	19%
Team culture	16%	22%
Number of jobs	4%	40%

Based on 280 respondents
Source: AI in Marketing and Communications Survey, June 2023, The Conference Board

Figure 4a

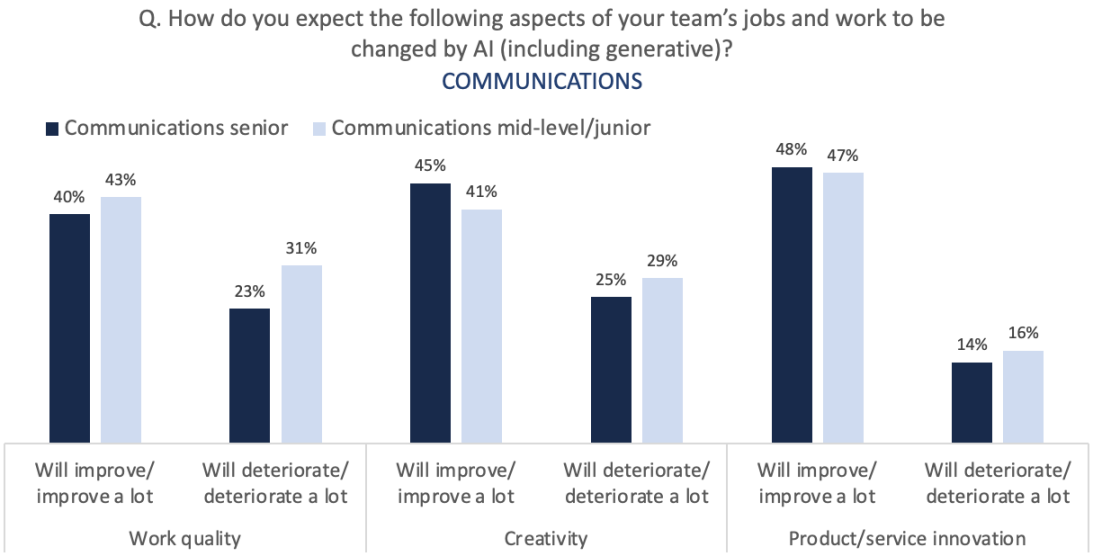
Senior marketers are most optimistic about AI improving innovation, work quality, and creativity—compared to their junior peers and communications colleagues. This might be due to their expectations of AI tools inspiring thinking by helping with research and by generating output that can trigger ideas.



Based on 63 respondents
Source: AI in Marketing and Communications Survey, June 2023, The Conference Board

Figure 4b

Senior and junior communicators are more aligned in their opinions, anticipating more positive quality and creativity effects from AI than negative ones.

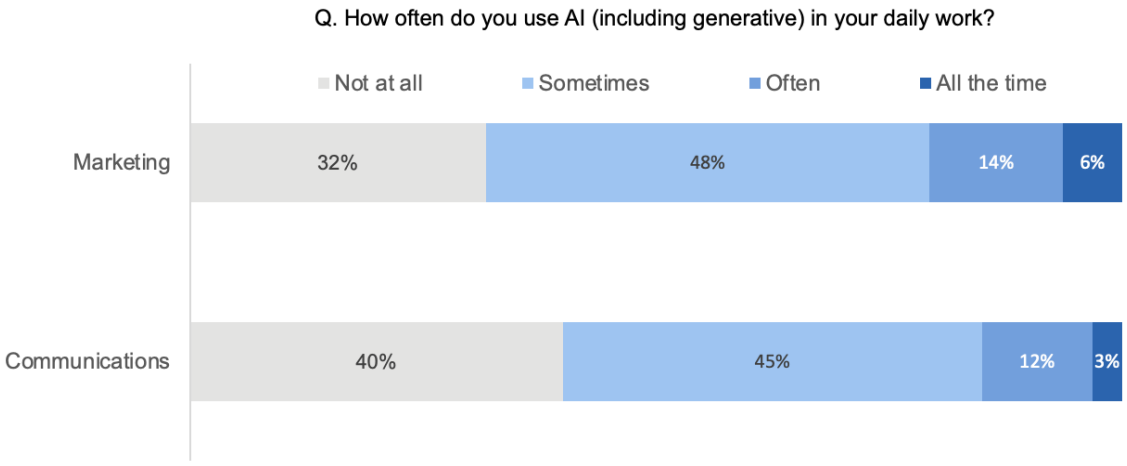


Based on 217 respondents
Source: AI in Marketing and Communications Survey, June 2023, The Conference Board

Marketers Currently Make Greater Use of AI Compared to Communicators

Figure 5

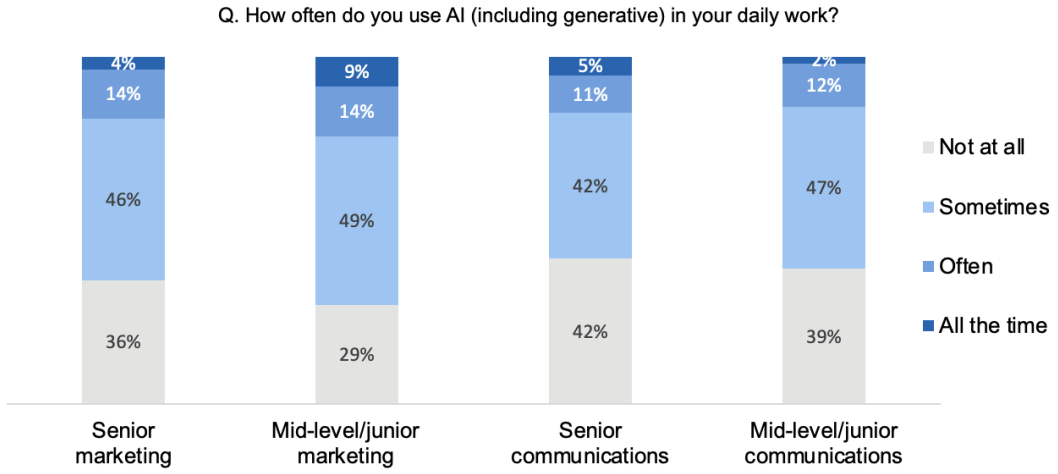
While 60 percent of communicators have embraced AI in their daily work, including to generate content and images, marketers' greater adoption (68 percent) may reflect the more established use of AI for customer-facing applications such as personalization and customer service.



Based on 283 respondents
Source: AI in Marketing and Communications Survey, June 2023, The Conference Board

Figure 6

Mid-level/junior marketers are at the forefront of adopting AI in their work, ahead of senior marketers, positioning them to help shape the evolution and adoption of AI in their organizations.

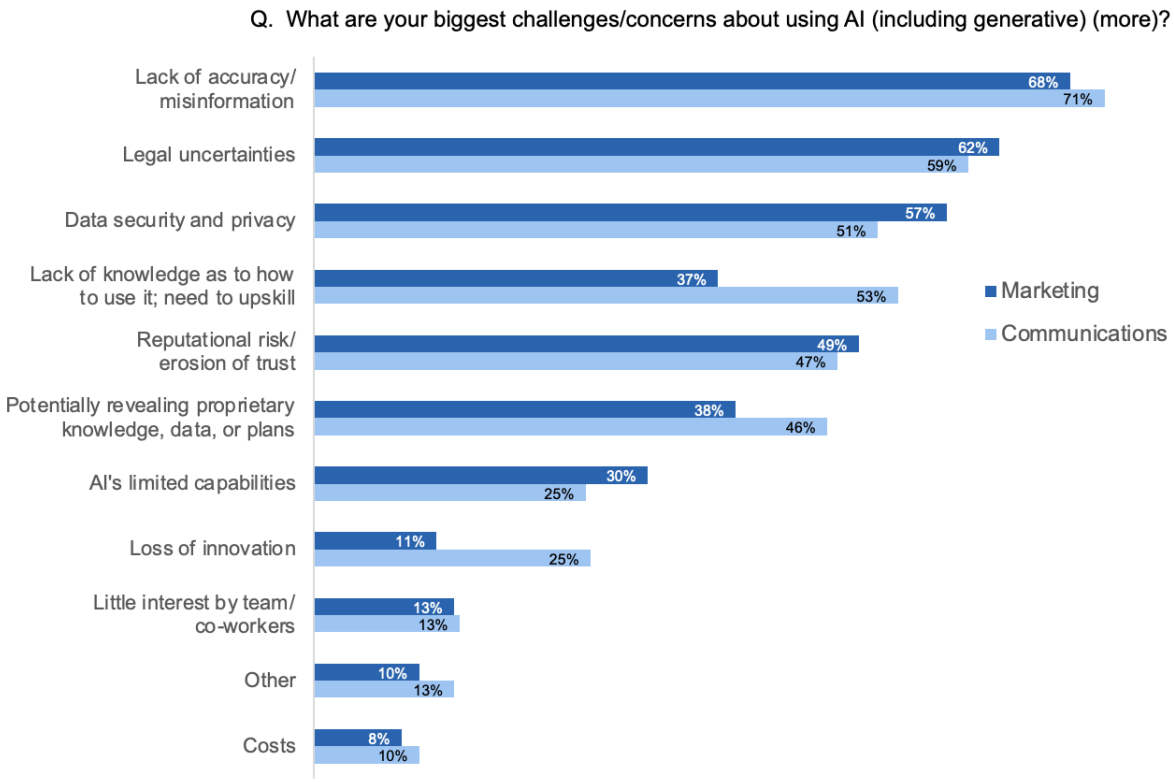


Based on 283 respondents
Source: AI in Marketing and Communications Survey, June 2023, The Conference Board

Data Source Quality and Legal and Data Privacy Concerns Call for Cautious Use of AI and Greater Risk Management

Figure 7

Misinformation, legal uncertainties, and data security are marketers' and communicators' top AI worries, suggesting careful use and the need to mitigate increased risks.

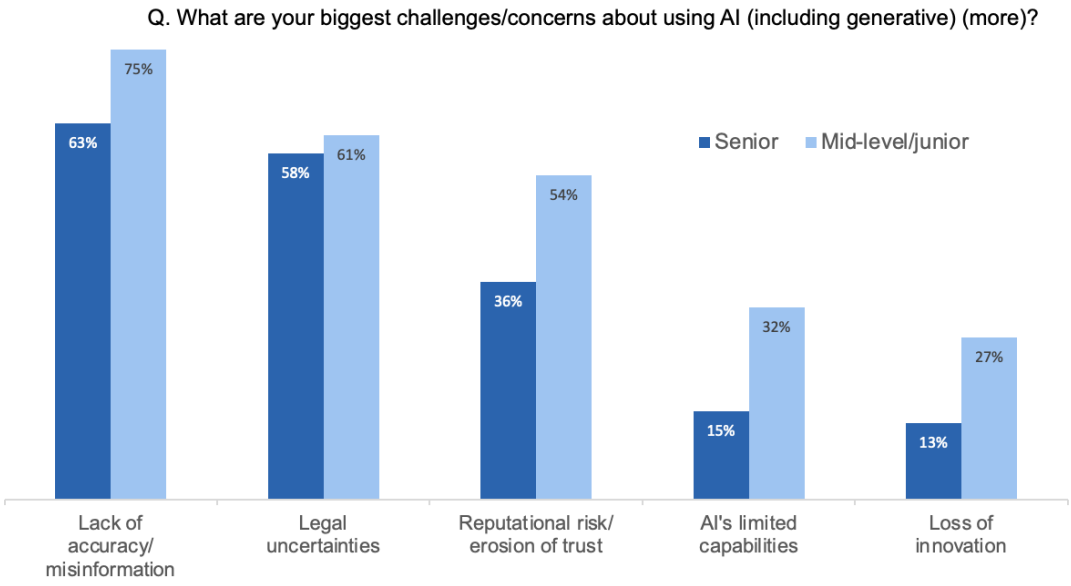


Based on 283 respondents
Source: AI in Marketing and Communications Survey, June 2023, The Conference Board

- Communicators voicing a need to enhance their AI expertise might make them open for organized AI-focused learning or peer exchange programs.
- Marketers seeing AI's capabilities as more limited might stem from their experience with mass-oriented use of AI, including for automated customer service, which our research has shown is customers' biggest customer service frustration.
- As AI and regulations develop, the level of concern is likely to decline.

Figure 8

Senior marketers and communicators, who see fewer downsides of AI than their mid-level/junior colleagues, could preempt potential organizational "blind spots" about AI through regular conversations with the latter group, who are the most frequent AI users overall.

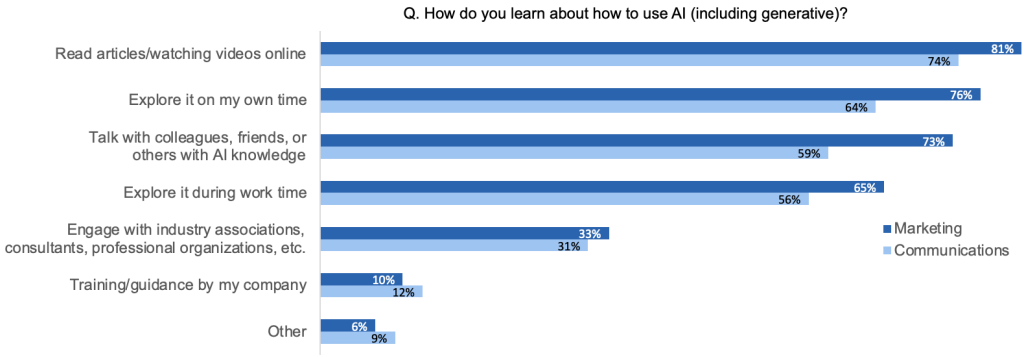


Based on 283 respondents
Source: AI in Marketing and Communications Survey, June 2023, The Conference Board

Informal Self-Education Dominates Current AI Learning, Opening Opportunities for Organized Peer Learning Programs

Figure 9

Consistent with today's greater use of AI in marketing, marketers focus more on learning AI. Marketing and communications professionals are largely self-taught, exploring AI on their own time—except for mid-level/junior marketers, who leverage their work time more.



Based on 283 respondents
Source: AI in Marketing and Communications Survey, June 2023, The Conference Board

- Given this rapidly evolving field, professionals might appreciate organized peer exchange groups or other less formal learning opportunities on the latest AI developments.

Figure 10

Mid-level/junior marketers, the biggest AI adopters, are the most prone to learn AI during work time and through talk with other AI experts, positioning them to help shape AI applications. Senior marketing professionals are most likely to use organized external opportunities to learn about AI.

Q. How do you learn about how to use AI (including generative)?

	Marketing senior	Marketing mid-level/junior	Communications senior	Communications mid-level/junior
Read articles/watching videos online	86%	77%	74%	73%
Explore it on my own time	82%	71%	68%	62%
Talk with colleagues, friends, or others with AI knowledge	75%	71%	55%	60%
Explore it during work time	54%	74%	55%	57%
Engage with industry associations, consultants, organizations of professionals, etc.	43%	26%	31%	31%
Training/guidance by my company	18%	3%	14%	11%
Other	11%	3%	8%	9%

Based on 283 respondents
Source: AI in Marketing and Communications Survey, June 2023, The Conference Board

Methodology

The findings in this publication are based on an online survey conducted by The Conference Board in collaboration with Ragan Communications from June 1 to June 23, 2023. The objective was to understand communicators and marketers' use of (generative) AI. The survey yielded a total of 287 responses (102 senior and 181 junior/mid-level marketing and communications professionals, in addition to 4 uncategorized respondents). Vice President to CEO/C-suite positions are defined as "senior" and everyone else as "mid-level/junior."

Acknowledgments

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About the Author

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