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When Marketing Meets AI: Governance Lessons for African Businesses

Part 1



The Rise of AI-Driven Marketing In Africa

Africa's digital landscape has been expanding rapidly, with internet access growing across the continent. As the landscape evolves, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming an important tool in business for understanding audiences and guiding marketing decisions. AI helps businesses tailor their messages and offers more precisely, thereby making campaigns more effective and relevant by analysing behavioural patterns and predicting trends.

At the same time, adopting AI for marketing is not without hurdles. Limited infrastructure, shortage of skilled professionals, and gaps in compliance with regulatory frameworks are still major barriers in many African markets.¹

As the first in a two-part series, this article examines how AI is increasingly shaping digital marketing across Africa and why that shift raises important governance questions.

Understanding AI and Its Value in Today's Digital Marketing Landscape

AI is undoubtedly a strong influence on how brands in Africa connect with their audiences, making digital marketing smarter, faster, and more personalised. On social media, AI is increasingly used to support content creation, audience targeting, and campaign optimisation by analysing user data and engagement patterns to improve relevance and performance.² This allows brands to respond almost instantly to conversations, monitor sentiments, and create content that resonates with diverse audiences across different platforms. It also helps marketers understand which types of posts work best, so campaigns can be refined over time to maintain relevance.

¹ 'How AI Is Reshaping Creative Strategy Across African Markets' (Pan-African Agency Network (PAAN), 25 August 2025) <<https://paan.africa/blogs/ai-creative-strategy-africa>> accessed 7 March 2026

² J Kietzmann, J Paschen and E Treen, 'Artificial Intelligence in Advertising: How Marketers Can Leverage Artificial Intelligence' (Journal of Advertising Research, 2018) <<https://doi.org/10.2501/JAR-2018-035>> accessed 29 March 2026.

Digital marketing goes well beyond social media. In **programmatic advertising**, automated systems use real-time bidding and user data to place ads on websites and apps, adjusting instantly to reach the most relevant audiences based on behavioural signals.³ In **email marketing**, AI personalises subject lines, product recommendations, and delivery schedules to suit individuals, thereby increasing the chance that messages will be opened and acted upon. Even **influencer campaigns** are enhanced by AI, which can identify creators with the highest potential engagement, predict audience reactions, and optimise content placement across multiple platforms. These tools help brands reach customers more effectively, ensuring that messages are delivered to the right people at the right time.

Beyond channel-specific applications, AI enables brands to analyse vast amounts of consumer data, segment audiences, and predict customer preferences. It automates repetitive tasks, monitors campaign performance in real time, and provides insights that guide strategy and creative decisions. This allows marketing teams to spend more time on innovation and experimentation.

AI-Powered Marketing in Africa



In the African context, where audiences are highly diverse, and digital behaviour varies across regions and platforms, AI helps make marketing efforts more adaptive and relevant. It turns digital marketing into a multi-channel, responsive system that delivers personalised, timely, and impactful experiences to consumers, thus helping brands build stronger connections and stay competitive in rapidly evolving markets.

Across Africa, brands are deploying AI to market faster and smarter by reacting to consumer behaviour in real time, a trend consistent with findings that AI enables real-time, data-driven personalisation and more responsive marketing strategies.⁴ For instance, Jumia Online Ghana leverages AI in its marketing communications to analyse customer data, segment audiences, and predict purchasing behaviour, enabling the company to deliver personalised promotions and real-time adjustments to advertising campaigns.⁵

Additionally, generative AI continues to reshape advertising across Africa as brands continue to experiment with innovative and data-driven campaigns that blend creativity and automation. These developments illustrate the technology's potential and the emerging considerations surrounding its

³ J Wang, P Xu and M Wang, 'Display Advertising with Real-Time Bidding (RTB) and Behavioural Targeting' (arXiv, 2016) <<https://arxiv.org/abs/1610.03013>> accessed 29 March 2026.

⁴ Sudhir K and Toubia O, 'The State of AI Research in Marketing: Active, Fertile, and Ready for Explosive Growth' (SSRN, 22 Nov 2023) <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4611868> accessed 29 March 2026

⁵ Edward E Brobbey, Ebenezer Ankrhah and Philip Kwaku Kankam, 'The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Integrated Marketing Communications: A Case Study of Jumia Online Ghana' (ResearchGate, 2021) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370170432_The_role_of_artificial_intelligence_in_integrated_marketing_communications_A_case_study_of_Jumia_Online_Ghana> accessed 29 March 2026.

use. In Kenya, [Supa Loaf](#) launched a 2024 billboard campaign featuring a mother chasing a child carrying an oversized loaf of bread—an image adapted from generative AI, marking one of the early mainstream uses of AI-generated visuals in outdoor advertising. Similarly, [Safaricom](#) also experimented with AI-generated visuals in digital ads, blending human photography with AI elements to produce faster and more adaptive campaigns.

Moreover, in Egypt, Orange incorporated generative AI to enhance a telecom advert featuring actor Karim Abdelaziz, using futuristic visuals to promote 5G services.⁶ In Nigeria, artist Malik Afegbua created the widely circulated “Fashion Show for Seniors” series using generative AI and has since been adopted by brands to showcase creativity and inclusivity in marketing.⁷

These examples demonstrate how AI is beginning to shape marketing campaigns across Africa, from public billboards to social media-driven creative, helping brands produce innovative visuals quickly while engaging audiences in new and dynamic ways.

The Governance Risks Behind AI-Driven Marketing

As seen above, we cannot deny the competitive edge of AI-driven marketing. However, we must also confront the governance risks it presents that extend well beyond traditional advertising. These risks are primarily rooted in the scale, speed, and opacity with which data is collected, analysed, and applied to influence consumer behaviour.⁸

Marketing systems are often where customer data is heavily shared and analysed. AI-powered marketing systems depend on large volumes of personal and behavioural data to enable personalisation, segmentation, and targeting.⁹ This reliance on personal data creates tension between marketing goals and individuals’ rights to data protection and privacy, particularly where legal bases are unclear, data collection is excessive and secondary use of data is likely to occur. This is further compounded by the inconsistency in regulatory frameworks across jurisdictions as enforcement capacity, regulatory guidance and institutional strength are uneven. This creates uncertainty for businesses and uneven protection for consumers,¹⁰ thereby increasing the risk of personal data breaches and violations of data protection and consumer protection laws, which can expose businesses to regulatory penalties and reputational damage.

⁶ Orange Egypt, ‘Orange 5G Ad - Karim Abdel Aziz’ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Llr8C5Sirxs>> accessed 23 February 2026

⁷VOA Africa, ‘Extended: Nigerian Artist Creates AI-Generated Fashion Show for Elderly’ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7FqpNKJd2c>> accessed 7 March 2026

⁸Pierre-Yann Dolbec, ‘Ethics in AI and Marketing’ (Pressbooks)<<https://pressbooks.pub/aiandmarketing/chapter/ethics-in-ai-and-marketing/>> accessed 7 March 2026

⁹Chioma Onyinye Ikeh, ‘AI-Powered Market Segmentation and Personalization Strategies for Enhancing Digital Product Lifecycle Management’ (2010) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/393029191_AI-Powered_Market_Segmentation_and_Personalization_Strategies_for_Enhancing_Digital_Product_Lifecycle_Management> accessed 7 March 2026

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Beyond data protection, AI systems such as predictive models and recommendation engines shape consumer choices and influence behaviour, often without transparency. Bias, manipulation, and algorithmic opacity amplify these concerns, especially when models are trained on incomplete or foreign data, potentially producing discriminatory outcomes or reinforcing inequalities.¹¹ Additionally, black-box decision-making makes it difficult for organisations to explain or correct outcomes, challenging accountability.¹² Highly personalised persuasion techniques can also create ethical risks, crossing from legitimate influence into manipulation.¹³

Governance needs to step in early and set boundaries on how data is gathered, interpreted and used in marketing to ensure transparency and accountability. When these principles are embedded, they become the foundation for building trust. As the Hospitality Institute [stresses](#), trust is earned through responsible behaviour, and in an AI-led world, that responsibility includes how data-powered marketing is governed. Without clear governance, AI-driven campaigns can quietly cross ethical and legal lines, exposing people's data and ultimately eroding trust in the organisation.

Cross-Border Digital Marketing And Regulatory Complexity

Cross-border digital marketing in Africa is growing as businesses seek to reach larger online audiences. However, navigating the continent's diverse legal landscape remains challenging. Several African countries have implemented data protection laws governing the collection, use, sharing, and protection of personal information, and these frameworks are steadily expanding as more countries introduce or update legislation and establish regulatory authorities. As noted in the **Year of the Teeth: 2025 Data Protection Roundup in Africa and Projections for 2026 report**, the level of regulatory maturity and enforcement capacity varies significantly across jurisdictions, meaning data protection regimes are not uniform across the continent.¹⁴

This regulatory patchwork also impacts cross-border data flows, which are key to many digital marketing tools and analytics. According to the **Year of the Teeth: 2025 Data Protection Roundup in Africa and Projections for 2026 report**, countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa have established data transfer mechanisms governing how personal data moves across borders. While these frameworks set out the conditions for lawful transfers, the specific requirements vary by jurisdiction. These differences make it difficult to plan a single, unified campaign as marketers must adjust how to establish legal bases and store data in each country.

¹¹ Melissa Russel, 'AI Will Shape the Future of Marketing' (Professional & Executive Development | Harvard DCE, 14 April 2025) <<https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/ai-will-shape-the-future-of-marketing/>> accessed 7 March 2026

¹² Rodiyah Bashir, 'Advancing Trustworthy AI through Privacy Enhancing Technologies' (Tech Hive Advisory Africa, 1 December 2025) <<https://www.techhiveadvisory.africa/insights/advancing-trustworthy-ai-through-privacy-enhancing-technologies>> accessed 7 March 2026

¹³ Chioma Onyinye Ikeh, 'AI-Powered Market Segmentation and Personalization Strategies for Enhancing Digital Product Lifecycle Management' (2010) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/393029191_AI-Powered_Market_Segmentation_and_Personalization_Strategies_for_Enhancing_Digital_Product_Lifecycle_Management> accessed 7 March 2026

¹⁴ Tech Hive Advisory, 'The Year of the Teeth: Data Protection in Africa Roundup, 2025, Projections for 2026' <<https://www.techhiveadvisory.africa/insights/the-year-of-the-teeth-data-protection-in-africa-roundup-2025-projections-for-2026>> accessed 30 March 2026.

Finally, consumer protection rules in these markets restrict misleading or deceptive advertising, adding another layer of compliance for marketers operating across multiple countries. These rules typically require that marketing communications are truthful, not misleading, and sufficiently transparent, particularly in areas such as pricing, promotions, endorsements, and the use of personalised or targeted advertising. In an AI-driven marketing, this becomes even more important, as automated systems may generate or optimise content in ways that risk exaggeration, omission, or manipulation if not properly governed.

Therefore, marketers must not only comply with data protection laws but also ensure that their campaigns meet fairness, transparency, and disclosure requirements stated in consumer laws across jurisdictions. Until more harmonised regional frameworks emerge, navigating this patchwork of laws will remain a key legal challenge for cross-border digital marketing in Africa.

AI Governance and Data Protection in the African Context



The AI governance Strategies and Policies across Africa is steadily evolving. Several countries have developed National AI Strategies to define national priorities, guide innovation, and map the governance direction for AI systems. Some jurisdictions are also taking legislative steps. Countries like Ghana have an Emerging Technologies Bill, which seeks to address and govern the development and deployment of emerging technologies, including AI,¹⁵ while Nigeria has the National Economy and E-Governance Bill, Digital Sovereignty, and Fair Data Bill and National AI Commission Bill, all currently passing through legislative processes.¹⁶

Even where AI-specific laws are not yet in place, existing data protection and consumer protection frameworks already impose obligations on organisations using AI, covering automated processing, profiling, responsible handling of personal data and ensuring fair, transparent, and accountable interactions with consumers.

Key data protection principles such as data minimisation and lawful processing are central to AI-driven marketing. Organisations must collect only the data necessary for a defined purpose and identify a clear legal basis to process personal information. Data subjects are also protected, with rights to contest decisions based solely on automated processing and access safeguards such as

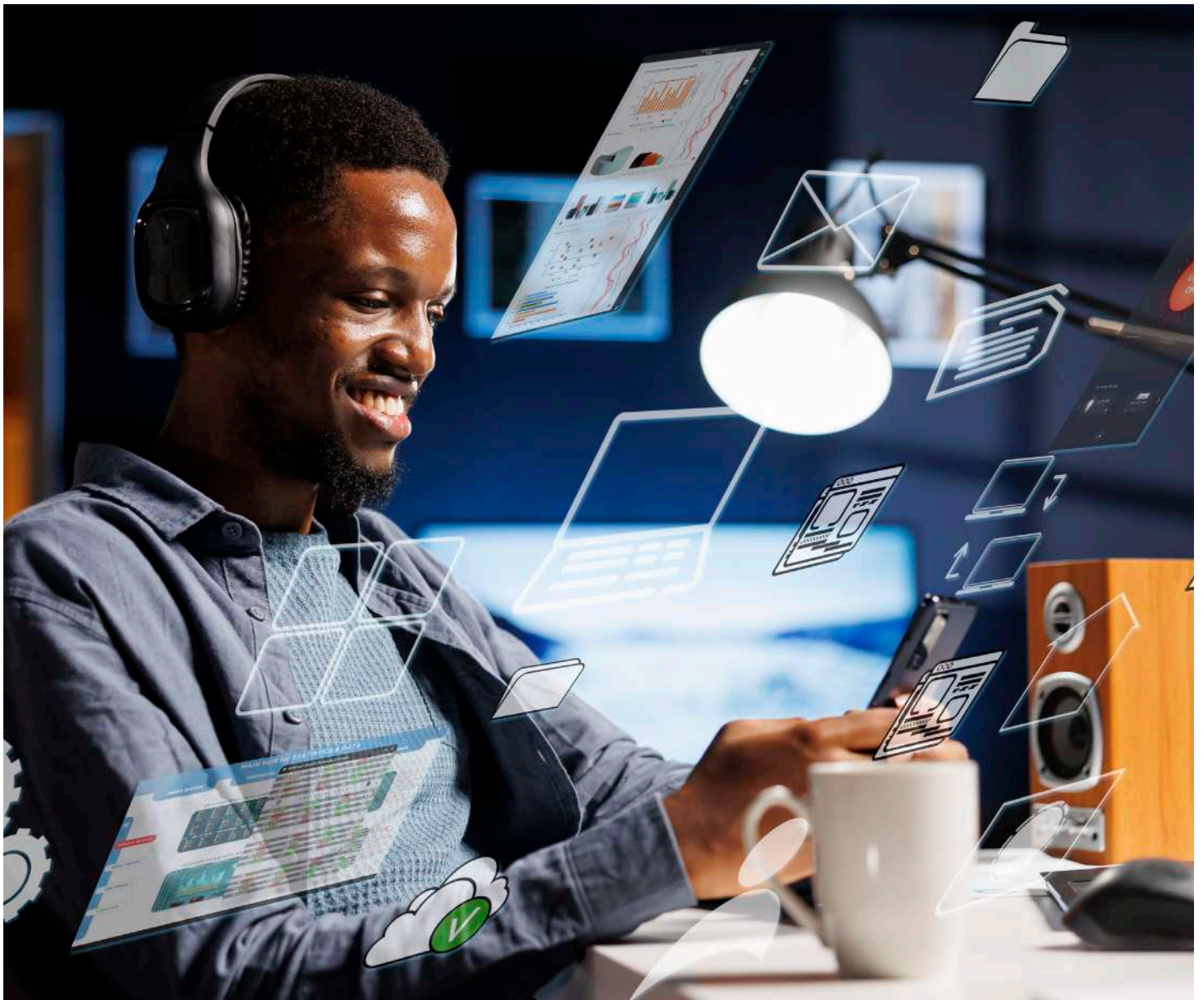
¹⁵ DPA, 'Ghana: Ministry of Communication, Digital Technology and Innovations opened consultation on Emerging Technologies Bill, 2025' <<https://digitalpolicyalert.org>> accessed 7 March 2026

¹⁶ Ridwan Oloyede and Victoria Adaramola, 'Nigeria: A 2025 Retrospective and 2026 Outlook' (Tech Hive Advisory, 29 December 2025) <<https://www.techhiveadvisory.africa/insights/nigeria-a-2025-retrospective-and-2026-outlook>> accessed 7 March 2026

human intervention when automated profiling produces significant effects. In addition, consumer protection laws impose parallel obligations, requiring that marketing practices are fair, transparent, and not misleading. These provisions ensure that even in the absence of AI-specific rules, marketing practices remain ethical, transparent, and legally defensible.

Conclusion

Marketing powered by AI predicts behaviour, segments people, and nudges choices, often invisibly. As a result, organisations must ensure strong governance so that marketing practices remain rooted in truth and trust, which become even more fragile when AI is involved. By embedding transparency, accountability, and compliance with both data protection and consumer protection laws, businesses can harness AI responsibly, protect consumers, and maintain long-term trust in their brand. In the second part of this article, the focus will turn to implementation, outlining the role of regulators and the concrete steps businesses must take to embed responsible AI in marketing.



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