

# Consumer Branding

An AI-generated persona — grounded in primary research and deployed as a co-designer — transforms customer simulation in a third-year marketing course at Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.



COURSE AT A GLANCE

# A third-year bachelor elective in International Marketing & Sales

5

ECTS CREDITS

91

STUDENTS

S1

SEMESTER

BA

BACHELOR LEVEL

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

# Consumer Branding

**UNIVERSITY**

**Amsterdam University of Applied  
Sciences (HvA)**

**PROGRAMME**

**Business Economics — International  
Marketing & Sales**

**COURSE LEVEL**

**Bachelor · Semester 1 · 5 ECTS**

**TYPICAL STUDENT BACKGROUND**

Third-year students who have completed Years 1 and 2. Skills include analytical thinking, primary research, case-study work, strategic recommendations, and academic writing.

**PREREQUISITES**

Successfully completed Years 1 and 2. Prior knowledge in marketing fundamentals, basic consumer behavior, market research principles, and strategic marketing concepts.

## SUMMARY OF AI USAGE

“ AI is a fundamental tool in the project: students define an AI persona with primary research (interviews and surveys), then use it to simulate customer responses. The primary goal is twofold: to help students understand which insights are needed to create their marketing strategy, and to stimulate iterative concept development by using the AI-generated persona as feedback partner and co-designer. Distinctive is also that AI use must be documented (prompts, outputs) and justified with a so-called “evidence pack”. AI does not replace primary research. Exactly the opposite: evidence from research is used to generate the persona.

— ALEXANDRA BENITEZ, COURSE TEACHER

## SECTION 02

# 02

# Learning outcomes

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What the course set out to teach — and where AI made a difference.



## INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

# Seven outcomes spanning research, strategy, and brand communication

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**01** Identify and justify the market potential of a brand using consumer research.

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**03** Design brand positioning concepts, based on brand identity insights and consumer insights.

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**05** Define brand objectives and determine the most suitable persuasion route based on target audience insights.

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**07** Create a set of communication assets that collectively tell the brand story.

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**02** Use consumer insights to create a customer profile.

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**04** Evaluate and select a brand strategy by testing the generated brand concepts with the target audience.

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**06** Create a compelling brand story that supports the customer's journey.

AI SUPPORT · ILO 2

# Grounding the AI persona in primary research evidence

02

INTENDED  
LEARNING OUTCOME

Use consumer insights  
to create a customer  
profile.

“

Students created an AI persona grounded in primary research.

AI SUPPORT · ILO 3

# Iterating brand concepts with the AI persona as co-designer

03

**INTENDED  
LEARNING OUTCOME**

**Design brand positioning  
concepts, based on brand  
identity insights and  
consumer insights.**

“

AI supported the generation and iteration of brand concepts by simulating how the defined AI persona might perceive and respond to positioning ideas. Supported by second primary re-search.



AI SUPPORT · ILO 6

# Exploring brand storytelling in dialogue with the persona

06

**INTENDED  
LEARNING OUTCOME**

**Create a compelling brand story that supports the customer's journey.**

“

AI was used to explore and structure storytelling options while checking alignment with the AI persona and brand positioning.

AI SUPPORT · ILO 7

# Drafting content assets — then validating against evidence

07

**INTENDED  
LEARNING OUTCOME**

**Create a set of  
communication assets  
that collectively tell the  
brand story.**

“

AI assisted in generating draft content, visual directions, and touchpoint ideas, which were then refined and validated using re-search evidence.

**SKILLS ENHANCED**

# Four skills sharpened by building and challenging the AI persona

“

- Persona development skills: students used consumer research to build and simulate an AI persona that represents and simulates their target audience, like an avatar
- Concept development: AI supported the generation and refinement of brand positioning ideas and activation concepts, as co-designer using the point of view of the target group.
- Story and content creation: AI assisted in drafting brand stories and communication elements.
- Critical evaluation skills: students had to document prompts, assess AI outputs, and validate them against research evidence with a critical thinking session in class.

## AI-SPECIFIC LEARNING OUTCOMES

# No standalone AI outcome — but critical AI use runs through the whole course

NO FORMAL ILO

“

AI supports achieving certain LOs, but it is not formulated as a standalone learning objective.

AI is used as a tool within the assignment (e.g., persona simulation, concept development, documentation of prompts), but none of the formal learning objectives explicitly mention AI skills, AI literacy, or AI competency.

The learning outcomes remain focused on consumer research, branding strategy, positioning, storytelling, and communication development.

## SECTION 03

# 03

# Purpose & benefits

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Why bring AI into this course — and what students and lecturer got out of it.



## MAIN MOTIVATION FOR USING AI

# AI as a research-grounded simulation tool — not a creative shortcut

“

The main reason for using AI in the course was to support students in simulating customer perspectives through an AI-generated persona.

AI acted as a tool, allowing faster iteration and insight generation without replacing primary research.

**BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS**

# Critical evaluation, accountability, and applied research skills

“

- Enhanced critical evaluation, students practiced assessing AI-generated content against research evidence, reinforcing analytical skills.
- Trained transparency and accountability in AI usage with the creation of an evidence pack.
- Enhances research application, students practice translating consumer research into actionable digital profiles (AI persona).

**BENEFITS FOR THE LECTURER**

# Clearer visibility into student reasoning — and a new lens on originality

“

- **Easier monitoring of student work**, AI outputs were documented in the evidence pack, making it clear how students used AI during the semester. Both assignments required “evidence pack” submission. Students also gave the teacher access to their persona, by providing the link to this persona. This helps the teacher with assessment
- **Support in judging originality**, Lecturers could focus on evaluating how students adapted AI-generated ideas creatively rather than grading basic ideation.
- **Guiding coaching sessions**, AI outputs allowed lecturers to focus feedback on strengthening analytical and evidence-based skills.
- AI personas simulate customer behavior, which complements or **reduces the amount of primary research students must conduct**.



## SECTION 04

# 04

# Implementation details

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How AI showed up in class — the tools, the access model, and the guidance around them.

## HOW AI WAS USED IN CLASS

# Four structured moments — from persona creation to live demonstration

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AI was used in class at four structured moments.

- First, with instructions from the teachers, students created the AI persona based on research inputs.
- Second, during a group session, team members had to evaluate and select which AI persona would be most suitable as co-designer in the concept development stage of their assignment
- The selected AI persona was then treated as an additional “team member,” allowing students to interact with it throughout the project for idea testing and campaign development.
- Finally, during the official presentations, students conducted a live AI demonstration to show how the persona was used in developing their branding strategy

## TOOLS & PLATFORMS

# Two primary tools — and freedom to choose more

01

### GENERAL-PURPOSE GENERATIVE AI

#### ChatGPT

Used across all four project moments — persona building, concept iteration, storytelling, and content generation. Both free and paid versions were in use.

02

### AI VIDEO GENERATION

#### InVideo

Used by select students for commercial design and video content production.

03

### STUDENT CHOICE

#### Other tools

Students were free to use additional AI platforms beyond the in-class sessions — the course did not restrict tool choice outside structured moments.

*In-class sessions used ChatGPT. No dedicated software or hardware was required.*

ACCESS TO TOOLS - FREE VS PAID

# No institutional licence — students chose free or paid independently

# Free

NO PAID LICENCE PROVIDED BY  
HvA

Students accessed tools independently;  
no institutional subscription was provided.

“

No paid version was provided in this course.

## GUIDANCE &amp; SUPPORT FOR USING AI EFFECTIVELY

# Detailed instructions, live screensharing, and a guided reflection session

“

- Slide deck with detailed instructions for building an AI persona (prompting, adding information, generating/editing images, settings, interaction), shared via Brightspace and reinforced through screensharing.
- A critical thinking group session was organized to reflect on and evaluate AI-generated outputs guided comparisons between AI persona outputs and primary research. This session was recorded.



## AI IN STUDENT ASSESSMENT

# Assessed on integration quality — not on the tool itself

**YES**

Part of both course assignments

“

Student performance with AI was formally assessed in both persona design and concept development. Students were not graded on the AI tool itself, but on how appropriately and critically they used it.

Assessment focused on:

- Whether AI use was documented (prompts, outputs, evidence pack).
- Whether AI outputs were aligned with primary and secondary research.
- The extent to which AI enriched the persona, journey, brand concepts, storytelling, and activation.

Students were therefore graded on their ability to leverage AI strategically and responsibly.. Feedback addressed both the effectiveness of AI integration and the critical evaluation of AI outputs.

SECTION 05

# 05

## Evaluation & risk management

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How impact was measured — and how misuse was kept in check.

## HOW AI IMPACT WAS EVALUATED

# Through formal rubrics and a post-course research study

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AI use was evaluated through the formal assessment rubrics for both course components.



## METRICS &amp; KPIS

## Post-course survey: overall 3.85 / 5 across 12 indicators (N ≈ 38–39)

| Statement                                                                                                   | Mean (1–5)  | N  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----|
| This course helped me to use AI in a responsible way, following ethical considerations and privacy rules.   | 3.72        | 88 |
| This course helped me to evaluate AI-generated answers critically.                                          | 3.98        | 87 |
| This course helped me to use AI effectively in the course topic(s).                                         | 4.13        | 88 |
| The integration of AI in this course improved my learning experience.                                       | 4.06        | 88 |
| The use of AI in this course helped me better understand complex concepts.                                  | 4.04        | 89 |
| The use of AI in this course helped me apply knowledge in practical ways.                                   | 4.18        | 89 |
| The teacher guided us in using AI in a responsible way, following ethical considerations and privacy rules. | 3.69        | 87 |
| The teacher guided us in evaluating AI-generated answers.                                                   | 3.79        | 89 |
| The teacher guided us in using AI effectively.                                                              | 3.93        | 89 |
| The integration with AI helped me develop relevant skills for my future.                                    | 4.11        | 89 |
| I feel more prepared to use AI in other academic or professional contexts because of this course.           | 3.98        | 88 |
| <b>Overall course evaluation</b>                                                                            | <b>3.96</b> |    |

## FORMAL COURSE EVALUATION

# AI was not a part of the formal course evaluation

**NO**

Not captured

**RISK MANAGEMENT IN AI USE**

# Three structural safeguards: clear boundaries, documentation, and graded accountability

**YES**

Built into the course design

Risk management was implemented through:

- **Clear boundaries:** AI could not replace primary research; students had to collect and use their own data.
- **Mandatory documentation:** All AI prompts and outputs had to be included in the evidence pack, ensuring transparency.
- **Assessment criteria:** “AI Integration” was a graded component, focusing on appropriate, research-aligned, and critical use of AI.
- **Extra teaching:** To clarify conceptual confusion (persona vs AI persona) and to show students how to use their AI persona meaningfully. If the teacher doesn’t have the time, the student produces uneven job.

## SECTION 06

# 06

# Overall impact

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What changed — for the teaching, the learning, and the student work.

## OVERALL IMPACT ON TEACHING & LEARNING

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AI enhanced the learning process in terms of engagement and efficiency. Students interacted with the AI persona as a “team member,” which supported idea testing and concept development during the project. AI also allowed faster generation of draft concepts, stories, and visuals, enabling more time to focus on strategic alignment and research integration.

However, AI uses required clear boundaries to prevent over-reliance. Its effectiveness was managed through assessment criteria (“AI Integration”) that required documentation, and live demonstrations during presentations, ensuring AI supported rather than replaced student work.

— ALEXANDRA BENITEZ, COURSE TEACHER



## IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

# Uneven by starting point — but structurally accountable

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Impact varied sharply by student tech orientation; some needed help getting started and learning to prompt well.

A key trade-off was reduced time for other course concepts, but accountability (sharing persona links) increased involvement and attention

Students also learned to question validity when AI output conflicted with their data.

Also see the course evaluation metrics shown previously.

## MAIN CHALLENGES & HOW THEY WERE MANAGED

# Inequality, uneven preparation, and group-work dependency

“

Main challenges were subscription inequality (paid vs unpaid access to persona/agent features). Differences in students' starting level, and technical delays (slow video production). Teachers also noted that students need enough topic knowledge to evaluate AI outputs; And the group work was complicated when only the persona creator could properly run early tests.

SECTION 07

# 07

## Scalability & transferability

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How this experience travels to other courses — and what it would take to support that.



## SCALING TO OTHER COURSES AND NEED FOR INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

# With design principles that keep the persona grounded and the work fair

# YES

## YES — SCALABLE

AI as simulated stakeholder works best where personas are used repeatedly across a project — not as a one-off gimmick.

- “ Where it worked: courses using personas repeatedly across a project (not as a one-off gimmick).
- Treat the persona as a reusable artefact, not a one-time output. Start with an initial version, then iteratively enrich it with primary/secondary data as the project progresses.
  - Force grounding in real evidence. Require explicit links between persona claims and field research, course theory, or collected data.
  - Prevent role drift. Constrain the persona so it behaves like the intended stakeholder (e.g., a consumer) rather than turning into a marketer/strategist.
  - Make collaboration fair in group work. If only one student can operate the “persona bot”, it creates dependency; build shared access or rotate responsibility.

KEY ADVICE FOR EDUCATORS

# Four practices that make AI integration work

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## Compare and select.

01

Compare multiple student-built personas in class, select one, and agree on “rules of use”.

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## Build in a conflict check.

02

Add a “conflict check”: if persona feedback contradicts primary re-search, students must reconcile it.

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## Require an evidence pack.

03

Persona version history; what data was added; how it changed decisions.

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## Add a short defence.

04

“Which 3 persona insights did you use, and why do you trust them?”

# A persona that had to be earned — built from research, tested against it, and never allowed to replace the student's own thinking.

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COURSE

Consumer Branding

INFORMANT

Alexandra  
Benitez

INSTITUTION

Amsterdam University of Applied  
Sciences (HvA)

PROGRAMME

Business Economics —  
International Marketing  
& Sales

## ABOUT AI-HED

# An Erasmus+ cooperation project on AI in higher education

The project "**Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education Teaching and Learning**" (AI-HED), launched with co-funding from the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Programme in the fields of education, training, youth, and sport for the 2021–2027 period, was submitted and awarded under **Key Action 2: Cooperation among organisations and institutions**.

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