Title: Marketing AI to the Public, A Technical Communication Analysis of Framing and Rhetorical Strategy in Microsoft Copilot's Enterprise

Table of Contents

Introduction

This study examines how artificial intelligence (AI) is rhetorically framed and promoted in public-facing marketing materials, with a focus on Microsoft Copilot as a case exemplar. Positioned within technical communication, the project investigates how complex systems are translated for non-expert audiences through metaphors, appeals, and visual strategies that emphasize usability, trust, and innovation. Drawing on frameworks of audience analysis, framing, and rhetorical ethics, the analysis considers promotional artifacts such as advertisements, landing pages, and videos published between 2021 and 2025.

The analysis identifies strategies such as humanization, seamless integration, and inoculation moves like "responsible AI" claims. These rhetorical choices construct "intelligence" as an invisible helper while minimizing risks such as bias or surveillance. By framing Copilot's marketing as technical marketing rather than marketing to technical communicators, this study emphasizes how promotional discourse itself performs the work of technical communication, simplifying complexity, managing comprehension, and shaping public trust.

Goals and Objectives

The goals of this project are to analyze how AI is rhetorically framed in public-facing marketing materials and to identify the strategies that make complex technologies appear understandable, trustworthy, and desirable. By examining artifacts from Microsoft Copilot's enterprise productivity campaigns, the research acknowledges technical marketing as a subfield of technical communication that is increasingly engaging with such rhetorical work. In doing so, the project seeks to bridge academic theory and professional practice, demonstrating how technical communication principles can inform promotional contexts and guide pedagogical cases that help students and practitioners recognize the rhetorical and ethical stakes of AI communication.

The primary objective of this study is to develop ethical AI communication guidelines, an outcome that itself contributes to technical communication scholarships, and more specifically, to technical marketing scholarships. These guidelines provide a framework for balancing persuasive goals with transparency and responsibility, ensuring that marketing strategies do not obscure risks or exaggerate capabilities. Responsible AI is not just ethics in theory but ethics in action, integrating legal, cultural, and societal values into AI design to ensure systems serve the well-being of many rather than the profit of a few (Dignum, 2019). By extending its findings into actionable guidance for practitioners and policymakers, the study strengthens its contribution not only to technical communication scholarship but also to broader conversations about ethical, responsible AI communication.

To ground up this study, Microsoft Copilot is selected as the primary case exemplar. Copilot is especially well suited for analysis because its enterprise-focused marketing emphasizes

productivity, usability, and ethical themes such as “responsible AI.” Moreover, its significance extends beyond representativeness: Copilot is one of the most widely adopted conversational agents, increasingly integrated into universities and corporations that already rely on Microsoft’s ecosystem for email, document production, and collaboration. This ubiquity makes Copilot a particularly consequential site for studying how rhetorical strategies shape public perceptions of artificial intelligence, not only within technology marketing but also across institutional and everyday professional communication contexts.

Type of Research

This research explores how Microsoft Copilot is framed and communicated to public audiences through enterprise-focused marketing artifacts, including promotional videos, web pages, product demos, and blog announcements, to identify the rhetorical strategies, such as metaphors, visuals, and simplified language, that make complex technical concepts appear accessible, trustworthy, and desirable. This type of inquiry values depth of interpretation and the discovery of patterns across texts, producing insights that cannot be reduced to purely numerical data. By focusing on meaning-making, the research emphasizes the user’s perspective and the communicative practices that shape technological literacy and public trust.

This study also constitutes primary research, since the data will be drawn directly from Copilot marketing artifacts, including advertisements, landing pages, promotional videos, and press releases. These materials represent intentional, public-facing messages created to promote Copilot’s capabilities and values. Internal training documents, technical manuals, or user-generated content are excluded, as they do not serve persuasive or marketing purposes. The selected materials will be systematically analyzed for their rhetorical and visual strategies. While the analysis is primarily qualitative, it will employ structured coding procedures that quantify the frequency and distribution of rhetorical strategies, enabling limited content analysis and thereby positioning the study as a mixed-methods investigation that combines interpretive depth with measurable patterns for transparency and rigor. This approach integrates interpretive depth with systematic documentation, ensuring that qualitative insights are supported by transparent analytical procedures and producing findings that advance both technical communication scholarship and practice. In doing so, the study highlights how technical communication, unlike fields such as media studies, communication studies, or marketing, offers a unique framework for producing clearer, more ethical, and audience-centered discourse about emerging technologies. By emphasizing usability, clarity, and responsibility, technical communication extends the conversation beyond representation to the practical work of making complex systems understandable and trustworthy.

Research questions:

The following research questions are designed to address the goals of this study:

- How does Microsoft Copilot's enterprise marketing frame artificial intelligence in public-facing discourse?
- What rhetorical strategies are employed to construct Copilot as a trustworthy, understandable, and desirable technology?
- What are the general entailments of Microsoft Copilot's "responsible AI" rhetoric on the public perception of AI?

Relation of Topic and Research Questions to Technical Communication

Technical communication is centrally concerned with making complex information usable, accessible (Oswal, 2013), and ethically responsible (Clark, 1987) for specific audiences. This study on Microsoft Copilot's enterprise marketing aligns directly with that purpose by examining how promotional artifacts translate technical complexity into audience-centered narratives. Just as technical communicators simplify documentation or design interfaces to support comprehension, Copilot's marketing relies on rhetorical strategies such as metaphor, plain language, and visual framing to help non-expert users engage with AI.

Importantly, technical communication extends beyond manuals or help systems to any genre that mediates between complex technologies and the public (Chamberlain & Mosher, 2017). By analyzing AI marketing as a communicative genre, this project expands technical communication scholarship into promotional contexts that shape technological literacy, trust, and adoption. The research questions, which focus on rhetorical strategies and ethical framing, reflect the field's concern with clarity, transparency, and responsibility in shaping user understanding. Rather than treating marketing solely as a media or cultural phenomenon, this study positions it as a form of technical mediation, carrying the same obligations to accuracy and audience adaptation as traditional documentation. This perspective aligns with emerging discussions in technical communication scholarship, particularly recent work on technical marketing, that examine how promotional discourse performs the functions of documentation and user communication (Boettger & Friess, 2021; St.Amant, 2002; Evia & Patriarca, 2012).

Finally, the study contributes to both the professional and pedagogical dimensions of the field. For practitioners, the findings offer heuristics; practical, research-based guidelines, for designing transparent and ethically responsible AI messages. These heuristics synthesize recurring rhetorical patterns identified in Copilot's marketing, such as framing complexity through metaphor, balancing innovation with reassurance, and integrating ethical appeals like "responsible AI." By translating these patterns into actionable design principles, the study provides communicators with adaptable tools to evaluate and craft messages that uphold clarity, honesty, and audience trust in AI communication.

Benefits and Beneficiaries

This project offers benefits to multiple audiences by extending insights into both scholarship and practice. For scholars in technical communication, the study provides a framework for analyzing how Copilot's enterprise marketing operates as a genre that blends persuasion with technical mediation, thereby expanding disciplinary conversations about usability, ethics, and rhetorical framing. For industry practitioners, the findings generate heuristics for designing transparent and trustworthy enterprise AI messages that balance persuasive appeals with ethical responsibility, offering concrete strategies for improving workplace-focused communication.

Educators also benefit from this project through the development of pedagogical cases that can be incorporated into technical communication curricula. By analyzing Copilot's enterprise-focused marketing artifacts, instructors can teach students to critically evaluate persuasive strategies and connect them to ethical and audience-centered principles, preparing the next generation of communicators to engage responsibly with emerging technologies.

For policymakers, the study's implications extend beyond analysis to practical communication guidance. By understanding the rhetorical moves employed in enterprise AI marketing, policymakers can design public-facing regulatory communication that anticipates misconceptions, addresses ethical concerns transparently, and fosters public trust in governance of AI. This connection between rhetorical analysis and policy communication underscores the broader societal relevance of the project, highlighting how technical communication research can inform not only academic and professional practice but also the ways governments communicate about technology to the public.

Deliverables

This project will produce two interconnected deliverables that serve both academic and professional communities. The primary deliverable is the thesis report, submitted to the Department of English and Technical Communication at Missouri University of Science & Technology in Spring 2025. This report will document the full rhetorical analysis of Microsoft Copilot's enterprise marketing, present coded examples, and interpret findings within the framework of technical communication scholarship. A condensed and refined version of this analysis will form the basis of a publishable manuscript intended for submission to a peer-reviewed journal such as Technical Communication Quarterly or the Journal of Business and Technical Communication. The article will foreground the study's most significant findings and translate them into practical heuristics for developing transparent, audience-centered, and ethically responsible AI messaging.

Planned Deliverables

- A completed thesis report with full analysis, coding appendix, and interpretive discussion.
- A peer-reviewed journal article presenting key findings and heuristics.
- A structured framework linking rhetorical strategies to technical communication principles.
- Pedagogical cases for use in technical communication curricula.

Literature Review

This review of secondary literature establishes the scholarly foundation for analyzing how artificial intelligence is framed and marketed to the public, with particular attention to Microsoft Copilot's enterprise campaigns. By drawing prior work in agenda-setting, framing theory, audience analysis, and rhetorical ethics, the review highlights both the strengths and limitations of existing research. As Schimel (2012) reminds us, research writing must "identify the problem that drives the research, introduce the characters, and target an audience" (p. 35); the same logic applies to understanding how AI is marketed. Similarly, McCombs (2005) and Lippmann (1922) demonstrate that framing and agenda-setting shape what the public perceives as important, insights that apply directly to how AI is positioned in promotional discourse.

While this body of scholarship clarifies how narratives influence perception, it also reveals important gaps. Existing work often emphasizes broad cultural critiques of AI or sociotechnical imaginaries but rarely addresses the micro-level rhetorical strategies that make AI marketing persuasive. As Entman (1993) notes, framing involves selection and salience, highlighting certain elements of reality while omitting others. This is especially relevant to AI campaigns, which foreground efficiency, usability, and innovation while minimizing risks like surveillance or bias. Yet studies seldom examine these choices through the lens of technical communication, where clarity, usability, and ethical responsibility are central.

By identifying these gaps, the literature review underscores how this project extends technical communication scholarship into promotional contexts. It positions Copilot's enterprise marketing as a communicative genre that not only frames artificial intelligence but also uses rhetorical strategies to construct it as trustworthy, understandable, and desirable. Drawing on rhetorical frameworks from Spinuzzi (2003), Johnson (1998), Redish (2012), and Markel and Selber (2018), the study connects AI marketing discourse to user-centered design, plain language, and ethical responsibility, particularly in relation to Microsoft's "responsible AI" rhetoric and its impact on public perception. In this way, the review not only situates the project within existing research but also clarifies its contribution: demonstrating how AI marketing functions as technical mediation with significant social and ethical consequences.

AI Marketing: Common Rhetorical Moves

Extensive research has been conducted to identify the rhetorical moves that shape academic and professional genres, and these insights provide a foundation for examining how AI marketing communicates complex technologies to public audiences. Technical communication scholars such as Clay Spinuzzi, R. John Brockmann, and Johndan Johnson-Eilola have demonstrated that genres evolve to meet new communicative demands in professional and technological contexts. Within the domain of AI marketing, these perspectives underscore that rhetorical moves are not neutral; they are carefully chosen strategies that shape perceptions of innovation, usability, and trustworthiness.

A first common move in AI marketing is framing the problem, where companies establish the need for their product or service. This often involves highlighting inefficiencies, risks, or frustrations in existing practices and positioning AI as the solution. Such positioning illustrates that AI marketing is more than promotional activity; it functions as a form of technical mediation, simplifying opaque systems while persuading audiences of their value.

As Harner and Zimmerman (2002) observe, technical marketing communication operates precisely in this intersection, where complex technologies must be explained, framed, and ethically promoted. Their work underscores that effective marketing in technology-driven contexts relies on the same analytical and rhetorical rigor as traditional technical communication, combining audience analysis, strategic planning, and clarity to make innovation both intelligible and persuasive.

Similarly, Mara (2008) demonstrates how technical marketing communication adapts rhetorical strategies in moments of technological disruption; in his analysis of Eclipse Aviation's rebranding, he shows that marketing becomes a site of cyborg discourse—a hybrid rhetoric that reconfigures expertise, innovation, and corporate ethos to sustain credibility and stakeholder trust when core technologies shift or fail.

Echoing this professional shift, Howard (2011) illustrates how technical communicators increasingly apply their rhetorical and usability expertise within commercial settings, demonstrating that the analytical skills once used to clarify technical processes now serve equally to craft persuasive, audience-centered marketing materials, bridging the gap between documentation and promotion in technology-driven industries.

Building on this expansion of marketing roles, Killoran (2009) examines how technical communication businesses use digital channels to reach clients indirectly through search engines, revealing that contemporary technical marketing communication operates within layered rhetorical ecologies where visibility, optimization, and credibility must be managed simultaneously, a dynamic increasingly central to AI-driven promotional environments.

Extending this view, Chen, Shen, and Chiu (2007) propose a framework for understanding how message design supports technology product launches, showing that informational and relational messages, when characterized by clarity and integration, most effectively enhance communication performance. Their findings highlight how technical marketing communication depends on the rhetorical balance between explanation and persuasion, a principle especially relevant to AI campaigns that must integrate ethical, technical, and promotional appeals.

From a broader industry perspective, Schultz and Schultz (1998) trace the evolution of marketing communication from the traditional 4Ps model toward an interactive, technology-driven marketplace, arguing that shifts in information control fundamentally reshape communicative needs and strategies. Their model of integrated marketing communication underscores how the management of digital information systems determines rhetorical effectiveness, a transformation that anticipates today's AI-mediated marketing, where adaptability and transparency are central to sustaining audience trust.

Holm (2006) traces the rise of integrated marketing communication as a dominant framework in modern marketing, noting that most organizations remain at the tactical rather than strategic level of integration, a limitation that underscores the ongoing need for communicative alignment between management, technology, and message design in emerging contexts such as AI marketing.

The second move is highlighting the gap, emphasizing what existing technologies lack and how AI uniquely addresses that absence. In practice, this often involves rhetorical strategies such as metaphors of human-like intelligence, appeals to plain language, or visuals that suggest seamless integration. While media studies and cultural analysis have examined representations of AI, fewer works analyze these specific strategies through the lens of technical communication. As Swales (1990) argues, articulating the gap is central to rhetorical positioning, and in AI marketing it functions to establish necessity while sidestepping technical or ethical limitations.

A third recurring move is building credibility, where companies align their messaging with principles of trust and usability. Johnson's (1998) call for user-centered design, Redish's (2012) emphasis on plain language, and Markel and Selber's (2018) focus on risk communication all provide frameworks for understanding how AI marketing constructs ethos. Campaigns that stress accessibility, transparency, or responsibility illustrate how promotional genres mirror the values of technical communication yet also reveal a dissonance between the ethical ideals they promote and the values embedded in the technologies themselves. This contrast exposes how marketing rhetoric can align with user-centered principles in form while diverging from them in practice.

Finally, promising transformation serves as a forward-looking move in AI marketing rhetoric. Campaigns often project outcomes that extend beyond immediate utility, framing AI as a driver of empowerment, personalization, or social progress. As Spinuzzi (2003) notes, genres evolve to

meet user needs, and AI marketing reflects this evolution by positioning products as transformative solutions that extend beyond technical features into broader societal narratives.

Taken together, these rhetorical moves; framing the problem, highlighting the gap, building credibility, and promising transformation, constitute a recognizable pattern in how AI marketing persuades audiences. They reveal both the persuasive strategies behind promotional discourse and the ethical stakes of how AI is positioned as desirable, trustworthy, and socially significant. Applied to Microsoft Copilot, these moves highlight how marketing constructs "intelligence" as an invisible helper while selectively minimizing risks. By situating these strategies within technical communication frameworks, the analysis demonstrates how promotional genres extend TC's central concerns with clarity, accessibility, and ethical responsibility into marketing contexts that directly shape technological literacy and public trust.

Viewed through a genre analysis lens, this project operates as a hybrid academic and professional text that performs several recognizable rhetorical functions, aligning with Luzón's (2005) view of genres in technical communication as social and rhetorical actions that both reflect and shape professional practice. The introduction foregrounds the exigence; AI's growing influence on public understanding, while situating the study firmly within technical communication. This mirrors Swales's (1990) "establishing a territory" move, signaling relevance to both scholarly discourse and broader societal concerns.

The project also demonstrates genre-specific adaptation through its literature review and framing, which operate as sites of gap articulation and disciplinary alignment. By drawing on agenda-setting and framing theory (Lippmann ,1922, McCombs, 2005, and Entman, 2010), the review situates Copilot marketing within communication scholarship, while works by Spinuzzi, Johnson, Redish, and Markel & Selber connect the analysis to technical communication frameworks. This dual alignment illustrates Spinuzzi's (2003) claim that genres evolve to meet new demands, here extending technical communication into promotional contexts. The strategy is not simply to review scholarship but to position the project as filling an overlooked niche: the rhetorical and ethical dimensions of Copilot's enterprise marketing as technical mediation.

Rhetorical Analysis as Research Method

Rhetorical analysis offers a rigorous framework for examining how AI is framed and communicated to the public through marketing materials. As a research method, it enables the systematic study of persuasive strategies such as metaphor, visual design, simplification, and ethical omission, all of which are central to understanding how complex technologies are made accessible to non-expert audiences. Unlike purely descriptive approaches, rhetorical analysis interrogates how messages are constructed, why certain strategies are chosen, and what effects these choices have on audience perception. For a project concerned with AI marketing, this method is particularly well suited because it highlights how promotional artifacts function not

just as persuasive texts but as technical communication, bridging opaque systems and public understanding.

In this proposal, rhetorical analysis will be applied to a corpus of 20–30 AI marketing artifacts drawn from Microsoft Copilot The method involves identifying rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos), analyzing framing strategies (e.g., "seamlessness," "responsible AI"), and evaluating how visual and linguistic choices align with principles of technical communication like usability, audience adaptation, and ethical responsibility. By coding these artifacts for recurring rhetorical patterns, the research not only uncovers the persuasive logic of AI marketing but also assesses its broader implications for trust, transparency, and technological literacy. In doing so, rhetorical analysis becomes both a lens for critique and a tool for developing heuristics; practical, research-based guidelines that help communicators design messages aligned with ethical principles of clarity, honesty, and accountability. These heuristics translate analytical insights into actionable strategies, enabling professionals to craft AI-related communication that is not only persuasive but also transparent and socially responsible.

Risks, Distrust, and Overreliance on Technology

Broussard (2018), Glikson and Woolley (2020), and Modliński et al. (2023) raise concerns about overdependence on technology. Broussard critiques the belief in digital solutions as inherently superior, a view she calls "techno-chauvinism." Glikson and Woolley demonstrate that trust in AI begins high but often erodes quickly after negative user experiences. Modliński et al. emphasize the backlash when AI replaces human roles, particularly in emotional labor and customer service.

These authors challenge the overly optimistic framing observed by Chuan et al. (2019) and reveal the human cost of automation often omitted from promotional content. The juxtaposition of these viewpoints highlights a communicative gap: while some promote AI's seamless integration into society, others reveal its disruptive social consequences. This tension underscores the need for more ethically nuanced and transparent marketing strategies, a central concern of this thesis.

Bochniarz et al. (2022) show that adolescents often express distrust toward AI, rooted in perceptions of hostility and unpredictability. Their findings reveal risks of overreliance on technology, emphasizing that marketing must address skepticism and provide ethical safeguards to foster responsible trust. Similarly, Peters and Visser (2023) argue that responsible AI requires balancing trust with distrust, cautioning that promotional narratives frequently exaggerate benefits while minimizing risks. Taken together, these perspectives highlight that AI marketing must acknowledge uncertainty and limitations, not merely frame AI as unquestionably beneficial.

Dwork and Minow (2022) argue that distrust in AI stems from faulty data, privacy violations, and misaligned corporate interests. They caution that overreliance on opaque algorithms fosters systemic risks, weakens accountability, and amplifies social inequalities, making ethical safeguards and transparent communication essential.

Starke and Ienca (2024) warn that misplaced trust or distrust in medical AI arises from opacity, weak accountability, and ethics-washing. They propose a taxonomy of failed trust, emphasizing risks of overreliance on untrustworthy systems, and highlighting the ethical need for transparency, communication, and justified skepticism.

Balancing Innovation with Ethical Concerns

Some researchers occupy a middle ground. Rafieian and Yoganarasimhan (2023), Erevelles et al. (2016), and Press (2013) acknowledge AI's potential to enhance marketing while cautioning against its ethical risks. Rafieian and Yoganarasimhan show that while hyperpersonalized email marketing increases engagement, it also requires large-scale data collection that raises privacy concerns. Erevelles et al. (2016) and Press (2013) warn that big data embeds pre-existing biases, leading to discriminatory outcomes masked by algorithmic language.

Ahmad (2025) and Lee et al. (2024) echo this duality. Ahmad describes how e-commerce platforms use AI to personalize recommendations, yet these practices may blur out the line between service and manipulation. Lee et al. delve deeper, showing how AI-generated persuasive messages based on demographic inputs challenge the boundaries of informed consent.

Jobin et al. (2019) highlight that companies and governments increasingly frame their technologies in terms of transparency, fairness, and responsibility, but often in ways that risk "ethics-washing" rather than ensuring accountability. Such rhetorical use of ethics functions as a persuasive strategy in marketing, shaping public trust by presenting AI as socially responsible even when risks are downplayed. This dynamic aligns with the present study's focus on how AI marketing employs rhetorical moves to frame artificial intelligence as both desirable and ethically sound.

Hagendorff (2020) argues that AI ethics guidelines often stress accountability, fairness, privacy, and transparency but remain ineffective because they are voluntary. As a result, ethical principles function rhetorically serving corporate PR strategies that build trust while obscuring risks and inequalities.

Kazim and Koshiyama (2021) highlight that AI ethics principles such as fairness, transparency, and accountability often remain abstract. In marketing, these values are rhetorically framed to foster trust, positioning AI as socially responsible while diverting attention from unresolved risks.

Huang et al. (2023) provide a comprehensive overview of AI ethics, emphasizing principles such as fairness, accountability, privacy, and sustainability. They review guidelines, frameworks, and evaluation approaches while underscoring persistent implementation challenges and the urgent societal need for transparent, trustworthy AI systems.

Siau and Wang (2020) stress that AI ethics remains in its infancy, emphasizing principles such as transparency, accountability, and privacy while highlighting risks of bias and misuse. In marketing, these ethical claims often serve rhetorical purposes, framing AI as trustworthy despite unresolved challenges.

Borenstein and Howard (2021) emphasize that AI introduces profound ethical challenges, including bias, privacy loss, and misplaced trust. They argue for integrating ethics education into AI design, noting that companies often frame ethics rhetorically in ways similar to marketing strategies that promote responsibility while masking risks.

However, Munn (2022) argues that AI ethics principles are largely "useless," functioning as vague, isolated, and toothless guidelines that corporations exploit for ethics-washing. This perspective contrasts with calls for ethical AI marketing, suggesting that ethics often serve corporate agendas rather than genuine accountability.

Taken together, these studies suggest that AI marketing is both powerful and precarious. It enables efficient communication but risks exploiting user vulnerabilities. In the context of this thesis, their work illustrates the importance of rhetorical analysis in exposing ethical trade-offs embedded in persuasive AI communication.

Technical Communication Frameworks

While much of the existing scholarship on AI marketing is rooted in media studies and science and technology studies (STS), technical communication provides a distinct set of frameworks that foreground usability, clarity, and ethical responsibility in the translation of complex technologies. Technical communication scholarship emphasizes how communicators adapt information for specific audiences, balance detail with accessibility, and design messages that are both usable and socially responsible. These principles are central to understanding how AI is marketed to non-expert audiences.

Spinuzzi (2003) highlights how genres in workplace communication evolve to meet the needs of diverse users, underscoring the importance of examining marketing as an emergent genre of technical mediation. Johnson (1998) calls for ethical awareness in technology design, a perspective that resonates with AI marketing's responsibility to represent risks, limitations, and ethical implications transparently. Similarly, Redish (2012) stresses plain language and user-centered design, principles directly applicable to the simplification strategies observed in AI marketing materials. Markel and Selber (2018) further expand the field's focus on risk

communication and audience analysis, reminding us that communicators bear responsibility not only for persuading audiences but also for enabling informed consent and ethical decision-making.

Cleary et al. (2017) present *TecCOMFrame*, a European competence framework for technical communication. They emphasize evolving skills in writing, information design, usability, and ethics, underscoring how structured frameworks guide professional practice and support transparent communication in technology-driven contexts.

Cargile Cook (2002) advances the idea of "layered literacies" as a framework for technical communication pedagogy. He highlights rhetorical, technological, ethical, and critical literacies as overlapping competencies, offering a multidimensional approach for evaluating how communication frames shape understanding of complex technologies like artificial intelligence.

Integrating these TC frameworks into the study of AI marketing enables a sharper distinction from media studies. Whereas media studies often interrogate ideological or cultural narratives, technical communication asks how communicators make technologies usable, how messages are adapted for diverse audiences, and how ethical obligations are negotiated in public-facing texts. By treating marketing artifacts as technical communication, this project reframes them as functional documents that perform the same core tasks as manuals, tutorials, or help systems: reducing complexity, supporting comprehension, and building user trust.

This reframing positions AI marketing as an understudied but consequential site of TC practice. By applying audience analysis, plain language, usability heuristics, and ethical risk communication frameworks, the study contributes new insights to technical communication, it demonstrates how promotional genres not only shape consumer attitudes but also perform technical mediation, bridging opaque technologies and everyday users.

Reframing the Conversation: The Role of Technical Communication

Crawford (2021) and Jasanoff and Kim (2015) offer critical frameworks that reframe AI as a sociotechnical system. Crawford dismantles the notion that AI is a clean, futuristic force, arguing instead that it relies on exploitative labor, energy, and data infrastructures. Jasanoff and Kim's "sociotechnical imaginaries" show how collective visions of progress are constructed through powerful narratives and visuals, tools frequently used in marketing.

While scholars such as Chuan et al. (2019) and Ahmad (2025) focus on what AI marketing says, Crawford and Jasanoff urge researchers to ask how and why it is said that way. This aligns with technical communication principles articulated by Spinuzzi (2003) and Johnson (1998), who stress the importance of usability, stakeholder analysis, and rhetorical design in communicating complex systems.

Gonzales (2022) reframes technical communication by centering Indigenous interpreters and translators, showing how multilingual practices are deeply tied to land, identity, and power. Her ethnographic work highlights the need for justice-driven frameworks that recognize language diversity as central to global technical communication research and practice.

Walwema (2021) argues that technical communication must be reframed to address issues of race, power, and social justice. By expanding beyond workplace efficiency, she highlights how technical communicators can shape equitable public discourse, positioning communication as central to ethical and inclusive technology practices.

Paton and Dorst (2021) argue that technical communication should be reframed as a discipline of mediating between technology and society, rather than narrowly confined to workplace documentation. He emphasizes the field's responsibility in fostering ethical, transparent, and audience-centered discourse; an approach directly relevant to analyzing how AI marketing frames intelligence for public audiences.

This reframing is critical to thesis; it justifies the application of technical communication methods to AI marketing and challenges dominant perspectives that prioritize persuasion over comprehension. By analyzing how metaphors, visuals, and audience targeting shape public understanding, the thesis contributes to a more ethical and inclusive discourse around emerging technologies.

Gaps in Previous Research

While existing scholarship has explored artificial intelligence largely through media studies and cultural analysis; often as a point in the broader debate between AI hype and AI doom, relatively little attention has been paid to AI marketing as a site of technical communication. Much of this work emphasizes cultural narratives or ideological critiques of AI (e.g., imaginaries in film and journalism), but it rarely addresses the micro-level rhetorical strategies through which enterprise tools like Microsoft Copilot are promoted to workplace audiences. This gap leaves unanswered how marketing artifacts such as advertisements, landing pages, and promotional videos translate technical complexity into simplified and persuasive narratives that shape professional adoption.

A second gap lies in the treatment of rhetorical strategies themselves. Although agenda-setting and framing theory (McCombs, 2025; Entman, 2010) highlight how communication directs attention and interpretation, fewer studies analyze how specific moves, such as humanization metaphors, promises of seamless integration, or disclaimers like "responsible AI", construct trust, usability, and ethical responsibility. Without closer analysis, scholarship risks overlooking how marketing communication parallels the central concerns of technical communication: clarity, accessibility, and transparency.

Finally, research remains largely confined to U.S. and Western contexts, offering little insight into how cultural values, regulatory frameworks, and linguistic conventions shape AI rhetoric globally. Addressing these limitations, this study positions Copilot's enterprise marketing as a case exemplar for analyzing rhetorical strategies at the intersection of persuasion and technical mediation, while recognizing the need for future cross-cultural extension.

Methodology

This project employs a qualitative, interpretivist research design that focuses on understanding how AI is framed and communicated in public-facing marketing materials rather than testing predefined hypotheses. The aim is to explore rhetorical strategies that make complex technologies like Microsoft Copilot appear accessible, trustworthy, and desirable. As Hughes and Hayhoe (2012) note, interpretivist inquiry "focuses on understanding rather than testing" (p. 8), producing insights that are best captured through patterns of meaning across texts rather than through quantifiable measures.

The dataset for this project consists of Copilot's enterprise marketing artifacts, including advertisements, product landing pages, promotional videos, and press releases published between 2021 and 2025. These materials were selected because they are publicly available, widely disseminated, and explicitly crafted to translate complex AI processes into persuasive narratives for workplace audiences. The scope is intentionally U.S.-based, which provides a manageable and coherent sample while also marking a limitation: the findings will not fully capture cross-cultural differences in AI rhetoric. Future research should address these dimensions to extend the analysis globally.

The analysis uses rhetorical coding to identify and interpret recurring strategies. Following Swales's (1990) emphasis on "gap articulation" and Entman's (1993) observation that framing involves both selection and salience, coding will trace how Copilot's campaigns highlight problems, promise solutions, and project transformation. A pilot coding round will be conducted to refine categories and ensure reliability of interpretation. Codes will be developed through a hybrid approach, deductive categories derived from existing scholarship (e.g., problem framing, credibility-building, transformation) and inductive codes that emerge directly from the artifacts themselves. As Saldaña (2016) notes, coding is a cyclical process in which categories are tested, revised, and validated against the data.

To ensure transparency, excerpts from coded texts will be included in an appendix, allowing readers to see how rhetorical strategies were identified and classified. Taguette (Rampin et. Al., 2023), an open-source qualitative analysis tool, will be used to manage the coding process and generate summaries that visualize the frequency and distribution of codes across artifacts. This approach strengthens rigor by combining interpretive depth with systematic documentation.

By focusing on the communicative practices that construct Copilot as trustworthy and user-centered, the methodology highlights how marketing artifacts function as technical communication. Johnson's (1998) insistence on user-centered design, Redish's (2012) emphasis on plain language and usability, and Markel and Selber's (2018) concern with risk communication provide the disciplinary grounding for this analysis. Together, these frameworks underscore that the goal is not only to describe rhetorical strategies but also to evaluate their implications for ethical, audience-centered communication.

Case Example: Microsoft Copilot

Microsoft Copilot serves as the central case exemplar for this study because of its prominence in enterprise communication and its positioning as a productivity-enhancing, ethically guided tool. Copilot is marketed across domains such as business productivity, knowledge work, and education, but its enterprise campaigns provide a coherent dataset that illustrates how marketing translates technical complexity into persuasive narratives. These campaigns highlight repetitive digital tasks; drafting emails, summarizing meetings, or generating reports, as bottlenecks to efficiency, positioning AI as the solution. They also underscore themes of "responsible AI," emphasizing transparency and human oversight as part of the product's ethos.

By focusing on Copilot, this study examines how rhetorical strategies construct "intelligence" as an invisible assistant that improves workflow while managing concerns about trust, ethics, and usability. The case is particularly useful for genre analysis because it is both specific; anchored in a widely deployed tool, and representative of broader trends in AI marketing.

Significance of the Study

This project advances technical communication scholarship by extending analysis into technical marketing genres that both reflect and shape how emerging technologies are communicated, understood, and adopted. While technical communication traditionally examines documentation and workplace texts, existing research in technical marketing (e.g., Harner & Zimmerman, 2002; St.Amant, 2019; Evia & Patriarca, 2012) has already highlighted how promotional discourse operates within similar rhetorical and ethical frameworks. Building on and expanding this line of inquiry, this study shows that marketing discourse performs comparable functions, simplifying complexity, guiding comprehension, and shaping user expectations. By analyzing Copilot's enterprise marketing, the project demonstrates how rhetorical strategies directly influence technological literacy and public trust, situating marketing as a form of technical mediation rather than solely a commercial activity.

For practitioners, the findings offer heuristics for designing AI messages that balance persuasive appeal with ethical responsibility, supporting clearer, more audience-centered communication. For educators, the project provides pedagogical cases that help students critically evaluate real-

world rhetorical strategies and understand the stakes of ethical design. For policymakers, the analysis highlights how rhetorical framing can obscure risks or exaggerate benefits, underscoring the need for transparent regulatory communication. In this way, the study contributes to multiple stakeholders by showing how technical communication frameworks can improve the clarity, transparency, and responsibility of AI communication.

Results

The results of this project will present a systematic rhetorical analysis of Microsoft Copilot's enterprise marketing artifacts, showing how strategies such as metaphor, plain language, visual framing, and ethical appeals construct AI as trustworthy, usable, and desirable. Coding summaries generated through Taguette will identify recurring themes and provide evidence of how these strategies operate across different promotional texts. Representative excerpts will be included in an appendix to ensure transparency and allow readers to see how rhetorical categories were applied.

The expected outcomes include both short-term and long-term contributions. In the short term, the project will document specific rhetorical patterns in Copilot's marketing that have not been systematically analyzed in technical communication scholarship. In the long term, the findings will inform heuristics for designing transparent and ethically responsible AI messaging, offering value for both academic research and professional practice. These outcomes will be communicated to multiple stakeholders: technical communication scholars, who will gain a framework for studying promotional genres; practitioners, who can apply the findings to create clearer, more responsible messaging; and policymakers, who may draw on the insights to support transparent communication guidelines.

By connecting empirical findings to broader disciplinary and societal concerns, the results will demonstrate how technical communication provides the tools to evaluate and improve AI marketing, bridging persuasive goals with ethical responsibility.

Schedule

I will submit the complete draft of my thesis by February 28, 2026. To meet this deadline, I have prepared a structured timeline to guide the key phases of my proposed research. Here's my proposed timeline:

Month	**Task**
July 2025	Literature Review
Mid-August 2025	Submit literature Review to Dr. Cheek
Late November 2025	Conduct pilot analysis

January 2026	Data Analysis
February 2026	Submit Methods & Results
March 1, 2026	Submit full thesis draft to the committee
March 8, 2026	Submit Draft for defense to Graduate Education
April 2026	Thesis defense

Table 1. Tentative submission deadlines for the thesis

Budget

The budget for this project is minimal because the data source; Microsoft Copilot's enterprise marketing materials, is publicly available, and the primary analysis tool, Taguette, is free and open-source. Since the scope of the dataset is manageable, coding will be conducted by the researcher without the need for hired coders or proprietary software. The primary expenses are related to disseminating the research through professional conferences and publications, ensuring that the findings contribute to scholarly and practitioner communities.

Item	**Cost**
Taguette (qualitative coding software, open-source)	$0
Conference travel or research result presentation to colleagues	$1000
Total	$1000

Table 2. Tentative budget for Thesis

Qualification

I am qualified to conduct this research because of my prior academic and professional experience with rhetorical and technical communication analysis. My first master's thesis in eco-linguistics involved analyzing dictionary definitions across eight volumes, demonstrating my ability to handle large textual datasets, and identify subtle rhetorical patterns. In my current graduate program, I have worked as a Graduate Research Assistant in both humanities and interdisciplinary STEM contexts.

At the Institute for Human Development and Integrating STEM+KC at UMKC, I conducted literature reviews, transcribed and organized academic interviews, and prepared manuscripts and presentations, gaining extensive experience in research design and data management. More

recently, as a Graduate Research Assistant in Game Studies at Missouri S&T, I have researched peer institutions, developed curriculum recommendations, and designed promotional materials that highlight usability and interdisciplinary communication. These combined experiences have prepared me to analyze Copilot's marketing artifacts with methodological rigor and to situate the findings within technical communication scholarship.

References

Ahmad, N. R. (2025). *Digital marketing strategies and consumer engagement: A comparative study of traditional vs. e-commerce brands*. The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies, 3(1), 1537–1548.

Bochniarz, K. T., Czerwiński, S. K., Sawicki, A., & Atroszko, P. A. (2022). Attitudes to AI among high school students: Understanding distrust towards humans will not help us understand distrust towards AI. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *185*, 111299. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.111299

Borenstein, J., Howard, A. Emerging challenges in AI and the need for AI ethics education. *AI Ethics* **1**, 61–65 (2021). https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-020-00002-7

Broussard, M. (2018). *Artificial unintelligence: How computers misunderstand the world*. MIT Press.

Cargile Cook, K. (2002). Layered literacies: A theoretical frame for technical communication pedagogy. *Technical communication quarterly*, *11*(1), 5-29.

Chamberlain, K., & Mosher, M. (2017). Communicating Disaster in the Age of Technology. *Eco Culture: Disaster, Narrative, Discourse*, 91.

Chen, C. W., Shen, C. C., & Chiu, W. Y. (2007). Marketing communication strategies in support of product launch: An empirical study of Taiwanese high-tech firms. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *36*(8), 1046-1056.

Chuan, C. H., Tsai, W. H. S., & Cho, S. Y. (2019, January). Framing artificial intelligence in American newspapers. In *Proceedings of the 2019 AAAI/ACM Conference on AI, Ethics, and Society* (pp. 339–344).

Clark, G. (1987). Ethics in technical communication: A rhetorical perspective. *IEEE transactions on professional communication*, (3), 190-195.

Cleary, Y., Karreman, J., Closs, S., Drazek, Z., Engberg, J., Ghenghea, V., ... & Straub, D. (2017, July). TecCOMFrame: A competence framework for technical communication. In *2017 IEEE International Professional Communication Conference (ProComm)* (pp. 1-5). IEEE.

Crawford, K. (2021). *Atlas of AI: Power, politics, and the planetary costs of artificial intelligence*. Yale University Press.

Dignum, V. (2019). *Responsible artificial intelligence: how to develop and use AI in a responsible way* (Vol. 2156). Cham: Springer.

Dilaver, H., & Dilaver, K. F. (2024). Algorithmic marketing. *International Journal of Engineering Science and Application, 8*(4), 76–84.

Dwork, C., & Minow, M. (2022). Distrust of artificial intelligence: Sources & responses from computer science & law. *Daedalus*, *151*(2), 309-321. https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_01918

Johnson-Eilola, J. (1996). Relocating the value of work: Technical communication in a post-industrial age. Technical Communication Quarterly, 5(3), 245–270.)

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Towards clarification of a fractured paradigm. *McQuail's reader in mass communication theory*, *390*, 397.

Entman, R. M. (2010). Framing media power. In *Doing news framing analysis* (pp. 347-371). Routledge.

Erevelles, S., Fukawa, N., & Swayne, L. (2016). Big data consumer analytics and the transformation of marketing. *Journal of Business Research, 69*(2), 897–904. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.07.001

Evia, C., & Patriarca, A. (2012). Beyond Compliance: Participatory Translation of Safety Communication for Latino Construction Workers: Participatory Translation of Safety Communication for Latino Construction Workers. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *26*(3), 340-367. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651912439697 (Original work published 2012)

Friess, E., & Boettger, R. K. (2021). Identifying Commonalities and Divergences Between Technical Communication Scholarly and Trade Publications (1996–2017). *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *35*(4), 407-432. https://doi.org/10.1177/10506519211021468 (Original work published 2021)

Glikson, E., & Woolley, A. W. (2020). Human trust in artificial intelligence: Review of empirical research. *Academy of Management Annals, 14*(2), 627–660.

Gonzales, L. (2021). (Re) Framing Multilingual Technical Communication with Indigenous Language Interpreters and Translators. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, *31*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2021.1906453

Hagendorff, T. The Ethics of AI Ethics: An Evaluation of Guidelines. *Minds & Machines* 30, 99–120 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11023-020-09517-8

Harner, S. W., & Zimmerman, T. G. (2002). *Technical marketing communication*. Allyn & Bacon (Longman)

Howard, L. (2011). *Technical Communication Strategies in Marketing* (Master's thesis, Miami University).

Huang, C., Zhang, Z., Mao, B., & Yao, X. (2022). An overview of artificial intelligence ethics. *IEEE Transactions on Artificial Intelligence*, *4*(4), 799-819. https://doi.org/10.1109/TAI.2022.3194503

Huang, M. H., & Rust, R. T. (2021). A strategic framework for artificial intelligence in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 49*(1), 30–50.

Jobin, A., Ienca, M., & Vayena, E. (2019). The global landscape of AI ethics guidelines. *Nature machine intelligence*, *1*(9), 389-399. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1906.11668

Johnson, R. R. (1998). *User-centered technology: A rhetorical theory for computers and other mundane artifacts*. SUNY press.

Jones, N. N., Gonzales, L., Haas, A. M., & Williams, M. F. (2025). *The Routledge Handbook of Social Justice in Technical and Professional Communication*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Kazim, E., & Koshiyama, A. S. (2021). A high-level overview of AI ethics. *Patterns*, *2*(9). DOI: 10.1016/j.patter.2021.100314 External Link

Killoran, J. B. (2009). Targeting an audience of robots: Search engines and the marketing of technical communication business websites. *IEEE Transactions on professional communication*, *52*(3), 254-271.

Lee, G. H., Lee, K. J., Jeong, B., & Kim, T. (2024). Developing personalized marketing service using generative AI. *IEEE Access, 12*, 22394–22402. https://doi.org/10.1109/ACCESS.2024.3361946

Lippmann, W. (1922). *Public opinion*. Transaction Publishers.

Luzón, M. J. (2005). Genre analysis in technical communication. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *48*(3), 285-295.

Mara, A. (2008). Ethos as Market Maker: The Creative Role of Technical Marketing Communication in an Aviation Start-Up: The Creative Role of Technical Marketing Communication in an Aviation Start-Up. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *22*(4), 429-453. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651908320379 (Original work published 2008)

Markel, M., & Selber, S. A. (2018). *Technical communication* (12th ed.). Bedford/St. Martin's.

McCombs, M. (2005). A look at agenda-setting: Past, present and future. *Journalism Studies, 6*(4), 543–557. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700500250438

Modliński, A., Fortuna, P., & Rożnowski, B. (2023). Human–machine trans roles conflict in the organization: How sensitive are customers to intelligent robots replacing the human workforce? *International Journal of Consumer Studies, 47*(1), 100–117. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12811

Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (1994). The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing, 58*(3), 20–38.

Munn, L. The uselessness of AI ethics. *AI Ethics* **3**, 869–877 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/s43681-022-00209-w

Oswal, S. K. (2013). Exploring accessibility as a potential area of research for technical communication: A modest proposal. *Communication Design Quarterly Review*, *1*(4), 50-60.

Paton, B., & Dorst, K. (2011). Briefing and reframing: A situated practice. *Design studies*, *32*(6), 573-587. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2011.07.002

Peters, T. M., & Visser, R. W. (2023, July). The importance of distrust in AI. In *World conference on explainable artificial intelligence* (pp. 301-317). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.

Press, G. (2013). A very short history of big data. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com

Rafieian, O., & Yoganarasimhan, H. (2023). AI and personalization. In *Review of Marketing Research* (Vol. 20, pp. 77–102). https://doi.org/10.1108/S1548-643520230000020004

Rampin, R., Rampin, V., & DeMott, S. (2023, July). *Taguette, the free and open-source qualitative data analysis tool*. (Version 1.4.2) [Computer software]. https://www.taguette.org

Redish, J. C. (2012). *Letting go of the words: Writing Web content that works* (2nd ed.). Morgan Kaufmann.

Schultz, D. E., & Schultz, H. F. (1998). Transitioning marketing communication into the twenty-first century. *Journal of marketing communications*, *4*(1), 9-26.

Siau, K., & Wang, W. (2020). Artificial intelligence (AI) ethics: ethics of AI and ethical AI. *Journal of Database Management (JDM)*, *31*(2), 74-87. DOI: 10.4018/jdm.2020040105

Spinuzzi, C. (2003). *Tracing genres through organizations: A sociocultural approach to information design.* MIT Press.

St.Amant, K. (2002). When Cultures and Computers Collide: Rethinking Computer-Mediated Communication according to International and Intercultural Communication Expectations: Rethinking Computer-Mediated Communication according to International and Intercultural Communication Expectations. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, *16*(2), 196-214. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651902016002003 (Original work published 2002)

Starke. G, Ienca M. Misplaced Trust and Distrust: How Not to Engage with Medical Artificial Intelligence. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*. 2024;33(3):360-369. doi:10.1017/S0963180122000445

Swales, J. M. (1990). *Genre analysis*. Cambridge University Press.

Attachments

Table of Figures

Appendix

Code	Definition	Example from Copilot	Linked TC Principle
Framing the Problem	Identifying inefficiencies, risks, or frustrations in current practices to justify the need for AI.	"Stop wasting hours drafting emails—Copilot helps you write in seconds."	Audience analysis & exigence
Highlighting the Gap	Emphasizing limitations of existing tools and showing how AI uniquely addresses them.	"Traditional software only processes data. Copilot understands context and adapts to your workflow."	Usability & plain language (Redish)
Building Credibility	Establishing trust through transparency, ethical claims, or alignment with responsible design.	"Built on Microsoft's commitment to responsible AI with human oversight at every step."	Risk communication (Markel & Selber)
Promising Transformation	Projecting long-term benefits of AI as empowering, personalized, or socially impactful.	"Copilot isn't just a tool—it transforms collaboration, creativity, and the future of work."	Genre evolution (Spinuzzi)

Responsible AI Framing (Sub-code)	Positioning AI as safe, transparent, and socially accountable.	"Our AI is designed responsibly, keeping your data private and secure."	Ethical responsibility
Human-as-Partner Metaphor (Emergent)	Depicting AI as a supportive colleague or assistant rather than a machine.	Visual of Copilot side-by-side with a worker under the phrase "Your everyday AI partner."	User-centered design (Johnson)

Table 3. Sample Codebook for Copilot Rhetorical Analysis