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Item Type	Article
Authors	Ryan, Annmarie
Citation	Journal of Marketing Management 2025, 41(9–10), pp. 855–869
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2025.2526485">https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2025.2526485</a>
Publisher	Routledge Taylor & Francis Group
Rights	Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International
Download date	2026-04-20 14:11:01
Item License	<a href="http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/">http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/</a>
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/10344/31211">https://hdl.handle.net/10344/31211</a>



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To cite this article: Annmarie Ryan (09 Jul 2025): The constant interplay between marketing, markets and digital technologies: agencing, de-agencing, and the shaping of practice, Journal of Marketing Management, DOI: [10.1080/0267257X.2025.2526485](https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2025.2526485)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2025.2526485>



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Published online: 09 Jul 2025.



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# The constant interplay between marketing, markets and digital technologies: agencing, de-agencing, and the shaping of practice

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## ABSTRACT

This commentary examines the dynamic interplay between marketing, markets, and digital technologies through the lens of agencing. Drawing on Market Studies, it argues that technologies such as platforms, dashboards, and AI tools do not simply support marketing they actively shape its practice by structuring agency, enabling some actors while displacing others. Tracing the historical evolution of market research and its digital transformation, the commentary introduces the triad of agencing, de-agencing, and re-agencing to conceptualise how marketing expertise is configured, contested, and redefined. It highlights how markets for marketing tools embed power asymmetries and produce new dependencies. The framework invites critical reflection on how marketing is performed in increasingly platform-mediated, data-driven environments.

## KEYWORDS

Agencing; marketing expertise; performativity; platforms; digitalisation; market studies

## Introduction

This commentary is concerned with the interplay between marketing, markets and (digital) technology and addresses the recently observed ‘markets for marketing’ which Murto et al. (2024) define as those markets that organise the exchange of marketing objects such as marketing services, tools, and audiences. Technology, and more recently digital technologies, have become an inseparable part of marketing (Grewal et al., 2020), fundamentally (re)shaping the practices, roles, and responsibilities of marketers. One perspective on this relationship is to consider these technologies as tools that enable marketers to efficiently perform their tasks (Kumar et al., 2021). However, this view underestimates the reciprocal and dynamic relationship between marketing, markets and (digital) technology.

Marketing is not just enabled by digital technologies, it is shaped by the very markets that commercialise these technologies (Hafezieh et al., 2023; Murto et al., 2024). Whereas Araujo et al. (2010) introduced the notion that marketing shapes markets, Ryan et al. (2023) extend this to demonstrate how digitalisation in markets restructures marketing expertise, embedding new actors, skills, and calculative

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infrastructures into practice. The authors put forward the concept of 'Digitalised Marketers', who are actors in what Murto et al. (2024) describe as the markets for marketing services and tools. The authors frame the emergence of the digitalised marketer through the lens of agencing as boundary work to highlight how marketing actors are equipped by navigating the shifting boundary between strategic marketing practice and data-driven decision-making; for example, where contemporary marketing professionals increasingly rely on live performance metrics to adjust campaigns in real time rather than following pre-defined marketing strategies. This ongoing recalibration of marketing decisions underscores the increasingly iterative and reactive nature of digitalised marketing work.

While the speed and intensity of the relationship between marketing, markets and technology continue to grow, driven by the expanding power and influence of platforms and generative AI, the question of who and what performs marketing (Hagberg & Kjellberg, 2010) is not a new one. In this commentary, I explore how this question has evolved over time through the lens of marketing histories (see Schwarzkopf, 2009). Building on the evolution of market research, from public opinion surveys to contemporary data-driven customer insights (see Diaz Ruiz, 2022), this commentary highlights the expanding network of actors and expertise involved in marketing work and how this is shaped by the markets for these technologies and techniques.

This is achieved by examining the evolving interplay between marketing expertise, technology, and markets through the lens of Market Studies, centring on the concept of *agencing*. Originally introduced by Callon (2008) and further developed by Cochoy et al. (2015), agencing provides a critical framework for understanding how marketing capacities are assembled, the heterogeneous actors involved, and the shifting dynamics of enablement (agencing), displacement (de-agencing), and reconfiguration (re-agencing) in an increasingly digitalised marketing landscape. Building on previous work (Ryan et al., 2023), I examine how digital technologies are inscribed and embedded in everyday marketing practices, not merely structuring agency but actively reconfiguring the roles and relationships of marketers, platforms, and consumers. Rather than viewing technology as a neutral enabler of marketing practice, this analysis foregrounds the contingent and negotiated nature of digital agencing, where new tools and infrastructures both expand and constrain agency, marginalising some actors while integrating others into emergent socio-technical arrangements. The commentary will consider how digital infrastructures and more recent AI-driven decision-making processes have become increasingly central to marketing practice, and how these shifts have important consequences for the marketing profession, the legitimacy of marketing knowledge, and the role of marketing in shaping consumer outcomes. In doing so, this commentary raises important questions about the nature of marketing itself and the evolving assemblages of human and non-human actors that constitute it. At stake is not only the changing nature of marketing expertise but also the broader implications for how (its) markets are constructed, governed, and contested.

The commentary is outlined as follows. We begin by revisiting the question of who or what performs marketing in the context of increasingly digitalised markets for marketing services, grounding this in market studies literature. We then trace the historical co-evolution of marketing, markets, and research technologies before exploring contemporary dynamics of agencing, de-agencing, and re-agencing more broadly. The commentary

concludes with implications for marketing expertise. In doing so, the commentary provides a framework for understanding how marketing actors navigate, contest, and are configured by these evolving arrangements.

## Returning to the question of who and what performs marketing

A central question in the market studies literature has been: Who or what performs marketing?; a question crystallised by Hagberg and Kjellberg (2010) who argue that marketing is performed by a network of actors, including humans, organisations, and material artefacts. This argument emphasises the distributed and relational nature of marketing practices. Drawing on actor-network theory Hagberg and Kjellberg (2010) demonstrate how marketing emerges through interactions, aligning various entities to shape markets and enact market exchanges. This approach has in effect decentralised the individual marketer, to point more to what Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier (2013, p. 5) describe as the

diverse array of individuals, professions, and tools tasked with constructing, organising, and managing markets; including market intermediaries such as advertisers, designers, and critics, alongside various market devices like product labels, advertisements, consumer reports, and consumer guides.

When we consider marketing as a network of practices, it highlights the involvement of various professionals and areas of expertise. This then not only includes traditional marketers but also data analysts, content creators, UX designers, social media managers, and technologists. All these roles collectively shape marketing outcomes, reflecting a dynamic interdisciplinary approach. By recognising that marketing is not a fixed organisational function, but a set of practices that shape and are shaped by markets, we can appreciate the iterative and co-evolutionary nature of this relationship. This broader perspective allows us to see how new professions and expertise emerge within this space, influencing and being influenced by the evolving scope of marketing (Hafezieh et al., 2023).

In addition to human actors, non-human entities such as algorithms, and marketing technologies actively mediate and shape marketing action, while regulatory actors, such as policymakers, industry standards bodies, and platforms, further influence how these technologies are adopted and utilised. Empirical insights from Ryan et al. (2023) demonstrate that digitalisation not only expands the range of actors involved in marketing but also fundamentally alters how decisions are made. For as Cochoy et al. (2015, p. 11) argue, 'market action is not restricted to human actors, but is shared with the agentic properties of artifacts that help humans accomplish tasks', but also and vitally, through their material affordances, help them accomplish these tasks *differently*. To this we might add, not only existing but also new tasks. Marketing dashboards, for instance, have become central to daily operations, offering a consolidated view of campaign performance, audience engagement, and revenue projections. These dashboards, populated with real-time data, enable marketing professionals to adjust their approaches dynamically, blurring the boundary between long-term strategic planning and immediate responsiveness.

## Historical perspective on the relationship between markets, marketing and technology

If we seek to examine the interrelationships between marketing, technology, and markets, then the co-evolution of market research practices, and the marketing research industry presents a particularly instructive site for analysis. To this end, we draw on the rich historic accounts on the markets for market research by Schwarzkopf (2009, 2016) and Araujo and Mason (2021). According to Araujo and Mason (2021) market research, as a knowledge infrastructure, has played a crucial role in shaping marketing practices by providing actionable knowledge and facilitating the construction of market objects. The authors highlight that in market research a knowledge-based infrastructure is formed by the emergence of novel forms of expertise that become gradually sedimented into practice where 'methodologies, tools, and techniques are built, adopted, or modified, marketing practices transformed and ways of representing markets revised' (Araujo & Mason, 2021, p. 248). Importantly the authors acknowledge the notion of *markets for market research*, thus aligning well to the focus of this commentary. However, the authors remain particularly attentive to the role of market research in constituting demand and in the maintenance of the market researcher's *client markets*. In the account presented here, we will instead tease out how the infrastructural transformation of market research does not merely shape marketer's client markets but is itself actively shaped by the commercial dynamics of the markets that sustain it.

According to Schwarzkopf (2016), market research, while initially rooted in academic social research with aims of societal reform, quickly became commercialised. This commercialisation did not sever its ties to academic inquiry, but rather formed a continuous and reciprocal dynamic relationship between scholars and commercial agencies, each contributing to the development of novel research techniques. For example, from early work on public opinion Gallup's newly formed organisation, the American Institute of Public Opinion, began conducting market research for advertising companies and the film industry in 1938, marking a pivotal moment in integrating public opinion research into marketing strategies (Bakker, 2003). This historical pattern, where social survey methods were first pioneered by social reformers and later adapted and transformed by market researchers, repeated itself across numerous industries, illustrating an ongoing cycle of knowledge exchange and methodological evolution (Schwarzkopf, 2016). The burgeoning demand for consumer insights spurred the growth of specialised market research firms. Companies such as A.C. Nielsen and the Market Research Corporation of America (MRCA) emerged, offering services that utilised innovative techniques to collect and analyse consumer data. These firms not only provided valuable information to businesses but also contributed to the professionalisation and standardisation of market research practices (Schwarzkopf, 2009).

Drawing on Callon (1998) and Muniesa and Callon (2007), we understand that the tools of research are not neutral but rather performative devices that actively participate in the construction of market realities. Each tool enacts a different version of the consumer: the talkative citizen, the data point, the predicted preference. For example, Grandclément and Gaglio (2011) show how the focus group convokes the consumer through structured discourse. We extend this insight to argue that all research tools, whether ethnography,

sentiment analysis, predictive models, or A/B testing, *perform* the consumer in specific ways. However, it is not only the consumer that is formatted through these methods, but also the marketer. Research techniques prescribe specific ways of interpreting consumer data, embedding particular logics, calculative frameworks, and strategic orientations into marketing practice. In doing so, they define what counts as legitimate marketing expertise, structuring how marketers themselves act, think, and make decisions within the constraints of available research tools and methodologies.

Further, the growth of the market research industry in the mid-twentieth century was significantly driven by competition among advertising agencies and their corporate clients, which fostered innovation and the professionalisation of research methodologies, where 'In an increasingly competitive market, these agencies subsidiaries had to compete with independent research companies' (Schwarzkopf, 2016, p. 71). This competition intensified as consumer goods giants like Unilever, Procter & Gamble, and General Foods sought deeper market insights, pushing their agencies, Compton, Benton & Bowles, and others, to pioneer new research techniques. The competitive pressure not only expanded the market for research services but also institutionalised data-driven decision-making in marketing, making consumer insights a strategic necessity rather than an optional tool. Tadjewski (2009) demonstrates how early marketing practices were shaped not only by the needs of individual firms but also by interorganisational cooperation, industry-wide knowledge exchange, and the structuring of marketing expertise through formalised associations. The formation of trade associations facilitated the organised exchange of market and distribution information among businesses, highlighting the emergence of an internal market for marketing knowledge. These groups did not merely respond to market needs but actively structured the ways in which firms approached market research, distribution strategies, and competitive intelligence.

### ***The era of digitalised marketing research***

Fast forward to the digital era, the advancement of the Internet and associated tools has further transformed market research. For example, digital tools enable online surveys, social media monitoring, and digital analytics, allowing for real-time data collection and analysis. Just as early trade associations regulated access to marketing knowledge, today's digital advertising platforms determine how and to whom marketing services and audience data are sold, reinforcing Murto et al. (2024) notion that markets for marketing shape marketing expertise. This as Ryan et al. (2023) have shown has not only enabled but also constrained marketing practices. Specifically, we recognise that the rise of often free-to-use Software as a Service (SaaS) tools appear to disintermediate the market for market research by reducing reliance on specialised agencies, but also like emerging AI technologies, introduce new forms of dependency. We will explore this further below.

The integration of analytics tools such as customer relationship management (CRM) systems further illustrates how digitalisation embeds automated decision-making processes within marketing practice, reinforcing the role of non-human agents in shaping outcomes. This perspective emphasises the importance of viewing marketing as a socio-technical practice, where agency is distributed across a network of actors. It also challenges traditional notions of marketing expertise by recognising the role of non-human agents in shaping outcomes. The question of who or/and what performs marketing becomes even more

pertinent in the context of digital technologies that increasingly inscribe themselves into marketing practices. Generative AI tools, for instance, blur the lines between human and machine labour, as they perform tasks traditionally associated with marketers, such as copywriting, data analysis, and campaign management (Lacerda & Nogueira, 2015).

A Market Studies perspective positions markets as constructed and maintained systems rather than natural or spontaneous phenomena. Within this framework, technologies are not neutral tools but active participants in shaping the markets for marketing. From algorithms and platforms to generative AI systems, these technologies influence how marketing is performed, who performs it, and what is considered successful or valuable. For example, platforms like Google and Meta have transformed the landscape of marketing by embedding proprietary algorithms that shape marketers' strategies, budgets, and outcomes. Similarly, generative AI technologies, such as ChatGPT, promise efficiency and creativity but also introduce new forms of dependency, as marketers increasingly rely on these tools for tasks ranging from content creation to customer segmentation. This increasing blurring of human and machine labour in marketing raises several critical questions. If marketing work is increasingly structured by non-human actors such as AI-driven decision-making systems, algorithmic recommendation engines, and automated ad placements, then what remains distinctively human about marketing expertise? (see Srinivasan & Sarial-Abi, 2021). Similarly, as marketing activities become embedded within platform-controlled ecosystems, what new power asymmetries emerge between marketers and the platforms that govern access to digital audiences? Furthermore, AI-driven marketing platforms like Google's Performance Max and Meta's Advantage+ reduce marketers' direct control over audience targeting, raising concerns about transparency and bias (McGowan et al., 2024). As decision-making shifts towards opaque algorithmic systems, questions of fairness and accountability become increasingly complex. Moreover, the shift towards platform-controlled AI decision-making reduces marketers' ability to audit campaign performance or challenge discriminatory outcomes, raising broader regulatory questions about who is responsible when automated systems produce biased or unethical results. These concerns underscore the need for greater regulatory scrutiny and transparency measures, particularly as AI-driven marketing ecosystems become increasingly dominant. These questions further highlight the need to examine how agency is distributed in digitalised marketing environments and how marketers navigate the evolving constraints and affordances of digital systems.

Further, while technologies play a crucial role in structuring markets for marketing, regulatory frameworks also actively shape these markets by defining the legal and ethical boundaries within which marketing practices operate. For example, increasingly stringent data protection regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe has fundamentally altered the digital advertising landscape by restricting how consumer data can be collected, stored, and utilised. Such policies have led to the decline of third-party tracking technologies and an industry-wide pivot towards privacy-first marketing strategies, such as contextual advertising, first-party data collection, and AI-driven segmentation models that do not rely on personally identifiable information. As a result, regulations function not merely as constraints on marketing activity but as market-shaping forces that dictate which tools, techniques, and expertise become dominant. The growing importance of compliance in marketing strategy has also fostered demand for specialised roles, such as data privacy officers and digital ethics consultants,

further underscoring the performative role of regulatory frameworks in marketing practice. These regulatory shifts have not only restructured how marketers engage with data but have also catalysed the growth of a secondary market for compliance-driven marketing solutions. As Brodherson et al. (2021) indicate, the shift towards privacy-first marketing has created new business opportunities for firms offering services such as consent management platforms, AI-driven data anonymisation, and predictive modelling solutions designed to operate within regulatory constraints. These services, marketed to marketers themselves, illustrate how regulation both restricts and generates new forms of market participation, reinforcing the idea that marketing operates within a market of its own. These examples illustrate how markets for marketing are co-constructed by heterogeneous actors, including marketers, technologies, and regulatory frameworks, creating a dynamic interplay that both enables and constrains marketing practice.

### ***Reciprocity in the marketer–technology relationship***

The previous account might bring the reader to consider that marketers are mere subjects in the markets for marketing services and tools that shape marketing work. Indeed, much of what was discussed could be framed as *client captivation* (Nilsson, 2019), where marketing technologies and services offer a seductive promise of effortlessness. The marketer's space for action is structured by such promises, framed by tools that purport to simplify and streamline but, in so doing, inscribe the limits of what marketing can be. Here, technology is not merely an instrument but an actor shaping the very possibilities of action. Thus, the marketer is caught in a dance of enablement and constraint, where prosthetic supports also delimit. However, to frame the marketer as merely reactive risks reducing the complexity of the work involved in their becoming; a becoming that, as Ryan et al. (2023) show, unfolds through distributed and situated practices of mediation, negotiation, and configuration. According to Callon (2008) we cannot speak of marketers as unitary, sovereign agents, but rather their agency is *habilitated* (see also Abrams, 2015). It is enabled through the configuration of environments, relations, and tools that allow for certain projects to be imagined and executed. As Ryan et al. (2023) show, the marketer can become proactive through *tinkering*, through contesting, modifying, and selectively integrating technologies into their own conceptual and organisational frameworks. The act of *dashboarding* is illustrative here: it is a form of integration work, requiring not only technical know-how but also the ability to navigate between different representational logics, organisational expectations, and the messy realities of markets. This is not passive use, but a form of leadership; a slow and careful construction of new market capacities.

In this light, the market for marketing technologies and services becomes not simply a backdrop but a site of *habilitative agencing*. Marketers who engage in configuring their environments, who resist the allure of ready-made solutions and instead assemble hybrid arrangements suited to their purposes, are not just users of the market, but its co-constructors. Whether they are seen as reactive or proactive depends on where we locate agency: in the individual, or in the networked performance of market-making. Therefore, marketers *might* play a more proactive role, but only if we are willing to recognise the forms of agency already enacted in the mundane, iterative, and often invisible work of assembling market agencements. The task is not to exhort them to act, but to attend to

how they are already acting, sometimes within tightly structured constraints, and at other times through acts of creative resistance.

Drawing on Callon's (2008) notion of agencing, and extensions to this from Cochoy et al. (2015), Mathers (2024) and McGowan et al. (2024) we might frame this better as a process of agencing, de-agencing and re-agencing where technologies and platforms intervene to reconfigure market (research) practices. Rather than simply removing intermediaries, these tools de-agence certain traditional research roles while simultaneously embedding (re-agencing) new digital methodologies and automated decision-making logics, shaping how market knowledge is produced. In this sense, digital platforms can be seen, not as neutral facilitators but active agents that structure, delimit, and redefine the expertise required to perform marketing research. This ongoing process involves not only the delegation of analytical tasks to machine-learning-driven models but also the increasing reliance on black-boxed AI systems that obscure how decisions are made, further de/re-agencing marketers within platform-controlled ecosystems. We will explore this theme further in the following section, considering how agencing, de-agencing, and re-agencing unfold in the evolving landscape of digitalised marketing expertise.

### ***Agencing-deagencing-reagencing***

Agencing refers to the processes by which actors, both human and non-human, are assembled into configurations that enable them to act within a given system. Hagberg (2016, p. 112) defines agencing as 'a process in which agency is acquired and sustained by the continuous arranging of the elements of practices, accompanied by continuous adjusting of these elements in relation to other elements of the practices in which they are included'. In the context of marketing, agencing involves the ways in which techniques and technologies equip marketers with particular capacities, allowing them to perform tasks, access markets, and engage with audiences. For instance, the integration of predictive analytics enables marketers to anticipate consumer behaviours, while programmatic advertising automates campaign optimisation. In Ryan et al. (2023), the authors further highlight how digital tools serve as key enablers of marketing work, allowing professionals to execute campaigns with increased precision and efficiency. For example, social media automation tools schedule and distribute content across multiple platforms, ensuring a continuous brand presence with minimal manual intervention. However, while such tools enhance productivity, they also inscribe constraints on marketing practice. Platforms, algorithms, or technological infrastructures more broadly embed particular logics and constraints into marketing practice, inscribing how marketers interact with consumers and data. The pre-set structures and algorithmic preferences embedded within these platforms dictate how content is prioritised and distributed, subtly shaping both strategic direction and consumer interactions. Agencing therefore does not merely expand agency, it also structures and delimits it, shaping the scope and form of decision-making. At the same time, these technological dependencies create vulnerabilities for marketers, as shifts in platform policies and algorithms can significantly impact visibility and engagement. Ryan et al. (2023) document how frequent changes to search engine and social media ranking algorithms, for instance, have forced marketers to continually revise their tactics, often with little warning or clarity regarding the criteria that determine

success. As a result, rather than being solely drivers of marketing strategy, digitalised marketers frequently find themselves reacting to externally imposed constraints, adjusting their approaches within the parameters set by dominant platform providers. Marketing expertise is thus not a fixed body of knowledge, but a contested and evolving assemblage shaped by the interplay of technological infrastructures, regulatory changes, and shifting market conditions. As digital tools and automated decision-making systems become increasingly embedded in marketing practice, the boundaries of what constitutes marketing expertise are reconfigured, raising questions about whose knowledge and skills remain valuable and how marketers assert their agency in increasingly data-driven environments.

When these constraints shift from structuring agency to removing it, we see the process of de-agencing; a concept introduced by Mathers (2024) and also described by McGowan et al. (2024). This notion is built on the concept that agencing activities generate overflows and excesses (Czarniawska & Löfgren, 2012), when previously established actors lose their ability to meaningfully participate in decision-making due to shifts in technology, policy, or market structures. For example, the rise of automated market research platforms has de-agenced traditional research firms, diminishing their role as key intermediaries in consumer insight generation. Similarly, marketers who rely on platforms like Meta or Google often find themselves constrained by opaque algorithms that determine what content is seen, by whom, and under what conditions. While tools such as generative AI may expand the possibilities for content creation, they also risk deskilling marketers by automating creative processes and narrowing the scope of human intervention (Valcea et al., 2024). In these instances, agency is not simply structured, it is diminished or displaced as decision-making authority shifts away from human marketers and towards algorithmic systems.

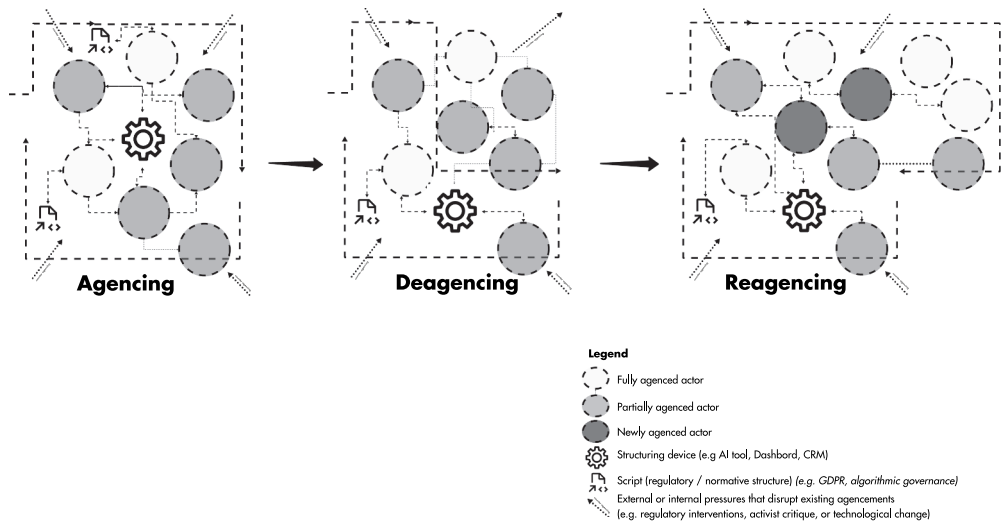
Regulatory interventions often act as forces of de-agencing, displacing established actors and practices within digitalised marketing. For example, the decision to phase out third-party cookies, driven by both regulatory pressure and changing consumer expectations, has disrupted long-standing models of personalised advertising. Traditional ad-tech firms that built their business models on granular consumer tracking are now being marginalised, as brands and agencies pivot towards first-party data ecosystems, server-side tracking, and AI-powered predictive analytics that comply with evolving privacy standards. This shift exemplifies how regulatory frameworks do not merely restrict marketing practices but actively reconfigure agency, privileging certain forms of market participation while rendering others obsolete. Marketers respond to these forms of de-agencing in multiple ways. Some adopt new skill sets, embracing platform-driven automation or positioning themselves as experts in interpreting AI-generated insights. Others attempt to resist dependence on dominant platforms, exploring alternatives such as direct-to-consumer (DTC) marketing (such as brands selling directly to consumers through owned channels like brand websites, email marketing, and proprietary apps) or decentralised digital ecosystems (such as the use of Mastodon, an alternative to X, which uses decentralised, user-run servers). However, for many, adaptation remains the only viable strategy, as compliance with shifting platform logics and regulatory demands becomes essential for maintaining market visibility and competitive positioning.

While agencing describes the assembling of actors, tools, and infrastructures into a functional market arrangement (Callon, 2008), these configurations are rarely stable or

uncontested. Counter-agencing refers to the processes through which actors challenge, resist, or disrupt existing agencements (Cochoy et al., 2015), often in response to perceived inefficiencies, ethical concerns, or regulatory pressures. Counter-agencing can provoke de-agencing, as previously dominant actors lose their ability to participate meaningfully in decision-making. For example, the regulatory push to phase out third-party cookies has counter-agenced long-established digital advertising models, leading to the de-agencing of ad-tech firms that relied on tracking-based personalisation.

However, counter-agencing also opens space for re-agencing, as new actors, technologies, or institutional mechanisms emerge to reshape the market. In this case, privacy-first advertising models, AI-driven targeting, and contextual advertising frameworks have been re-agenced as alternative market configurations. As such de-agencing can be followed by re-agencing, as new technological and institutional arrangements reconfigure actors into emergent sociotechnical networks defined by Cochoy et al. (2015, p. 11) as 'efforts to regain control and devise acceptable market agencement due to the inescapable instability of markets and market entities'. For example, the rise of consent management platforms, federated learning models, and synthetic data solutions illustrates how regulatory shifts create new opportunities for firms that can navigate and capitalise on changing compliance requirements. Thus, regulatory de-agencing is often followed by re-agencing, as marketing actors adapt to new legal landscapes by integrating alternative tools and methodologies. Re-agencing as such then describes how previously de-agenced actors, or new ones entirely, are integrated into evolving market structures, often with altered roles and dependencies. For example, as traditional research firms are displaced by automated market research tools, some are re-agenced as consultants, interpreting AI-driven insights rather than conducting primary research themselves. Similarly, the growing reliance on platform-driven marketing has given rise to new intermediary roles, such as digital advertising specialists who optimise campaigns within proprietary algorithmic frameworks. These shifts illustrate how agency is not static but continuously reshaped by the interplay of technological innovation, market structures, and institutional configurations.

Rather than treating these processes as sequential, it is more accurate to view counter-agencing, de-agencing, and re-agencing as iterative and interdependent, continually shaping the power dynamics of digitalised markets. Understanding this interplay is crucial for analysing how marketing expertise is not only redistributed but also restructured in response to technological and regulatory change. Figure 1 illustrates these modalities and forces of agencing (Callon, 2008; Cochoy et al., 2015; Mathers, 2024; McGowan et al., 2024), which unfold simultaneously and iteratively rather than as distinct stages. *Agencing* reflects efforts to configure a market by enrolling actors, tools, and devices, such as platforms, dashboards, scripts, and calculative techniques, into functional arrangements. This involves not just inclusion, but the structuring of agency itself; that is, the ways in which roles are prescribed, capacities are shaped, and action is made possible within specific socio-technical configurations. *De-agencing* captures moments of destabilisation, where these arrangements are disrupted and actors lose their capacity to act meaningfully, whether through exclusion, redefinition, or the erosion of previously enabling infrastructures, often in response to regulatory shifts, technological change, or platform governance. *Re-agencing* highlights the emergence of new configurations, in which different actors, tools, and institutional logics are mobilised to re-stabilise and reshape



**Figure 1.** Agencing, Deagencing and Reagencing.

market participation. These shifts frequently redefine what counts as expertise and who or what is positioned to act.

The arrows from outside the bounded market arrangements in [Figure 1](#) represent counter-agencing pressures, that is, external or internal challenges such as regulatory interventions, activist critique, or technological innovation, that disrupt existing agencements and may lead to de-agencing or provoke re-agencing. These forces reflect the inherent instability of markets and the continuous socio-technical work required to maintain, contest, or reconfigure them. The interaction of these forces and modalities underscores the contingent and evolving nature of market formations, and the ways in which agency is both distributed and structured within them.

Understanding these processes of (counter) agencing, de-agencing, and re-agencing is critical for analysing the evolving role of marketers in increasingly digitalised and data-driven markets. Rather than viewing technological advancements as straightforward enablers of marketing practice, it is essential to recognise how they structure agency, through platforms, devices, calculative tools, and normative scripts, embedding particular forms of expertise while marginalising others. These socio-technical arrangements not only determine who is empowered to act but also prescribe *how* marketing is performed and valued. This ongoing transformation underscores the need to critically examine the power dynamics that shape digital marketing markets, and to consider how expertise is co-constructed, contested, and constrained within evolving agencements.

## Conclusion

The evolving interplay between marketing, markets, and digital technology highlights the necessity of viewing marketing not merely as a function performed by individual professionals but as a socio-technical practice shaped by a dynamic network of human and non-human actors. The rise of digitalisation and platform-mediated marketing has reconfigured traditional notions of marketing expertise, embedding new forms of agency while

constraining others. Using an illustration of the market for market research this commentary demonstrates that the market for marketing technologies is not just an enabler of efficiency but an active force shaping marketing practice, expertise, and decision-making.

Through the lens of agencing, counter-agencing, de-agencing, and re-agencing, we see how technologies equip marketers with new capacities, while simultaneously structuring and delimiting their agency. One consequence of this evolving landscape, as noted by Ryan et al. (2023), is the continuous demand for marketing professionals to upskill in response to the rapid proliferation of new tools and techniques. The increasing reliance on AI-driven analytics and automation has not only expanded the scope of marketing but also created a persistent pressure to stay abreast of technological advancements. Many professionals now engage in ongoing training and professional development to navigate the ever-changing suite of digital(ised) marketing tools. This continuous process of de/re-agencing ensures that marketers remain functional within the digital ecosystem, even as the parameters of their agency are constantly redefined. The constraints imposed by opaque algorithms, proprietary data infrastructures, and AI-driven automation illustrate the shifting power dynamics within digital marketing ecosystems.

Furthermore, as digitalisation reconfigures expertise, new professional roles emerge, reflecting the adaptive strategies marketers must employ to navigate evolving technological landscapes. For example, while traditional content marketing focused on creative storytelling and brand messaging, contemporary content strategists increasingly act as AI curators, leveraging machine learning tools to produce, optimise, and distribute marketing content. This shift does not eliminate the need for human creativity but requires marketers to develop new skills in prompt engineering, AI ethics, and human-AI collaboration. The ability to train AI models, refine generated content, and ensure brand consistency across algorithmically generated outputs has become a core competency in this new role.

Ultimately, this commentary underscores the need for a more critical engagement with the markets that shape marketing practice. Recognising the performative effects of marketing technologies enables a deeper understanding of how expertise is structured, distributed, and contested. Furthermore, besides their role in defining ethical and legal parameters, regulatory frameworks actively participate in market-making by shaping the demand for new marketing tools and expertise. However, regulation should not be understood solely in terms of state-imposed policies, platforms themselves act as *de facto* regulatory actors, continually reshaping how marketing is performed (McGowan et al., 2024). These platform-imposed restrictions mirror formal government regulations in their capacity to shape digital markets, affecting which marketing strategies remain viable and which become obsolete.

These shifts are not merely limiting but also market-generative, producing a secondary market for compliance-driven marketing solutions. This aligns with Callon's (2008) perspective that markets are actively shaped through socio-technical arrangements, rather than simply constrained by external forces. The increasing opacity of platform-controlled advertising models, which rely on probabilistic rather than deterministic attribution, further illustrates how de-agencing mechanisms restructure the role of marketers, shifting agency away from individual practitioners and towards platform-driven AI systems.

Thus, marketing expertise today is not only shaped by technological advancements and state-imposed legal frameworks but also by the evolving regulatory power of

platforms themselves. Future research should explore how regulation-driven transformations, both from governments and platforms, continue to influence marketing expertise, practice, and strategy, particularly in relation to emerging AI governance policies and ethical standards for algorithmic decision-making. By viewing regulatory frameworks as market-shaping forces rather than external constraints, scholars can better understand their role in structuring the ongoing evolution of digitalised marketing. These shifts in agency have far-reaching implications for marketing as a profession, benefiting those who can align with emerging technological infrastructures while marginalising others whose expertise is rendered obsolete. Marketers equipped with data analytics skills, compliance expertise, or AI integration capabilities increasingly find themselves in demand, while those whose roles depended on more traditional creative or strategic functions may experience a loss of professional autonomy. As the marketing profession continues to evolve, the question of who controls the terms of expertise and how power is distributed within marketing ecosystems becomes increasingly central. Understanding agencing, de-agencing, and re-agencing offers a critical lens on how marketing expertise evolves within platform-driven, algorithmic systems. As digitalisation restructures agency, marketing professionals must continuously adapt to emerging technological infrastructures, navigating power asymmetries that redefine expertise and decision-making authority.

## Acknowledgments

This manuscript has undergone language refinement and structural review with the assistance of ChatGPT-4. The AI tool was used exclusively for grammatical checks, reference verification, and the identification of redundancies to enhance clarity and coherence. No generative AI was used for argument construction, or analytical interpretation. All intellectual contributions, critical insights, and theoretical frameworks remain the sole work of the author. The final text has been carefully reviewed to ensure accuracy, consistency, and compliance with academic integrity standards.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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