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# Marketing's boundary-work with IT in the digital age

Clea Bourne

Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London, London, UK

**ABSTRACT**

This article examines how the global marketing profession sought new ways to ensure legitimacy and sustainability in the digital age by conjoining professional and managerial logics. Through field-level professional discourse analysis, the article examines marketing's efforts to control the movement of increasingly fluid professional boundaries in the digital economy through jurisdictional boundary-work with the IT profession. The article uncovers professional marketers' efforts to: (1) regain 'command and control' within organisations through protectionist, expansionary and hybridising discourses designed to build digital capital for the marketing profession through collaboration with IT; (2) formalise the emergence of marketing technology or 'MarTech' as a new technology specialism reporting to marketing; and (3) assert new areas of control for marketing within the organisation.

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## Introduction

All professions have their myths and legends. For marketing, one such professional legend arose more than 10 years ago when Gartner research analyst, Laura McLellan predicted that by 2017, CMOs would spend more money on IT than their CIO counterparts (Brinker, 2012). McLellan's comments were made at a January 2012 webinar, the links for which have long dissolved into the ether. But in the months that followed, her webinar comments stirred up much anxiety within the IT and marketing fields. IT professionals were concerned by digital marketing's threat to their organisational relevance (see, for example, Krigsman, 2012; Scissons, 2012; Vance, 2012). Meanwhile, marketing professionals felt increasingly pressured to justify their organisational value amidst a tsunami of unstructured, siloed data accumulating in digital marketing channels (see, for example, Plomion, 2012; Spenner & Bird, 2012).

Modern tensions between the marketing and IT professions highlight the transformational changes imposed on the marketing profession by the digital economy, and the great corporate grab for big data. The tensions further illustrate a foundational argument in the sociology of professions, which contends that the *real* history of any profession is determined by its occupational competition, conflict and disputes over professional

**CONTACT** Clea Bourne c.bourne@gold.ac.uk Department of Media, Communications and Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross, London SE14 6NW, UK

jurisdictions – that is, what may be practised and who may practise it[1] (Abbott, 1988; Heusinkveld et al., 2018). The sociology of professions further contends that professions evolve when jurisdictions become vacant, either when a professional jurisdiction is newly created – e.g. with the advent of new technologies – or because an earlier tenant has lost its 'grip' on a particular jurisdiction or left it altogether (Abbott, 1988). This longstanding view almost certainly applies to the rise of marketing technology or 'MarTech' as a technological specialism, which in modern organisations typically reports to the marketing department rather than to IT.

Two years before Gartner's controversial technology forecast, the CMO Council, an affinity network for marketing professionals, had already commissioned a large benchmark study entitled *The CMO-CIO Alignment Imperative*. In this benchmark 2010 study, the marketing profession framed its jurisdictional battle with the IT profession in the friendliest of terms, depicting marketing and IT as two professions with a shared objective of achieving organisational growth. Over the next two decades, the CMO Council would carefully build the case for collegialism and collaboration between marketing and IT, even as the marketing profession worked to formalise MarTech as a sub-field of the marketing profession. Today, specialist MarTech professionals are responsible for researching and recommending marketing technology products, designing and managing internal workflows, training and supporting marketing staff on using MarTech, designing, running and optimising digital marketing campaigns, administering and integrating MarTech products, and monitoring data quality therein (Digiday, 2022; Third Door Media, 2024; Wedel & Kannan, 2016). The marketing profession has thus evolved in the digital age through both contestation and collaboration.

Theorists of professions recognise that beyond jurisdictional disputes, professions and occupations may develop more collaborative relations (Heusinkveld et al., 2018). Yet collaborative language by one profession can mask strategic battle plans for domination over a field of expertise. Whereas marketing frequently adopts controlling, uncompromising language over associated professions such as advertising and public relations (Bourne, 2015, 2019), as a corporatised profession, marketing may adopt different strategies with other corporatised professions within an organisation – such as HR, management consultancy and IT. Research on corporatised professions suggests that, unlike traditional professions such as medicine or law, corporatised professions find the organisation to be the main point of jurisdictional dispute and, simultaneously, the main prize to be won (Heusinkveld et al., 2018). While all professions now face unprecedented change stemming from new technologies, corporatised professions such as marketing face radical upheaval due to organisations' quest for big data.

This article contributes to the Special Issue on the digitalisation of the marketing discipline by examining the marketing profession's encroachment on IT expertise, and its implications for marketing's 'professional project', a term adopted by Larson (2012) to describe professions that are still 'becoming' and engaged in a struggle over jurisdiction in order to survive. By combining debates from the sociology of professions, marketing theory, and digital culture, I examine how the marketing profession has sought new ways to ensure legitimacy and sustainability in the digital age by further conjoining professional and managerial logics (Goto, 2021) to defend marketing's authority, while hybridising new marketing specialisms and occupational roles designed to expand that authority even further. Professional marketers have systematically gone about this strategy by

collectively organising at the field-level through professional associations and networks to build marketing's case for expanding the boundaries that demarcate one profession from another (Bucher et al., 2016). Whereas marketing's twentieth-century professional project focused on control over adjacent fields of PR, advertising and sales, marketing's *twenty-first century* mode now requires technology expertise, traditionally embodied within IT departments and the senior role of Chief Information Officer (CIO).

Marketing can, of course, be practised in different ways and in different ecologies (see e.g. Mellet, 2025). This article's focus is on *in-house marketing*, where marketers are more likely to work in departments with established professional boundaries and identities. The article asks the following questions: How has the marketing profession engaged in discursive boundary-work with IT in the digital age? What are the implications of such boundary-work on marketing's professional jurisdiction in the digital economy? These questions are answered through a study of field-level professional discourses produced over a 14-year time span by the CMO Council, a global marketing network. The rest of the article is organised as follows. The next section draws on the sociology of professions and marketing theory to define the nature of corporatised professions such as marketing and IT, before examining marketing's expanding jurisdiction in the digital age, and its boundary-work with IT. Methods and materials are then introduced, drawing on Bourne's (2019, 2022) method of field-level professional discourse analysis, before introducing thought leadership material produced by the marketing profession through one of its international networks. The article ends by discussing key findings, in particular, marketing's strategic efforts to formalise MarTech as a sub-specialism of the marketing profession.

## Marketing's professional discourses

Despite its rapid expansion over the past century, marketing has received limited attention in the sociology of professions literature. This may be due to the nature of marketing's ubiquitous presence in the language of business; where corporations are defined as 'marketing-led', marketing rhetoric is widely available and universalised, and 'everyone is a marketer now' (Applbaum, 2004; Gross & Laamanen, 2018; McKenna, 1991; Whittington & Whipp, 1992). As Willmott points out, marketing is exceptional in representing marketers as 'experts in the management of *every conceivable kind of transaction within organisations* [my emphasis] as well as between organisations and their diverse stakeholders' (1999, p. 213). In the organisational context, marketing work is articulated as a rationality for managing every departmental function and every type of employee (Skålén et al., 2008).

Within marketing theory itself, however, the question of marketing's professional status and evolving practice is evergreen (e.g. Gross & Laamanen, 2018; Mellet, 2025; Svensson, 2007; Whittington & Whipp, 1992). 'The marketing concept', a codification of marketing's managerial and customer-oriented rationality, gained hegemony in marketing discourse in the 1960s (Skålén et al., 2008; Willmott, 1999), encompassing market research, product development, distribution, pricing, packaging, promotion and after-sales service (McKenna, 1991). A 1979 study by Walker and Child traced the marketing profession's twentieth-century efforts to distinguish itself from, then subsume, sales. By the 1980s, the goal of marketing was to *own* the market, not just to sell the product, and to push expansion, once markets had reached their natural limits (Applbaum, 2004).

Key amongst marketing's professional services to client-organisations is the commitment to know the customer, and to produce knowledge about the customer. Concepts such as Unique Selling Proposition, the 'four Ps' (Product, Price, Place and Promotion) and market segmentation became widely used terms that can be attributed to the success of marketing's managerial discourse. Such terms appeal to client organisations not just because they provide a well-defined, theorised set of practices but because of their inherent promise of progress and rationality (Christensen et al., 2008). A further rearticulation in managerial marketing discourse occurred in the 1990s when the emerging service marketing field determined that value creation was mutually created *with* the customer through long-term relationships (Skålén et al., 2008). The customer, or the key stakeholder, became the core of the organisation's strategic process. Hence, any occupation which could govern this ultimate organisational imperative (Skålén et al., 2008) could gain a strategic role within the firm as experts on key stakeholder relations. This imperative shaped marketing's professional project into the twenty-first century.

## *'New' expert labour: marketing as entrepreneurial profession*

Both marketing theory and the sociology of professions recognise issues with marketing's professional status. Each discipline acknowledges that unlike traditional professions such as medicine or law, newer professions such as marketing typically organise without state regulation, licencing or ring-fenced forms of knowledge. Marketing theory also highlights the fact that marketing's action field is 'an open, uncertain and remote space' requiring 'constant, gentle, patient and very fragile work' when shaping economic exchanges (Cochoy & Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013, p. 4). Mellet (2025, p. 2) positions marketing not as a profession, but a professional world – 'an ecosystem of interacting actors', populated by a variety of specialists and non-specialists 'who coordinate, make markets … and ultimately produce attachments between businesses and consumers'. For marketing theory, the open and uncertain nature of market spaces has dogged marketing's capacity to measure, to display uniformity and replication in its techniques – and to control. This denies the marketing field its desired professional status and ideology (Deighton, 2017; Enright, 2006; Svensson, 2007; Whittington & Whipp, 1992).

However, the sociology of professions casts a different light on marketing's professional project: it positions marketing as one of the newer entrepreneurial professions or 'expert labour'. As a form of expert labour, marketing encompasses long-standing practices that only began to formalise under a professional umbrella in the early twentieth century. Despite existing for more than a century, de facto control over the marketing profession is weak – *deliberately* so, argue Muzio et al. (2008), because newer, entrepreneurial forms of expert labour are highly responsive to the organisations, cultures and customers they serve. Entrepreneurial professions exhibit participative, cooperative patterns of workplace relations (Muzio et al., 2008) and have the 'liminal competence' to constantly reinvent themselves (Reed & Thomas, 2021).

Newer entrepreneurial professions are also active and fluid in the construction of knowledge through their use of language and relational skills (Muzio et al., 2008), both vital aspects of marketing (Svensson, 2007). Hence, the marketing profession is mutually active in the construction of knowledge through its use of language and relationship skills with client-organisations while continually developing *new* forms of knowledge together

with different methods for its production, organisation and delivery, adopting 'radically different strategies and organisational configurations' as needed (Muzio et al., 2008, p. 4).

Marketing's responsiveness to organisational culture represents a 'reverse' ordering of professionalisation, in which professional development is shaped not by the professions but by the organisations they serve (Muzio et al., 2008, 2019). So often do entrepreneurial professions like marketing appear to change the rules of the game, that, increasingly, they challenge and displace traditional forms of professional knowledge and organisation (Muzio et al., 2008). Marketing and other entrepreneurial professions are therefore forced into a never-ending pursuit of legitimation strategies which help them remain relevant to client-organisations. Indeed, studies have found that organisations continually redefine the marketing field by requiring new marketing expertise and work practices (Hafezieh et al., 2023).

### *Localised, corporatised identity*

Traditional theories of professionalism did not foresee the shift of certain kinds of professional work into very large organisations (Kirkpatrick et al., 2023). Hence, more recent literature on *corporatised* professions sheds further light on the fluid nature of marketing's modern identity (Hodgson et al., 2015). Whereas practitioners in adjacent fields of advertising and public relations (PR) are more likely to work as intermediaries in agencies, consultancies, or as freelancers, thus retaining their entrepreneurial, client-focused identity, marketing professionals often work in-house on the 'client side' where they engage in 'localism', aligning daily with corporate/organisational goals as much as – or more than – to the marketing profession (Walker & Child, 1979). As a corporatised profession, marketing is even more closely tied to the interests, preferences and values of corporations that employ marketing expertise (Kirkpatrick et al., 2023). Because the organisation is such an important arena for interaction, the marketing profession finds its jurisdictional issues become complicated when enmeshed with managerial logics and organisational practices (Heusinkveld et al., 2018; Kirkpatrick et al., 2023). Hence, corporatised professions draw on different forms of boundary-work, where jurisdictional struggles are just as likely to happen between disparate occupations employed within the same organisation (Heusinkveld et al., 2018). Within organisational settings, professional marketers have developed a more managerial identity, while their daily work is closely associated with solving technical problems and adding value to the organisation through efficiencies.

Where traditional professions may focus on control over professional knowledge domains, corporatised professions such as marketing and IT will also focus on control over organisational work processes (Heusinkveld et al., 2018) such as efficiency, value, and tangible, measurable results when delivering products and services (Noordegraaf, 2015). Throughout the twentieth century, any in-house status realised by marketing professionals was achieved through building a semblance of control over the customer. The marketing profession promised organisations that it could know the customer in ever more detail, increase market efficiencies, and measure return on investment (ROI) through automating and intensifying market surveillance and customer data collection, thus delivering sophisticated data insights. In acknowledgement of its efforts to exert control and drive profits, more organisations bestowed boardroom status on their marketing function by elevating a marketing professional to the role of Chief Marketing Officer.

## Marketing's expanding jurisdiction in the digital age

While technology has always been key in marketing practice (Hafezieh et al., 2023), the digital era, and accompanying digitalisation and automation of white-collar work, has underscored the fluid boundaries of the marketing profession, giving rise to new marketing specialisms such as digital content marketing, social media marketing, search engine optimisation marketing, while simultaneously centring data flows as the fulcrum of modern marketing expertise. The fluidity in marketing's professional boundaries is further evident in the job titles currently accorded to an organisation's most senior marketer. Recently, the title of 'Chief Marketing Officer' has morphed into 'Chief Marketing and Technology Officer' or 'Chief Customer Officer' and occasionally been replaced altogether by 'Chief Growth Officer', 'Chief Revenue Officer' or 'Chief Data Officer' (Parsons, 2018; Rumbol, 2017). For many professional marketers, the writing was on the wall when budget airline easyJet swapped its top marketer for a chief data officer. EasyJet's CEO explained that the substitute board room role would 'further build on work we have already done with data science to exploit the opportunity of the billions of data points [we have] within the organisation' (Rovnick, 2018).

Marketing's new assorted job titles hint at diverse tensions facing the profession. The professional marketer's challenge has always been to glean information at every possible moment of the customer's daily life, enabling companies to better project the future (Darmody & Zwick, 2020; Nadler & McGuigan, 2018; Viale et al., 2017). However, the rise of the digital economy rocked marketing's comfortable view of its distinctiveness and superiority. The surge in cloud computing, software suppliers, and big data did not initially provide marketers with substantially better understanding of customers, because many organisations had inflexible structures, outdated data modelling, and split ownership of customer data siloes (Bibby et al., 2021; Plomion, 2012; Quinn et al., 2016). Campaign strategy and proprietary data management were further stymied by mistakes, oversights, insouciance and inefficiencies (Pathak, 2018). Within organisations, the marketing profession watched its power over customer data shift to the IT department and to external service providers (Aimé et al., 2022; Fourcade & Healy, 2017; Nadler & McGuigan, 2018; Pascucci et al., 2023; Ruckenstein & Granroth, 2019). In response, marketing's various professional associations rallied to 'change the narrative around marketing, positioning it as more vital, both in its embrace of technology and in its contribution to business success' (Parsons, 2018). At stake was marketing's ability to regain control over sales and over datafication in order to rebuild legitimacy with the C-suite[2] (Aimé et al., 2022; Cluley et al., 2020). By aligning with IT, marketing stood to close the gap of control (Graesch et al., 2021).

## Marketing's boundary-work with the IT profession

Technological changes inevitably trigger jurisdictional task negotiations and impose tensions between professional groups (Köktener & Tunçalp, 2021). To this end, marketing theory has examined interprofessional struggles and boundary-work between the marketing and IT professions for several decades (e.g. Brady et al., 2002; Deighton, 2017). Traditionally, the marketing and IT professions would collaborate on projects (in some sectors more than others) but did not necessarily work closely day-to-day. Prior

to the big data era, the relationship between the chief marketing officer (CMO) and chief information officer (CIO) primarily involved figuring out technology to drive customer engagement (Abramovich, 2013). Marketing professionals often regarded IT as a prosthetic endowing marketing with new capacities (Hafezieh et al., 2023; Ryan et al., 2023); and a resource to be exploited – with IT seen variously as a set of tools and applications, a marketing channel, medium or marketing technique (Brady et al., 2002). Occasionally, marketing was even guilty of technophobia (Brookes et al., 2005), which presented a real organisational challenge by the 1990s when developments in IT unfolded so fast, they overpowered marketing departments (Brady et al., 2002). Advances in customer relationship-management, ecommerce and cloud computing increased the level of IT engineering expertise needed to support increasingly digital marketing activity. The IT profession moved from the back-end to the front-end of organisations, even as IT experts converted bricks-and-mortar marketplaces into virtual 'market-spaces' (Brookes et al., 2005).

Today, the need to harness digital platforms and massive amounts of data to create personalised customer experiences creates substantial organisational complexity (IBM, 2012). This puts pressure on both in-house marketing and IT professionals to expand their expertise and meet in the middle in order to manage the customer journey and value. Where marketing may lack technological know-how, it is propped up by more than 15,000 software products, which has helped drive more organisational technology spend from IT to marketing (Brinker & Riersma, 2025). Despite their asymmetric interdependence, IT and marketing departments must increasingly partner and work symbiotically to ensure a 'seamless' customer experience (Hafezieh et al., 2023; Sleep & Hulland, 2018). At issue, however, is which profession should control 'big' customer data within the organisation, and which profession should own the process for implementing new tools for customer data analysis (Sleep & Hulland, 2018). Such professional control can be partly achieved through deploying field-level discourses.

## Method and materials

Several methods have been used to examine how professional fields are constructed and evolve over time, including case studies, qualitative interviews, action research, and various forms of quantitative analysis (Skjølsvik et al., 2017). Discourse analysis remains a useful way of following a profession's shifts and struggles over time. Theorists have highlighted the importance of professional discourses in influencing modern society, and shaping the worlds of business, commerce, leisure and statecraft (Gunnarsson, 2009). Professional discourse can be both situated and dynamic, with constantly changing professional language designed as a means of distinction (Gunnarsson, 2009). For professions like marketing that rely heavily on communication, the language of marketing discourse is integral to asserting both professional identity (Kong, 2014), and organisational control.

Broadly speaking, professional discourse can take place within a single profession; or between two separate professions; as well as between professionals and third-party groups such as clients, customers and prospects, suppliers, governments and regulators (Bucher et al., 2016; Kong, 2014). For instance, Cova and White's (2012) work on tribal marketing discourses in online brand communities provides insight on professional

discourses visible in participatory culture. To these analytical categories, Kong (2014) adds regulatory discourses, such as professional codes of practice.

However, existing published work on professional discourse analysis is fairly narrow in scope, since most studies concentrate on micro-level discourses, that is to say, communication between *individual* professionals within their organisational settings (e.g. Bhatia, 2010; Gunnarson, 2009). By contrast, macro-level methods highlight the limitations of marketing's own organisation-centric professional discourses, by repositioning marketing discourses within field-level contexts such as globalisation, neoliberalism, and digital platformisation (see e.g. Bourne, 2020). Such macro-level interventions are vital because marketing not only claims that all organisations should become marketing-led, and all employees should be marketers, but by also claiming to own the consumer experience, marketing is a profession well on its way to claiming ownership over the human experience (Vaccaro et al., 2019).

The materials chosen for this study represent the professional genre commonly referred to as 'thought leadership'. The term 'thought leadership' has been in use for decades in academic and political circles to invoke transformational thinking within disciplines (Keane, 1976) or across nations (Tokuda, 1971). In real-world terms, thought leadership refers to a range of materials including proprietary research exploring forecasts, trends and new ideas, policy documents, white papers, industry speeches, technical articles, seminars, video presentations and opinion editorials published for one or more of three aims: to establish authority when entering new or adjacent markets where firms have low existing credibility; to demonstrate a firm's commitment to a specific field or specialism; or to find scalable ways to reach large numbers of prospects (see Bourne, 2015). Thought leadership features prominently as a popular professional genre in large, well-resourced professional marketplaces, where it is made accessible to the wider field through dissemination and citation by opinion formers, national and trade media.

While various forms of thought leadership can portray jurisdictional work, including conference presentations, internal documents, and client/supplier communication, I began my search for thought leadership on marketing–IT relations within the industry trade press for several reasons. Importantly, the trade press 'speak *for* industries, not just *about* them', often promoting themselves as an industry's 'voice' (Corrigan, 2018, p. 2760). Trade press are a principal channel for spreading management knowledge by different professional groups, offering socially accepted language through which production and consumption of management ideas take place (Nijholt et al., 2014), and creating spaces for industry professionals to negotiate their norms, values, and beliefs (Corrigan, 2018). The trade press also play a gatekeeping role by blocking or facilitating the further dissemination of ideas, thus influencing corporate agendas (Nijholt et al., 2014). Specifically for this study, the trade press further help to reinforce industry consensus around technologies (Napoli, 1997), thus 'thickening' such professional discourses.

I began by searching through a combined list of 20 business and professional publications and platforms catering to the marketing and IT sectors, as well as business publications that cover both, namely, *Ad Age, AdExchanger, Adweek, Campaign, Chief Martec, Chief Marketer, CIO magazine, Computer Weekly, Computer World, CNBC/Marketing.Media.Money, Digiday, The Drum, Fast Company, Forbes, Fortune, Harvard Business Review, Marketing Week, Wired, TechCrunch* and *ZDNET*. My search applied combinations of the terms 'marketing' and 'tech' and 'CMO' and 'CIO', with no date

parameters. The initial search yielded 146 articles, as well as podcasts and other content formats. I focused the thought leadership search to text-based articles only, checking for references to 'report', 'survey' or 'research'. This refined search yielded articles directly referencing thought leadership studies by several management consultancies and professional organisations including Accenture, the CMO Club, the CMO Council, Deloitte, EY, Forrester, Gartner, KPMG, McKinsey & Company and Oliver Wyman. From this refined search, I compiled a list of reports examining CMO-CIO relationships (see Table 1).

As seen in Table 1, most of the listed reports were commissioned by marketing interests, rather than IT. Exceptions include Gartner's 2014 report on 'Best Practices for CIOs', and KPMG's 2015 report challenging CIOs to 'lead or get out of the way'. Nevertheless, the IT trade press certainly covered the CMO-CIO debate. For instance, *CIO* magazine foreshadowed the battle breaking out between IT and other lines of business over who really owns the user interface (Friedenberg, 2010). The same magazine also speculated over whether the relationship between CIOs and CMOs could be saved (Wailgum, 2010). Table 1's skew towards marketing publications may be explained by the likelihood that new professional discourses are often mounted by an aggressor attempting to expand into another's professional territory (as detailed in the next section).

**Table 1.** Reports focused on CMO-CIO relations (source: author, 2025).

| Year | Organisation | Title |
|---|---|---|
| 2024 | CMO Council | CMO Intentions 2024 |
| 2022 | CMO Council | The High Velocity Data Marketer: Meeting disruption with insights at speed |
| 2021 | Forrester | The CMO And CIO Partnership In Digital Transformation |
| 2021 | Infosys | CMO and C-Suite: The DNA of Partnership |
| 2021 | Deloitte Insights | 2021 Global Marketing Trends |
| 2021 | CMO Council/ KPMG | Making Martech Payoff: Future of Martech depends on CMO-CIO relationships |
| 2020 | The CMO Club/ Deloitte | The Evolution of Marketing Organizations |
| 2019 | Forrester | CMO-CIO Collaboration: Resolving the Paradox |
| 2019 | Deloitte Insights | Tech Trends 2019: Beyond the Digital Frontier |
| 2018 | CMO Council/ Deloitte | CMOs and the Spark to Drive Growth |
| 2016 | Forrester | A Customer-Obsessed Operating Model Demands A Close Partnership With Your CIO: Marketing And Technology Drive Growth Together |
| 2016 | CMO Council/ Deloitte | The CMO Shift to Gaining Business Lift: Executive perspectives |
| 2015 | KPMG | Digital Business: It's Time for CIOs to Lead or Get Out of the Way |
| 2015 | Celerity | Bridging the CMO-CIO Gap |
| 2014 | Forrester | CMOs And CIOs Must Turn Collaboration Into Action |
| 2014 | Gartner | Best Practices for CIOs: Mobilizing a Great CIO-CMO Relationship through Five Maturity Levels |
| 2014 | The CMO Club/ EPAM | CIO-CMO Omnichannel Crossroads |
| 2014 | Accenture Interactive | Cutting Across the CMO-CIO Divide |
| 2013 | Forrester | The CMO And CIO Must Accelerate On Their Path To Better Collaboration |
| 2013 | CMO Council/SAS | Big Data's Biggest Role: Aligning the CMO and CIO |
| 2013 | Accenture Interactive | The CMO-CIO Disconnect: Bridging the Gap to Seize the Digital Opportunity |
| 2011 | Accenture | Joining Forces: Aligning Marketing and IT to drive high performance revenue growth in insurance |
| 2010 | CMO Council/ Accenture | The CMO-CIO Alignment Imperative: Driving Revenue through Customer Relevance |

The data set was finalised through a process of deselection. For instance, reports from Forrester and Gartner research consultancies were deselected due to subscription costs (more than US$1400 per report). Likewise, although management consultancies produced CMO-CIO reports periodically, many of these reports were no longer available on consultancy websites, despite receiving ample trade press coverage. By contrast, the CMO Council consistently published reports on CMOs-CIOs over a long timeframe; the reports were authoritative (often co-produced with Accenture or KPMG, for example); regularly cited in the trade press, and remain either affordable or free to download. CMO Council reports also consistently reflected the broader debates regarding CMO-CIO relations across the range of publications listed in Table 1.

The CMO Council is a US-based affinity network headquartered in San Jose, California. Formed in 2001, the organisation was founded by South African, Donovan Neale-May, who previously spent four decades at marketing, promotions, and PR agencies, including Ogilvy and Mather (CMO Council, 2024b). While other professional marketing organisations might be older and better known, the CMO Council is a self-described modern 'content factory' (Hanifin, 2025), as exhibited in Table 1. According to its founder, the CMO Council was formed at a point when the title and territory of 'Chief Marketing Officer' was not well defined, with poor recognition of the need for that role in shaping organisational strategy and growth (Hanifin, 2025). The Council's goal, then as now, is 'positioning and alignment' of CMOs with other C-Suite members 'notably IT and information security as well as … finance and procurement, revenue, growth data, and digital' (Hanifin, 2025). The CMO Council's goals support the three main motivations for thought leadership production: to establish authority, to demonstrate commitment to a specific field or specialism, and to find scalable ways to reach large numbers of prospects (Bourne, 2015).

The CMO Council further provided a logical site for study for several reasons. As an affinity network, the Council has international reach, representing some 16,000 marketing professionals in 10,000 companies and 120 countries around the world. The Council focuses on 'high-level knowledge exchange', thought leadership and business-to-business content marketing of white papers, surveys, reports and webinars (CMO Council, 2024b), hosting hundreds of reports on the thought leadership section of its website. While some reports are free, most of its survey research is available via premium membership (US$495 annually), library subscription (US$99 annually), or a one-off cost of US$50 per report. Not only is the Council's thought leadership centred on marketing professionals – much of its output examines 'cross-functional alignment' between marketing and other departments, including sales, finance, HR and IT.

The CMO Council is sponsored by some 145 member companies across different sectors, while its advisory board represents all major geographic regions, with senior experts on both business-to-consumer and business-to-business marketing, as well as consulting advisors and academics. The Council's website includes various testimonials from senior marketing professionals lauding the networking opportunities and research insights afforded through membership (CMO Council, 2024c). In 2010, the Council launched its *CMO-CIO Alignment Imperative*, returning to this topic periodically between 2010 and 2024. Reports from this period were therefore scanned for references to the CIO and to IT, with a final data set of seven reports (see Table 1) chosen as follows: *The CMO-CIO alignment imperative* (2010); *Big data's biggest role: Aligning the CMO and CIO* (2013);

*The CMO shift to gaining business lift* (2016); *CMOs and the spark to drive growth* (2018); *Making MarTech pay off* (2021); *The high velocity data marketer* (2022); and *CMO intentions 2024* (2024a).

## Field-level discourse analysis

The methodological approach adapts Bourne's (2019, 2022) field-level discourse analytical framework (see Figure 1). This method is designed to deconstruct discursive boundary-work carried out by professionals within an expert field, or between adjacent fields of expertise, in order to reveal how claims to professional knowledge and expertise are successfully deployed, defended, and maintained. In this approach, 'boundary-work' refers to discursive efforts to demarcate professional activity and expert knowledge so as to assert distinctive status and centrality within that field by establishing, obscuring or dissolving distinctions between groups of experts. Since boundaries are not fixed, this discursive work is always in motion, revealing tensions between actors claiming or maintaining status (Bourne, 2019, 2022). Boundaries define an expert group's access to material and non-material resources such as power, status, and remuneration (Abbott, 1988). Professions continually negotiate boundaries in their desire to expand or protect their autonomy (Bucher et al., 2016; Gieryn, 1983). Marketers' role, status and broader professional project must therefore be understood as part of an ecology of multiple, overlapping projects of combined professionalisation and institutionalisation (Suddaby & Viale, 2011). In the twenty-first century, 'locating how, where and why jurisdictional claims are made' is

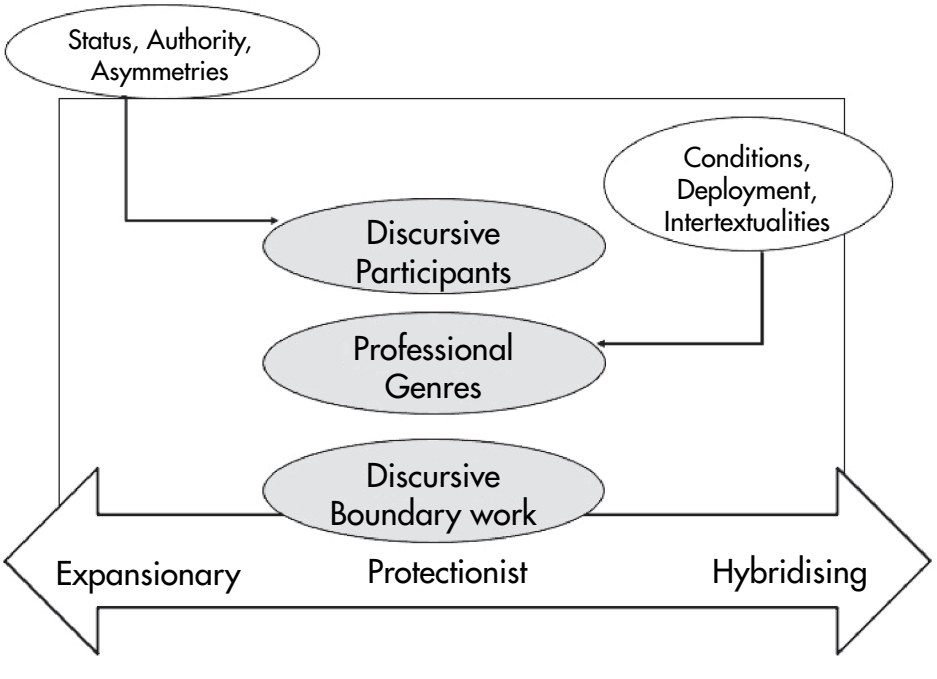


**Figure 1.** Field-level professional discourse analysis (source: Bourne, 2019/2025).

essential for capturing how marketing work develops in new digital environments (Lewis, 2012).

I first read all the reports listed in Table 1, for context. I then conducted a close reading of the seven CMO Council reports, first separately, then in conjunction with each other. Here, I read the reports applying an interpretive approach in the post-structural tradition (Wetherell, 2001), where the researcher responds to questions about a phenomenon's significance (e.g. boundary expansion, protection, hybridisation), and active meanings in communication practices (e.g. new or existing professional expertise). Following Bourne's (2019) method, I approached the analysis in three layers, focusing on discursive participants and professional genre, followed by discursive boundary-work.

For the first step of the framework (the top of the diagram in Figure 1), I identified the participants of the various reports to determine their status, authority and asymmetries. CMO Council thought leadership included many anonymised surveys of professionals across marketing, sales, IT and finance (e.g. CMO Council, 2013, 2016), as well as commentary from senior marketers at well-known global brands such as eBay, GE HealthCare, PayPal and Salesforce; senior IT professionals at PayPal; or in some cases *joint commentary* e.g. from the CMO and CIO of Fidelity Investments – emphasising the collaborative tone of certain reports (CMO Council, 2021, 2024a). Several of the CMO Council's reports were produced in collaboration with global management consultancies such as Accenture and KPMG, companies well-rehearsed in designing and disseminating successful management ideas.

The second step of the framework considered professional genre. Genres are a rhetorical action organised in response to a particular situation, so they have a socially objectified need (Malone & Wright, 2017). Every genre occurs in a particular setting, is organised in a particular way, and has a distinctive communicative function (Paltridge, 2012). The CMO Council's reports generally serve two overlapping purposes. First, they are problem-solving, in that they analyse problems facing the marketing profession and find solutions. They are also 'market reports' in that they identify opportunities for the marketing profession and advise strategies accordingly (Yeung, 2007). Reports typically featured a member survey, with content structured as follows: an executive summary or highlights, followed by detailed survey findings illustrated with graphs; then expert commentary, along with member perspectives and/or case studies designed to illustrate either a solution (in the case of a problem-solving report) or an opportunity (in the case of a market report), or both. Since reports were written to advocate a course of action, a positive tone pervades throughout (Yeung, 2007). Part of this second phase of analysis included consideration of external conditions which gave birth to the seven reports.

The third step of the framework involved identifying three primary forms of discursive boundary-work designed to produce status in an expert field – discursive boundary-work often carried out by market professionals, but potentially also by other actors including regulators, customers, clients, and the media, underscoring the co-creative nature of marketing's knowledge claims. The three forms of field-level discursive boundary-work are identified as expansionary, protectionist and hybridising discourses (Bourne, 2019).

*Expansionary* discourses expand authority or expertise into domains claimed by other expert groups. Boundary-work in expansionary discourses heightens the contrast between rival experts and professions in ways that flatter the aggressor's side (Gieryn, 1983). Expansionary discourses are, therefore, evident in talk, text, or

images where one expert group opts to go on the offensive. Expansionary discourses in professional fields feature assertive language, and regular pronouncements about moves to occupy or capture new areas of expertise regardless of whether the aggressor actually possesses this expertise (Bourne, 2019). Signs of aggressive intent in professional rhetoric can be sugar-coated to render the professional project palatable to adjacent fields. For instance, Suddaby and Viale (2011, p. 428) note that where professions expand internally, through the extension or renewal of expertise and knowledge, they often create a 'gold rush', or institutional vacuum through 'which considerable wealth and resources are transferred largely in the absence of formal institutions – by defining a new space for economic enterprise or social activity'.

Next, *protectionist* discourses encompass efforts, usually by traditional occupants of a field, to defend against encroachment on their knowledge areas (Lauzen, 1992). Higher-status expert groups may be forced to defend boundaries against incursion by emphasising the exclusiveness of their abstract knowledge, for example, by constructing newcomers as interlopers – as 'mere' digital experts rather than marketing specialists. While one might expect marketing discourse to aim for highly visible images, talk, and text, protectionist discourses may also feature silences. This can happen where higher-status experts adopt silence to express 'a taken-for-granted assumption of their own technical superiority' (Sanders & Harrison, 2008, p. 297). Silences also occur in mediated discourses when publicity takes a backseat, allowing market actors to lobby quietly behind the scenes.

Finally, *hybridising* discourses are a form of professional boundary-work closely associated with entrepreneurial behaviour – whether by an innovative start-up specialism within a single department of an organisation, or by third parties (such as tech providers) keen on seeing fragmentation of knowledge into new specialisms. Companies engaged in hybridising boundary-work reject monopolistic market behaviour as neither desirable nor achievable (Bourne, 2019). Instead, hybridising discourses laud innovation, entrepreneurship, and active market engagement to carve out brand-new niche specialisms and market identities. In hybridising discourses, professionals often use their expertise and legitimacy to challenge the incumbent order and define new, open and uncontested spaces (Suddaby & Viale, 2011). The rapid growth of the digital economy has been accompanied by many hybridising discourses by a range of experts, even as digitalisation leads many existing professional groups to assert innovative, entrepreneurial language. Hybridising discourses also help to construct new field-level actors, of whom less is understood in professions literature (Suddaby & Viale, 2011).

All three types of field-level boundary-work are defined by their strategic intent, in the sense that a boundary can advance, recede or dissolve altogether. Aggressive expansion past an existing boundary (Gieryn, 1983) and defensive protection against encroachment of a boundary (Lauzen, 1992) are classic forms of professional boundary-work, while hybridising is considered more typical of newer, entrepreneurial professions (Muzio et al., 2011). My analysis of such professional boundary-work is set out in the next section.

## Findings and discussion

### *CMOS and CIOs in 2010: the context*

Discursive context is an important part of the field-level approach to professional discourses – understanding why a professional text was deployed at a particular time and its various intertextualities (Bourne, 2019, 2022). The emergence of CMO-CIO thought leadership in 2010 coincided with a plateau in the number of companies elevating a marketing executive and an IT executive to the C-Suite (Taylor & Vithayathil, 2018). Starting with its 2010 report, the CMO Council identified the site of boundary-work between marketing and IT as control over digital platforms and software *within* the organisation, and digital channels to the customer *outside* the organisation (CMO Council, 2013). Specifically, the reports focused on CMOs' need for more agile systems and processes for knowing the customer, i.e. the ability to personalise customer experiences; track and respond to customer behaviours at every point of contact; and make campaigns and strategies data-driven and measurable (CMO Council, 2010).

### *Marketing and IT: journey to consensus*

Between 2010 and 2021, reports by the CMO Council highlighted a professional disagreement between marketing and IT over which would be best placed to champion and spearhead digital marketing strategies within organisations. According to the CMO Council's (2010) benchmark report, marketing and IT operated on different temporalities, inevitably leading to a turf war in which both professions had 'enough knowledge to be dangerous about each other's domain' (CMO Council, 2010, p. 29). While in-house marketing was in a race to analyse the moving target of digital customer traces, in-house IT professionals wanted to do things safely and securely (CMO Council, 2010). The CMO Council responded to this turf war with conciliatory language and tone, identifying the gap between marketing and IT as a communications problem – a mere difference between 'creative minds and engineering minds' (2010, p. 13) – which could be overcome by developing a new 'shared language' (2010, p. 17). The 2010 benchmark report asserted that while IT was amenable to helping marketing face its data challenges, 'IT struggles to understand and meet the needs' of marketing professionals and **how they measure data** (CMO Council, 2010, p. 16), as seen in the following 2010 excerpt:

> The CMO Council believes there is a global imperative for marketing and IT organisations, which too often have been polarised and adversarial, to find common ground around the business of innovating more efficient, effective and measurable ways to target, acquire and stay intimately connected to customers … At risk is no less than the customer … Digital engagement and technologies are changing the way customers engage and the way customers react. Real-time engagement has sped the clock, necessitating immediate action and collaboration between the two critical, front line stakeholders in the delivery of customer experience: the CMO and the CIO. (CMO Council, 2010, p. 4)

According to the 2010 report, digital platformisation had become an existential issue for the marketing profession because digital personalisation and related processes now underpin and shape the entire customer experience (CMO Council, 2010, p. 10). Where companies lacked sophisticated digital interfaces, customers would vote with their feet,

moving to digital-first business competitors. The conciliatory language contained in the benchmark report is evidenced in the following quote:

> . . . this study uncovers a fairly high degree of consensus among CMOs and CIOs on the central role of technology in defining today's customer experience and powering effective market engagement. They agree on the critical importance of customer intelligence in creating sustainable business advantage. Both sides, at least in general terms, know what they need to do. And both sides clearly bring a unique set of talents, strategy and ability to the table that cannot simply be merged or combined into what many have proposed as a 'Chief Marketing Information Officer'. The problem is that neither group believes they are actually doing a very good job of getting it done. (CMO Council, 2010, p. 6)

According to the CMO Council, big data had emerged as 'the real glue' permanently cementing the relationship between in-house marketing and IT (CMO Council, 2013, p. 3). Far from framing the IT profession as the primary threat, the CMO Council's benchmark report cites organisational 'ignorance' as the mutual enemy of CMOs and CIOs, preventing companies from allocating requisite budget for customer intelligence (CMO Council, 2010, p. 9). Overall, the early CMO Council reports frame disruptive technologies (digital platforms, cloud computing, big data, marketing technology software) as an issue so large and dispersed that it must be brought under control not by a single, indispensable profession, but by a collective professional role identity (Goto, 2021) embodied by the CMO and CIO.

### *Protectionist discourse: who will own big data?*

Drawing on the field-level discursive framework set out in Figure 1 (Bourne, 2019), the analysis now turns to evidence of the marketing profession's protectionist boundary-work. Within organisations, protectionist boundary-work often takes place between departments where one profession works to defend against encroachment of its departmental boundaries (Gesualdi, 2019; Lauzen, 1992). Protectionist discourses are also likely to involve one profession defending the exclusiveness of its abstract knowledge, by positioning aspiring interlopers as simply 'technicians' or 'non-experts' (Abbott, 1988; Bucher et al., 2016). The CMO Council's 2010 report emphasised the issue of protectionist control for both marketing and IT, revealing that the majority (69%) of marketers surveyed saw the CMO as the primary leader on defining digital marketing strategy. Conversely, 58% of IT executives identified CIOs as the true champions of digital marketing.

While marketing as a field cannot claim greater expertise over digital technologies, its knowledge claim is over the *customer*. Hence, marketing's protectionist efforts across the seven CMO Council reports focused on *regaining control over the customer* by sequestering ownership of customer-related big data under marketing rather than under IT. Despite its preference for the language of consensus, the CMO Council made the case for marketing's pre-eminence as the profession best placed to address high levels of organisational ignorance about customers, and to accelerate organisational customer intelligence to real-time. According to marketers surveyed by the CMO Council in 2010, real-time intelligence could only be achieved where CMOs had a seat at the board, giving them budgetary control over digital infrastructure needed to manage multi-channel campaigns, associated content, data collection and analysis, ROI modelling and performance measurement:

> CMOs must have a more prominent role at the table in discussions about what data is aggregated, how it is integrated into customer-facing front-line functions and how it is used. The CIO must have a more active voice in discussions around where and how this valuable insight can be aggregated and what infrastructures can enable global distribution of resulting insights. And, should the IT executives interviewed in this research be the typical view, CMOs will be more than welcome at this strategic table, primarily because marketing has shed its image of unmeasurable, unaccounted and 'window-dressing' role. (CMO Council, 2010, p. 5)

As stated earlier, in the digital economy, corporatised professions' quest had become the 'power to speak with big data' (Beer, 2019). Such professions could best protect themselves by cementing their proximity to organisational power held by the C-suite, as well as proximity to digital power held by external tech companies, which design the infrastructure needed to support 'the data gaze' (Beer, 2019).

### *Expansionary discourse: connecting marketing's expansion to big data*

Discourses overlap and interweave with one another. In expansionary discourses, professions go on the offensive, expanding their authority or expertise into domains claimed by other professions or occupations. Such was the case when the CMO Council released its 2018 report, *CMOs and the spark to drive growth*. Adopting an aggressive stance, combined with collaborative language, the 2018 report identified digital technologies as an *external* jurisdiction for marketing to conquer, while remaining conciliatory to in-house IT departments as an *internal* field. The 2018 report urged the marketing profession to tap into the power of the marketing-IT nexus, lamenting that a full eight years since the benchmark report, just 23% of CMOs identified the IT profession and CIO as a 'key ally and champion' (CMO Council, 2018, p. 5), even in companies where marketing had taken the lead in tech stack innovation.

Successive CMO Council reports stipulated that future marketers should do *more* than just own customer data. Instead, the marketing profession should expand jurisdiction even further by instigating innovations and new collaborations across the organisation. The 2018 report opened by declaring that 'Marketers are growth leaders' (a similar expansionary claim was later made in the Council's 2024 report, *CMO Intentions*). The 2018 report advised CMOs to break free of the 'functional rut, focused on campaigns and moments in time' (CMO Council, 2018, p. 2), by embracing a wider jurisdictional mandate to become Chief Growth Officer (CMO Council, 2024a). The 2018 report set out this expanded professional vision:

> Marketers own the brand and how it melds into engagement and communications, but they can also be influencers and stakeholders across a vast list of critical business-driving functions. [. . .] The next evolution of the CMO will likely be to shift from brand-builder and experience-orchestrator into an executive who directs and drives long-term, sustainable growth by introducing new points of distribution and identifying opportunities for expansion and acquisition. Few marketers surveyed in this study have currently made this shift, but there are indications that leaders are looking to these areas for rapid growth and revenue gains. (CMO Council, 2018, pp. 4–5)

Here, the CMO Council's 2018 report urged marketers to *expand* their professional boundary by leveraging data, digital tools, and new technologies to transform the organisation's view of marketing – not just as a driver of short-term profits, but a key driver of long-term growth and strategy, thereby extending marketing's field of operation, its strategic role, and organisational status. The 2018 report thus recommended further professional collaborations to achieve marketing's strategic objectives:

> As marketers progress through the stages of growth evolution, leaders who are looking to shift from immediate sales to long-term global growth will likely need to broaden their influence and ally circles. First and foremost could be a requirement to more intensely embrace the chief operating officer (only 29 percent consider the COO to be an ally today) and head of product (also an ally for only 28 percent of respondents). For CMOs committing to shifting cultures, the head of HR should also become a key champion and partner, despite being aligned with only 13 percent of respondents today. (CMO Council, 2018, p. 6)

The language of the 2018 report supports a central critique of marketing management; that while marketing can coexist with other managerial practices, it appears perpetually intent on driving 'other managerial practices out of competition' (Skålén et al., 2008, p. 115 citing Keith, 1960; Levitt, 1960).

### *Hybridising discourse: the MarTech specialism evolves*

A third and final form of boundary-work can be traced across the various CMO Council reports between 2010 and 2024, during which time the Council acknowledged and formalised the emergence of MarTech as a subfield of marketing. MarTech's formalisation as a specialism is notable in the Council's 2021 report, *Making MarTech Payoff*, which revisited the CMO-CIO relationship a decade after the 2010 benchmark survey. The 2021 report conceded that the IT profession had helped build-out organisational expertise in MarTech, so that many organisations now had dedicated, well-equipped MarTech teams with their own MarTech department heads. Nevertheless, a decade since initially airing marketing-IT struggles, the 2021 report claimed this professional victory: while MarTech teams might collaborate with IT, MarTech was nevertheless typically embedded *within* marketing departments, despite many traditional marketers still lacking tech expertise. According to the 2021 report, the effectiveness of the marketing–IT relationship is now gauged by how an organisation measures and manages the MarTech specialism:

> In our study, CMOs in 'very effective' relationships with IT also have the largest MarTech stacks and spend the highest percentage of their marketing budget on MarTech. Clearly, high-performing MarTech warrants more investment. [. . .] More than half of 'moderately effective' marketing-IT relationships have a critical piece missing: a dedicated MarTech team. Instead, they use ad hoc or outside teams to help with MarTech adoption, which can lead to inconsistencies, capability gaps, integration issues and more. (CMO Council, 2021, p. 16)

Ten years on from the CMO Council's benchmark report, the MarTech field has successfully constructed its own occupational identity, emerging professional status, and proven effectiveness. The 2021 CMO Council report suggests that, through the emergence of the MarTech specialism, a more comfortable relationship between IT and marketing had emerged. Meanwhile, the 2021 report positioned marketing as well on the way to securing its place among successfully digitalised professions. The trajectory of the CMO

Council's discourse suggests that marketing's professional boundary-work in the digital age may have been less about alignment between marketing and IT, and more about buying time for the marketing profession to 'birth' its own hybridised specialism able to command both sets of skills.

## Conclusion: Marketing's professional status in the digital age

This article has examined how the marketing profession sought new ways to ensure legitimacy and sustainability in the digital age by further conjoining professional and managerial logics, envisioning the two logics as contributing to and enabling each other (Goto, 2021; Noordegraaf, 2015). As an entrepreneurial profession, marketing has continually developed *new* forms of knowledge – together with different methods for its production, organisation and delivery – adopting 'radically different strategies and organisational configurations' as needed (Muzio et al., 2008, p. 4). However, there is a particular urgency to marketing's contemporary occupational struggles in order to keep up with the speed of the digital platform economy (Beer, 2019; CMO Council, 2022), where the new jurisdictional issue is control over digital resources, tools and expertise, amidst the great corporate grab for big data.

Marketing's jurisdictional struggles take place in different ecologies. Mellet (2025) details this in his examination of external struggles between MarTech suppliers, where he demonstrates the marketing field's entrepreneurial, responsive nature. By contrast, this study explores the corporatised side of marketing, governed not just by professional logics of knowledge and expertise, but by a managerial logic of command-and-control. I show that as a corporatised profession, marketing's jurisdictional contestation is often *within* the organisation, a particular ecology for boundary-work. As the CMO Council made clear in its series of reports, much of the tension between marketing and IT as corporatised professions, stemmed from an interdepartmental power grab. For two decades, Marketing and IT battled over 'resources, stature and responsibilities' with the pendulum swinging 'from IT to marketing and back again' (CMO Council, 2021, p. 10). This brought tensions between the marketing and IT professions to the fore, highlighting a foundational argument in the sociology of professions, which contends that the *real* history of any profession is determined by its occupational competition, conflict and jurisdictional disputes (Abbott, 1988; Heusinkveld et al., 2018).

The article began by asking how the marketing profession has engaged in discursive boundary-work with IT in the digital age. The longer a profession struggles to master digital technologies, the more it cedes territory to other experts in the platform economy (Bourne, 2022). To this end, the CMO Council, an affinity network, is just one of the professional marketing groups that propelled marketing's professional project into a new phase, rallying to shift marketing's professional narrative, and centring marketing's organisational role as vital in the digital economy (Parsons, 2018). The CMO Council organised its members in support of a series of reports beginning in 2010 and spanning some 14 years. This time period marked rising industry debate over the marketing-IT nexus – a debate reflected in voluminous industry thought leadership, faithfully reported on by the trade and business press covering both professions.

Despite detailing very real tensions between marketing and IT, the CMO Council reports ultimately adopted a collaborative approach towards the IT profession, narrating

an optimistic vision of marketing's future position as the hub of the digital organisation. The potential for greater marketing-IT collaboration was further cemented in the reports through testimonials from senior marketers, *as well as* their colleagues in IT departments. Initially, CMO Council reports framed disruptive technologies (digital platforms, cloud computing, big data, marketing technology software) as an issue so large and dispersed that it must be brought under control not by a single, indispensable profession, but a collective professional role identity (Goto, 2021) bringing together the CMO and CIO. The data set also highlights multi-fold discursive strategies by the marketing profession. The collaborative overtures towards IT enabled marketers to engage in protectionist boundary-work so as to reclaim marketing's role in the organisational hierarchy by acquiring sought-after digital capital as a profession. This discursive strategy simultaneously enabled marketers to expand their remit and increase professional authority via 'the power to speak' with big data (Beer, 2019, p. 1).

### *Hybridising MarTech as a marketing sub-specialism*

The sociology of professions further contends that professions evolve when jurisdictions become vacant, either when a professional jurisdiction is newly created – e.g. with the advent of new technologies – or because an earlier tenant has lost its 'grip' on a particular jurisdiction or left it altogether (Abbott, 1988). Hence, the article's second question explored the implications of marketing's boundary-work on its professional jurisdiction in the digital economy. Previous studies suggest that newer, entrepreneurial professions such as marketing are more likely to hybridise and fragment into sub-disciplines because such professions are less likely to practise monopolistic market closure, restrictive practices, and self-regulation of their boundary-work. Instead, newer professions are expected to succeed through innovation, entrepreneurship and active engagement with markets (Muzio et al., 2011).

The discursive data set suggests that while digital skills are in high demand across a range of marketing roles, the 'new rules of marketing' appear to move marketers as close as possible to controlling relevant information technologies and big data by *hybridising* a new marketing specialism – MarTech. Within organisations, MarTech now typically reports into marketing departments rather than to IT. As a new subfield, MarTech has allowed the marketing profession to regain organisational control over the customer without compelling traditional marketers to retrain as tech experts. By throwing its full weight into supporting MarTech as a new specialism, the wider marketing profession gave itself breathing room to 'catch up' with increased demand for digital skills and competencies, so that it could carefully shape-shift in response to the digital economy's new requirements to know the customer in real-time. At the time of writing, it remains unclear whether the MarTech specialism will remain a sub-field of marketing, sever itself from traditional marketing to emerge as a separate field, or subsume traditional marketing altogether. What is clear is that the MarTech specialism continues to expand, with dedicated conferences and awards catering to this new specialism (e.g. The Association of National Advertisers [ANA], 2024; BEETc, 2024), even as MarTech develops its own fast-growing external ecosystem of specialist communities and multiple contexts (Mellet, 2025).

The study has shown how marketing's professional evolution can be better understood through analysis of marketing's interprofessional relations with other fields, where those

interprofessional relations and struggles illustrate how marketing's traditional twentieth-century boundaries were tested by twenty-first century digital forces. The marketing profession responded over time instigating hybrid forms of professional identity now visible today. Admittedly, the diplomatic language and collaborative approach found across the CMO Council reports may not represent the tenor of CMO-CIO interactions within organisations or in other communications behind-the-scenes (e.g. company meetings or emails). Likewise, separate studies of the evolution of discourses in the IT profession might yield different perspectives on the CMO-CIO relationship, and on the evolution of MarTech as a professional sub-specialism. As a higher-status expert group in the digital economy, IT's professional discourses may be less publicly visible due to lobbying behind-the-scenes, or because IT increasingly adopts silence in trade discourses to express 'a taken-for-granted assumption' of its own technical superiority (Sanders & Harrison, 2008, p. 297).

The CMO Council data set suggests that through the use of both contestation and collaboration, twenty-first century in-house marketers remain intent on asserting marketing discourse as a totalising organisational discourse (Skålén et al., 2008; Vaccaro et al., 2019; Willmott, 1999). Perhaps no individual firm can assure its survival in the marketplace by adopting global marketing ideology, but the cumulative effects of the adoption of managerial marketing discourses among a critical mass of competing firms may sustain the worldwide marketing profession into the foreseeable future.

## Notes

1. For instance, one might associate the marketing profession with tasks such as new product development, but marketing does not have jurisdiction over this, as other experts can be responsible for new product development e.g. an actuary might develop new products in an insurance company.
2. The C-suite is a term for the highest-ranking executives in a company, whose job titles typically start with the word 'chief' e.g. Chief Executive Officer.

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## Notes on contributor

***Clea Bourne*** is a Reader in Media and Market Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her current research applies interdisciplinary approaches to software, AI and digital technologies in economy and society. Clea is author of Public Relations and the Digital: Professional Discourse and Change, co-editor of the Sage Handbook of Promotional Culture and Society (2025), and has published widely in journals such as American Behavioural Scientist, Culture and Organization, Journal of Cultural Economy, and New Media and Society. Clea is an Associate Editor of the journals, Economy and Society, and AI and Society.

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