

The Role of AI in Content Development among Romanian Small Businesses

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Abstract. *Small businesses can use content marketing to create and provide information that is both interesting and valuable for potential customers. Moreover, the benefits it brings include the cultivation of brand loyalty, a way to differentiate from competitors, stimulating sales while cultivating emotional connections, and delivering targeted messages. Particularly for small companies, content marketing represents a way to reach a target market and grow in a sustainable rhythm. The article explores the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in creating content for Romanian small businesses. The research focused on identifying the types of AI tools used and the challenges and benefits of adopting AI for content development. A quantitative market research was performed among a sample of Romanian small businesses to identify opinions and practices regarding AI tools. The findings show that there is a significant adoption rate of AI tools, which positively impacts content production efficiency. Despite the challenges of initial investment costs and the steep learning curve, the strategic integration of AI has notably enhanced operational efficiencies and competitive positioning in the digital market. The research contributes to a better understanding of the effects brought by AI usage on content development, underlining the need for investing in technology in order to grow and remain relevant in the market.*

Keywords: artificial intelligence, content marketing, digitalization, small businesses, digital marketing, artificial intelligence tools

Introduction

Digital marketing is going through massive transformation due to the Artificial Intelligence development which brings innovation and efficiency in the technology area. AI contains a large range of tools that offer various benefits to the enterprises. The digital medium is marked by data-rich and computation-heavy environment nowadays, so many organizations use AI to improve their business processes. (Enholm et al., 2022).

Considering AI's role in the digital landscape, particularly for small businesses, the advantages brought are personalization, boosting efficiency, and providing a competitive advantage in marketing strategies. Customer needs are better served with the help of AI and its capacity to process and analyse large amounts of data.

AI applications range from automating customer interactions to generating insights for targeted marketing campaigns, revolutionizing how small businesses engage with their audience (Campbell et al., 2020).

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The importance of the role of AI in content development has grown at an accelerated rate, enabling custom content creation that appeals to targeted audiences. The effects are evident in the effectiveness and engagement of the marketing activities. AI tools allow marketing specialists to identify specific trends and develop content that is better suited for their audiences, which in turn leads to a higher content consumption and redistribution. With further advancements in AI technology, it can only be expected that content creation and marketing will continue to evolve and improve over time (Alqurashi et al., 2023).

Romanian small businesses can explore the benefits of using AI tools to create more effective content strategies. The article aims to examine the effects of AI on small businesses' marketing activities, particularly content development.

Literature review

Small businesses in Romania

Small and micro businesses form the bedrock of Romania's economy, reflecting the broader trends seen across the European Union. These entities constitute a substantial share of Romanian businesses, with micro-enterprises alone accounting for approximately 90% of all enterprises, while small enterprises account for 8.6%, both categories contributing significantly to job creation, employing a considerable fraction of the workforce (European Commission, 2023a).

Statista (2024) reported that Romania witnessed significant economic input from its smallest business entities, with micro firms infusing approximately 22.31 billion euros and small firms contributing around 18.71 billion euros into the national economy. The combined value added by these sectors underscores their important role in driving economic growth and highlights the entrepreneurial strength within the Romanian market.

Digital marketing perspectives

Small businesses, particularly microenterprises, grapple with productivity levels significantly below the EU average. The Digital Decade Country Report (European Commission, 2023b) places Romanian SMEs at the bottom of the EU for digitalization, highlighting substantial gaps in human capital and the integration of digital technology. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digitalization, with 45% of Romanian firms investing in digital upgrades, matching the EU's medium rate.

Small and medium-sized businesses in Romania often struggle with adopting and effectively using digital transformation tools (Ogrean & Herciu, 2021). However, the limited resources of SMEs, compounded by the dual pressure of digital and green transitions, mean that keeping digitalization at the forefront is not just a choice but a necessity for future-proofing the sector (Scuotto et al. 2021).

As mentioned by the European Economic and Social Committee (2021), Romanian enterprises face various challenges in digital transformation, particularly in AI adoption. The country exceeds the median EU level, showing moderate public optimism towards AI's potential benefits, still, several barriers hinder broader AI integration.

Content marketing for small businesses

Content marketing has evolved significantly from its early days. In the digital era, content marketing encompasses everything created and uploaded to online environment that aims to provide value to users. This can be achieved through education, entertainment, problem-solving,

or informative experiences. Pulizzi and Barrett (2009) describe content marketing as creating and distributing educational or compelling content to attract or retain customers. The goal is to encourage profitable customer action.

According to The Content Marketing Institute, this approach focuses on producing content that is consistent, informative, and truly useful for your audience. Nowadays, content marketing aims to create tailored, valuable, and engaging content for specific target audiences. This approach uses emotional connections and personalized messaging to build brand loyalty and drive profitable customer action.

AI tools for content creation

In the dynamic landscape of Romanian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools for content creation marks a significant shift towards digital innovation (European Commission, 2023b). Text generators use natural language technology to simplify and refine how content is created. They are very good at writing clear and context-appropriate texts, such as product descriptions, blog articles or social media posts, thus helping to streamline work and capture public attention. By leveraging these tools, SMEs can significantly increase content production, maintain consistency in tone and style, and effectively engage their target audience (Simonsen, 2022).

Moreover, photo editing programs that use AI are also frequently used. These programs can alter photos by removing items, adjusting colors, or improving the quality of the image. Their ability to analyze and improve visual content is valuable for businesses in e-commerce and marketing, where visual appeal is crucial (Noor, 2020).

SEO (search engine optimization) is also a very important tool which can be enhanced by AI. This helps businesses to be more visible in the online environment by using keywords that increase traffic naturally. Beyond these, the spectrum of AI tools in SMEs' arsenal includes various specialized applications such as customer service chatbots, AI-driven market analytics, and predictive models for consumer behavior, each tailored to specific operational needs (Dumitriu & Popescu, 2020).

Several studies concluded that AI tools are used increasingly in marketing activities, bringing both advantages and disadvantages. Researchers Letheren, Russell-Bennett, and Whittaker (2020) suggest that the true impact of AI can only be assessed after its capabilities are fully understood and ethical guidelines for its application are established.

Additionally, Spanos (2021) argues that leveraging AI to produce advertising material significantly boosts the success of communication efforts and leads to a decrease in the expenses related to the creation and dissemination of adverts. The adoption of AI tools by Romanian small and medium-sized companies improves the overall operational efficiency and brings them competitive advantages.

Challenges in AI adoption for content marketing creation

For small businesses, embracing AI is like navigating a unique obstacle course, distinct from the path large enterprises walk on. Engaging with AI technologies is not solely a matter of intellectual capacity, financial considerations play a critical role as well. Small businesses are often characterized by limited budgets and staff which can delay the launch of ambitious projects.

Small business owners often find it challenging to stay current with technology, gather reliable data, and handle staff objections while remaining ethical. These companies must carefully

balance the potential benefits of AI with their specific needs and limitations. This ensures the effective use of AI while minimizing risks and downsides (Betoni et al., 2021).

Small businesses benefit significantly from adopting artificial intelligence (AI) in their content marketing strategies. As mentioned before, integrating AI into small and medium-sized companies' marketing strategies can bring many benefits. AI can customize content, deliver predictive insights, and optimize resource allocation, thereby facilitating decision-making, fostering business development, and enhancing competitive advantage. Although the initial cost of integrating AI may be high, its long-term benefits include improved efficiency and business growth. According Elia et al. (2020) and Kraus et al. (2020) AI enables companies to plan strategically and improve their activities, leading to more efficient results. Indeed, artificial intelligence's impact can create fresh avenues for entrepreneurs to tackle precise challenges within specific fields and applications (Giuggioli & Pellegrini, 2023).

However, evaluating the potential of AI in marketing activities cannot be strictly labeled as completely positive or negative. It is viewed both as a benefit and a risk to individuals in the advertising sector, with convincing arguments suggesting that it inevitably results in significant alterations, for better or worse, within the advertising domain (Rodgers, 2021).

Bearing in mind the research's purpose of investigating the use of artificial intelligence in creating content by Romanian micro and small businesses, several questions can be retrieved: How are businesses perceiving the use of AI for content creation? What are the challenges they face when adopting AI? What are the benefits brought by AI in generating content, as well as the influence perceived in operational workflows?

Methodology

In order to identify how AI influences the development of the digital content of micro and small companies in Romania, a quantitative research was conducted. The established research objectives were:

- O1.** Determining the prevalence of AI usage in content creation within small Romanian enterprises.
- O2.** Identifying the categories of AI tools, small businesses employ for online content development.
- O3.** Identifying the challenges small businesses face in adopting AI for content creation.
- O4.** Ascertaining the benefits, particularly cost-related, derived from using AI in content creation.

The research targeted Romanian small businesses, specifically micro-enterprises and small enterprises, as defined by the EU classification: micro-enterprises (fewer than ten employees and turnover under €2 million) and small enterprises (between 10 and 50 employees, turnover between €2 million and €10 million). The businesses were also categorized by location within four macro-regions of Romania to analyze geographic patterns in AI adoption.

The largest share, 34%, belonged to Region 3 (counties Argeş, Prahova, Dâmboviţa, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Ialomiţa, Călăraşi, Ilfov and Bucureşti), Region 2 (comprising counties such as Bacău, Botoşani, Brăila, Buzău, Constanţa, Galaţi, Iaşi, Neamţ, Suceava, Tulcea, Vaslui and Vrancea), represented 16% of the sample. Region 1 (counties: Alba, Bihor, Bistriţa-Năsăud, Braşov, Cluj, Covasna, Harghita, Maramureş, Mureş, Satu Mare, Sălaj and Sibiu) accounted for 33%, while Region 4 (Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinţi, Olt, Vâlcea, Timiş, Arad, Caraş-Severin and Hunedoara) constituted 17% of the respondents.

A non-random sampling strategy was utilized. Businesses classified as medium-sized enterprises or other categories were excluded from the survey. The final sample included 372 businesses, primarily micro (83.9%) and small (12.1%).

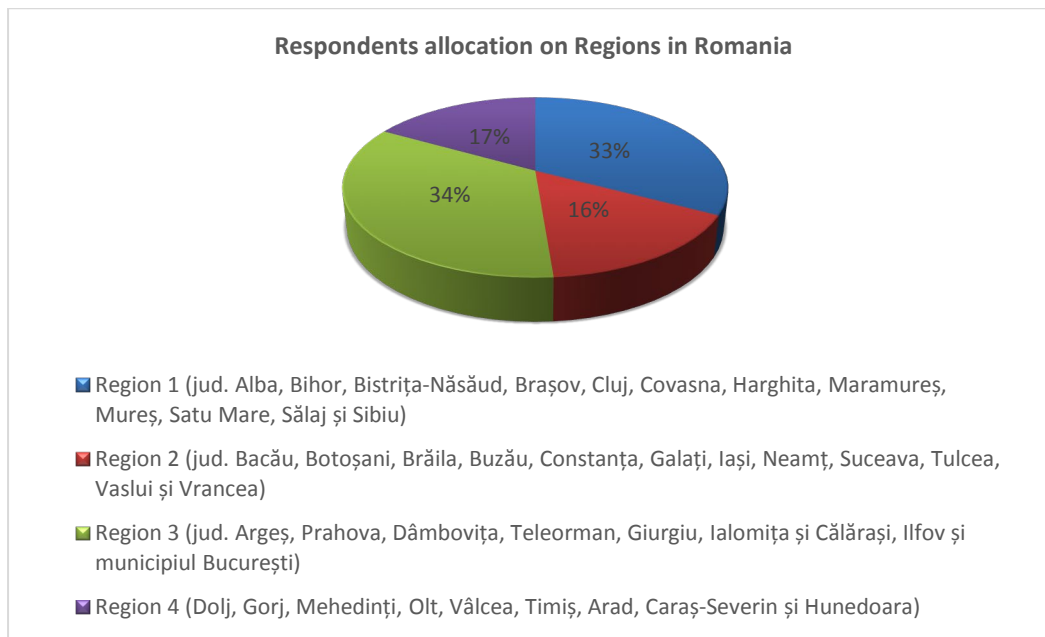


Figure 1. Regional distribution of respondents

Source: Authors own research.

The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire comprising 20 questions (3 filter questions, 11 core questions, and 6 identifying questions). The filter questions were included to ensure the respondents met the study criteria: familiarity with AI tools, current use of AI in online content creation, only those unfamiliar with AI tools or not using AI were excluded from further questions.

A survey using Google Forms was carried out to reach respondents spread out over a wide geographic area. The survey data was collected between 15th November and 15th of December 2023. The data that was gathered has been analyzed using the IBM's Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). In the analyzes the focus was on the descriptive statistics, as well as on the cross-tabulation analysis in order to identify how AI is used by companies of different sizes and from different regions. One of the limitations of the research was the non-random sampling method used. Therefore, the results obtained cannot be extrapolated to the entire population.

Results and discussions

The most important results of the research were structured according with the established objectives as follows.

01. Determining the prevalence of AI usage in content creation within small Romanian enterprises.

The analysis of the reasons (R1 - Efficiency and speed of content production, R2 - More engaging and personalized content, R3 - Content creation costs reduction, R4 - Advanced data

analysis for content optimization, R5 - Market competitiveness maintenance, R6 - Lack of specialized human resources for content creation, R7 - Other reasons) for AI usage among small businesses in various sectors in Romania, demonstrates a notable prevalence and diversity in the application of AI for content creation.

The data indicates that the top reason for using AI tools is to enhance efficiency and speed up content creation, mentioned 252 times across different sectors. Professional services notably lead this category with 87 instances, followed by health and wellness and education and training at 33. The results show that using AI in creating content, businesses can improve their operational efficiency.

Table 1. The reasons for using AI tools according to the activity domain

	IT& C	Health & Wellness	Educa-tion	Commer-ce	Professional services	Tourism	Arts & Entertai-nments	Agricul-ture	Product-ion	Other	Total
R1	24	33	33	21	87	18	6	15	15	0	252
R2	12	39	36	27	93	18	9	18	18	0	270
R3	12	36	27	18	69	24	6	9	18	0	219
R4	9	24	18	3	39	6	6	3	3	0	111
R5	15	15	12	3	30	9	3	6	3	0	96
R6	9	21	15	15	12	12	9	0	12	0	105
R7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	81	168	141	87	330	87	39	51	69	0	1053

Source: Authors' own research.

Generating more engaging and customized content for audiences is another critical factor, with the highest frequency in professional services (93 mentions), indicating a strategic focus on content personalization. Health and wellness businesses also prioritize this, with 39 mentions, contributing to a total of 270 across sectors.

Cost reduction associated with content creation is another pronounced motivation for AI adoption, notably within professional services (69 mentions), health and wellness (36 mentions), and education and training (27 mentions), accumulating to a total of 219. The results show a possible economic benefit for using AI in content production.

Access to advanced analytics and data for content optimization is less emphasized but remains significant in professional services, with 39 mentions out of a total of 111. While all sectors acknowledge the value in using data for content optimization, professional services are leading in using AI for strategic insights.

Maintaining market competitiveness and addressing the lack of specialized human resources for content creation are indicated to a lesser extent, with 96 and 105 mentions, respectively. The findings reveal that businesses recognize AI's competitive edge and resource gap-filling potential. However, it may not be the main driver for its adoption.

According to the AI usage frequency, also considering the domain activity, AI integration varies across sectors. The professional services sector is strongly inclined towards high-frequency AI use, with 70% of businesses employing AI for content creation (over 75% usage frequency). A moderate level of AI use (between 46%-75%) is observed among 11.4% of businesses in the technology and IT sector. Education and commerce display a relatively balanced distribution of AI use across various levels.

Table 2. AI usage frequency

AI usage frequency		Domain									Total
		IT&C	Health & Wellness	Education	Commerce	Professional services	Tourism	Arts & Entertainment	Agriculture & Foods	Production	
Under 15%	Count	6	0	3	3	6	3	3	6	6	36
Between 15% -45%	Count	6	27	18	18	30	15	6	12	15	147
Between 46% - 75%	Count	12	15	12	12	39	6	3	3	3	105
Over 75%	Count	3	0	3	3	21	0	0	0	0	30
Total	Count	27	42	36	36	96	24	12	21	24	318

Source: Authors' own research.

Industries centered on information and management, such as professional services, are more likely to integrate AI intensively due to the important benefits automation can offer. Conversely, sectors traditionally less reliant on digital processes, such as agriculture and foods, adopt AI more conservatively. The results also indicate a pattern specific to each sector. While AI has been adopted in a significant proportion, its applicability varies according to the industry's particular needs, and the value perceived is variable as well.

O2. Identifying the categories of AI tools, small businesses employ for online content development.

Text generators are the most commonly used AI tool, with a total usage of 318 instances across all sectors. The professional services sector shows the highest use of text generators with 96 instances. This is followed by the health and wellness sector, with 42 instances, and education and commerce sectors, each with 36 instances. According to this, the sectors utilising AI-driven text generation the most are those where content creation is crucial to their operations.

Table 3. Usage of AI tool categories on activity domains

	IT&C	Health & Wellness	Educ-tion	Comme-rce	Professi-onal services		Tour-ism	Arts & Entertai-nments	Agri-culture	Produc-tion	Other	Total
Text generators	27	42	36	36	96		24	12	21	24	0	318
Photo editors	18	33	18	18	66		9	3	6	9	0	180
SEO optimization algorithms	18	3	9	9	12		6	0	6	0	0	63
Other instruments	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	63	78	63	63	174		39	15	33	33	0	561

Source: Authors' own research.

AI-based photo editing programs are the second most utilized tool, with 180 instances. The professional services sector again leads with 66 instances, suggesting a strong emphasis on visual content in these areas. Health and wellness (33 instances) and IT&C (18 instances) also significantly use such tools, indicating the importance of visual appeal in their online presence. SEO optimization algorithms are less common but still notable, with a total of 63 instances across sectors. Leading this category with 18 and 12 instances, respectively, are the IT&C and professional services sectors, underscoring the significance of visibility on search engines for these companies.

Regarding the regional distribution use of AI tools, the total count is 561, reinforcing that AI is a vital component in the content strategy of small businesses within Romania.

Table 4. Types of AI instruments used by each region

	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	TOTAL
Text generators	105	51	105	57	318
Photo editors	60	33	51	36	180
SEO optimization algorithms	21	12	18	12	63
Other instruments	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	186	96	174	105	561

Source: Authors' own research.

With 318 instances in all regions, the data indicates that text generators are the most popular AI tool. Specifically, Region 1 and Region 3 both strongly prefer text generators, accounting for 105 businesses using such tools, followed by Region 4 (57) and Region 2 (51).

Photo editing programs based on AI are the second most popular type of tool, with 180 mentions. Region 1 leads in this category with 60 mentions, while Region 3 follows with 51, Region 4 with 36, and Region 2 with 33 businesses utilizing these tools. SEO optimization algorithms are used to a lesser extent, with a total of 63 instances. Region 1 and Region 3 are again leading with 21 and 18 businesses, respectively, followed by Regions 2 and 4 with 12 each.

The country-wide accessibility or adoption strategies of AI tools vary depending on the region, as these patterns show.

O3. Identifying the challenges small businesses face in adopting AI for content creation.

Considering the additional context that out of 372 respondents, 318 use AI tools, and only 21 do not use AI despite being familiar with it, the challenges of AI adoption reflect the concerns of a relatively small but significant subset of businesses. Despite its growing prevalence in the business community, the reported challenges are not widespread but represent specific barriers encountered by those who have yet to embrace AI fully or choose not to.

Table 5. The reasons for not utilizing AI instruments by activity domain

	IT&C	Health & Wellness	Educa-tion	Commerce	Professional services	Tourism	Arts & Entertainments	Agriculture	Production	Other	Total
High implementation costs	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	0	6
Lack of knowledge	0	0	0	0	3	3	3	3	3	0	15
Unreliable results	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	6	0	15
Preference for traditional methods	3	0	0	0	0	3	3	0	0	0	9
Other reasons	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	6	0	0	0	9	6	6	6	12	0	45

Source: Authors' own research.

The high costs of implementation, cited by 6 businesses, suggest that for some, the investment required to adopt AI is a hurdle, possibly due to limited financial resources or a calculation that the ROI (return of investment) does not justify the expense in their specific cases. The most frequently mentioned challenge, the lack of knowledge or expertise, acknowledged by 15 businesses, points to a barrier that might be addressed through education and targeted training. It also suggests that despite the growing popularity of artificial intelligence (AI), some businesses might not be ready to fully utilize AI's potential. This could be because they lack the necessary staff members or are unaware of the real-world uses for AI.

Unreliable results or distrust in technology, also noted by 15 businesses, underscores a skepticism towards AI or dissatisfaction with its outcomes. This could be attributed to early experiences with suboptimal AI tools or a cultural hesitation to depend on automated processes over human judgment, particularly in sectors where personal expertise is highly valued.

The preference for traditional methods, reported by 9 businesses, reflects a choice rather than a constraint, suggesting that some businesses maintain a deliberate commitment to traditional practices due to their business model or customer expectations.

Because most businesses use AI tools, these challenges highlight specific areas where further development, education, and innovation in AI technology could facilitate broader and more effective adoption. The relatively low number of businesses reporting these challenges suggests that while obstacles exist, they have not been significant enough to prevent a substantial majority from implementing AI in their operations.

04. Ascertaining the benefits, particularly cost-related, derived from using AI in content creation.

From a total of 318 respondents, 78 businesses reported a significant cost reduction, with Region 1 leading prominently, where 53.8% of businesses experienced this benefit. Region 3 follows with 26.9%, and Region 4 with 15.4%. According to the findings AI has played a significant role in reducing the operational costs associated with content creation in certain regions, most notably in Region 1. 102 businesses observed a moderate cost reduction. Region 3 has the highest percentage within this category at 38.2%, indicating that while the impact of AI is positive, it is less pronounced than in Region 1. Region 1 and Region 4 show a lower but substantial percentage of businesses reporting moderate cost savings, at 26.5% and 14.7%, respectively. Furthermore, 135

businesses saw no significant cost change after AI adoption, with Region 3 again having the highest percentage (33.3%). Region 1 and Region 4 are quite similar in their reporting, with approximately one-quarter of businesses in each region not observing a notable financial impact from AI use.

Interestingly, there are three instances (all in Region 1) where costs have increased following AI adoption. This is a very small percentage (0.9% of the total respondents) and might reflect initial investment costs that have not yet been offset by the longer-term savings or efficiencies that AI can bring.

Table 6. Costs evolution by region

Costs evolution		Regions				Total
		Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	
Significant cost reduction	Count	42	3	21	12	78
	% within Costs evolution	53.8%	3.8%	26.9%	15.4%	100.0%
Moderate cost reduction	Count	27	21	39	15	102
	% within Costs evolution	26.5%	20.6%	38.2%	14.7%	100.0%
No significant changes	Count	33	27	45	30	135
	% within Costs evolution	24.4%	20.0%	33.3%	22.2%	100.0%
Cost increase	Count	3	0	0	0	3
	% within Costs evolution	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	105	51	105	57	318
	% within Costs evolution	33.0%	16.0%	33.0%	17.9%	100.0%

Source: Authors' own research.

Data indicates that most businesses, especially in Region 1, reduce costs when using AI for content creation. Differences in results across regions could be due to how much AI is used, the types of AI tools used, how extensively they are implemented, or local economic factors. This indicates the financial advantages of using AI to produce content, although these advantages may differ according to region.

Conclusion

This study investigates how Romanian small enterprises are using artificial intelligence to create content. With the increasing adoption of AI technologies by companies, significant enhancements in audience engagement, productivity, and content quality have been observed. Setting new standards for the industry is this convergence of innovation and technology.

According to the research findings, most businesses, 93.8%, have adopted AI-driven solutions to streamline their operations and improve efficiency. Out of these, 46.2% of the companies use AI tools in their marketing activities, with a range of usage between 15% and 45%, while 33% of the businesses use AI tools between 46% and 75%. AI content marketing solutions are being used by an increasing number of businesses to keep one step ahead of their rivals. Small businesses encounter several challenges, including high initial costs and the need to adapt to new AI capabilities. However, these companies' ability to fortify their presence in a digitally driven market has been considerably enhanced by their smart use of AI tools.

The use of AI in small businesses worldwide is becoming increasingly popular, a survey performed by Intuit QuickBooks (2023), indicated that 83% of small businesses already use AI in various capacities. The most common applications of AI in small businesses include data analytics, generating ideas or inspiration, and enhancing customer support, each cited by 36% of respondents.

Based on the report, 65% of small firms intend to use AI more frequently because they think it can help them compete on an even playing field with their larger rivals. Small businesses hope to benefit from AI in various ways, including improved efficiency, reduced errors, and lowered operating costs. Based on these benefits, small businesses seem to be strategically focused on optimising their processes and promoting growth.

According to the data, using AI boosts corporate performance, showing that it's more than just a helpful tool. The shift towards AI-driven content strategies highlights the importance of being ready to invest in innovation and adapt technologically to sustain growth and stay relevant in the market.

Nevertheless, the prevailing view is that AI's importance in generating advertising and marketing content is on the rise (Somosi, 2022), profoundly reshaping these activities (Arango et al., 2023).

It is undisputable that Romanian small businesses benefit greatly from artificial intelligence (AI) in terms of increased content development and operational productivity. By utilising AI, more companies are preparing for a time when technology will be essential to their success and the sector's expansion.

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