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Abstract: This study investigates how digital transformation has disrupted the marketing career path by analysing the most in-demand marketing skills and identifying opportunities for the future marketing professionals. Through a content analysis of job advertisements and a survey of marketing professionals, the study proposes a framework defining the skillset required to marketing professionals to start and moving forward their career. The study identifies five employability skill categories and 29 skills and capabilities. The relevance of such categories is also analysed across lowly and highly digitalised firms. This research contributes to the debate on the employability of new graduates and provides useful directions to universities, tertiary education institutions and companies to support the marketing talents of the future.

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There are no linked research data sets for this submission. The following reason is given:
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Employability skills for the future marketing professionals.

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Employability skills for the future marketing professionals.

Abstract

This study investigates how digital transformation has disrupted the marketing career path by analysing the most in-demand marketing skills and identifying opportunities for the future marketing professionals. Through a content analysis of job advertisements and a survey of marketing professionals, the study proposes a framework defining the skillset required to marketing professionals to start and moving forward their career. The study identifies five employability skill categories and 29 skills and capabilities. The relevance of such categories is also analysed across lowly and highly digitalised firms. This research contributes to the debate on the employability of new graduates and provides useful directions to universities, tertiary education institutions and companies to support the marketing talents of the future.

Keywords: employability, skillset, marketing graduates, digitalisation

Employability skills for the future marketing professionals.

Introduction

Over the past 15 years, the digital transformation of businesses has revolutionised the role of marketing within firms. The widespread adoption of digital marketing practices, especially social media and mobile marketing, has significantly influenced the way through which firms and customers embrace new Internet-based technologies, behave, interact, collaborate, and co-create value (Cova, Dalli, & Zwick, 2011; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; A. F. Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a, 2004b). The digital transformation of marketing is driving marketing in practice, requiring firms to rethink their marketing strategies by hiring new professional profiles, and creating new organisational structures to succeed in the digital domain (Harrigan & Hulbert, 2011; Lamberton & Stephen, 2016; Moorman, 2016; Royle & Laing, 2014). While Internet-based technologies have enabled the enhancement of traditional marketing principles and strategies, they have been far more disruptive with reference to marketing skills and functions (Harrigan & Hulbert, 2011). The “old” professions based on traditional push (outbound) one-to-many communication paradigms (G. Kerr & Kelly, 2017; Kozinets, Hemetsberger, & Schau, 2008; Schultz & Patti, 2009; Vernuccio & Ceccotti, 2015) are being replaced by new marketing job positions focused on managing many-to-many interactive communication flows. Consumers are now more engaged and empowered, having become active producers of user-generated content (UGC) and, in some cases, co-producer of brand-related content (Vernuccio & Ceccotti, 2015). Hence, the digital transformation of marketing has posed a systemic phase change in marketing and communication practices, developing a parallel and fragmented world focused on digital media (Mulhern, 2009; Leeflang, Verhoef,

1 Dahlström, and Freundt, 2014). In this world, new job positions have emerged, with job
2 titles revealing a dominant need to reconcile the new with the old and reshape the
3 marketing function. Some examples of emerging job positions in the marketing and
4 communication area are community manager, digital copywriter, digital PR, digital
5 advertiser, web analyst, e-reputation manager, SEO specialist, and data scientist (Xhaet
6 & Fidora, 2015).

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16 In parallel with this reconfiguration of the marketing profession around the digital
17 world, the digital transformation of marketing is one of the critical topics of discussion
18 in academic journals (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). While this evolution is under way,
19 the cornerstones of marketing theory and practice are far from being obsolete (Mulhern,
20 2009; Royle & Laing, 2014). The study of Hamid Saleh (2016) reveals that from 2010
21 to 2014 the Journal of Marketing has given more importance to articles focusing on
22 traditional marketing themes, such as customer relationship and customer loyalty,
23 service and service quality, international marketing, sales and sales management, and
24 branding. In this perspective, it is of paramount importance that marketing managers of
25 tomorrow develop a) a robust knowledge of marketing theory; b) a creative mind to
26 introduce innovations in the marketing process; c) soft skills to understand the
27 technicalities connected to the digital marketing (Ackerman, Gross, & Perner, 2003;
28 Alpert, Heaney, & Kuhn, 2009; G. F. Kerr & Proud, 2005).

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Previous literature has focused on understanding the fit between the requirements of the
job market and universities' curricula (Mauri, Di Gregorio, Mazzucchelli, & Maggioni,
2017; Michaelidou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2011; Mulhern, 2009; Pefanis Schlee
& Harich, 2010; Royle & Laing, 2014), while research focusing on job positions and
new skills marketing graduates require to succeed in the digital domain remains scarce.

1 This study seeks to address this research gap and to contribute to the existing body of
2
3 knowledge on the employability of new graduates in the marketing discipline,
4
5 proposing a new framework for the digital marketing skills and professions. Taking the
6
7 firm perspective, this study makes a four-fold contribution. First, the research offers a
8
9 comprehensive and integrated view of the digital evolutionary process and of the
10
11 changing nature of marketing job positions and skills marketing graduates require to
12
13 develop in the new digital domain. Second, the work analyses marketing job
14
15 opportunities for graduates comparing highly versus lowly digitalised firms in their
16
17 request for marketing roles and functions. Third, the research empirically examines
18
19 knowledge, capabilities and skills marketing graduates should develop to be hired and
20
21 succeed in their careers in the new digital era and how this skillset differs according to
22
23 the level of firm digitalisation. Finally, the study presents a new framework related to
24
25 “digital” marketing skills and professions centred around the omni-channel customer
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27 experience and its touchpoints.
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35 The paper is structured as follows. After a review of the relevant literature, results from
36
37 a survey of marketing practitioners are presented to provide a picture of the new
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39 marketing professions and job positions created by the digital transformation of
40
41 marketing. Findings are discussed and organised into a framework highlighting the
42
43 most valuable and strategic skills and personal characteristics to face the challenges in a
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45 digital domain. The framework can guide both firms in reconfiguring their
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47 organisational structure with new positions and skills, and academic institutions in
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49 educating marketing students in a more effective way.
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Review of the relevant literature

The ever changing and complex needs of the contemporary workplace force business graduates to be willing to develop adequate skills to succeed in their career (Bennett, 2010; Turley & Geiger, 2006). The debate in the past ten years has mainly taken place in journals dedicated to pedagogy and education, and revolves around a number of issues, such as employability factors (Andrews & Higson, 2008; Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin, & Zehner, 2013), graduates' skills gap (Evans, Nancarrow, Tapp, & Stone, 2002; Kelley & Bridges, 2005; Walker et al., 2009), and academic-practical world gap (Coates & Koemer, 1996; N. J. Payne, Campbell, Bal, & Piercy, 2011; Wellman, 2010; Wymbs, 2011).

In this regard, previous literature has provided evidence and empirical studies related to the desired skills required to operate in the marketing field. For instance, Bennett (2002) developed a list of 14 attributes to be successful in marketing and found that initiative, motivation, communication, IT and presentation skills were significantly the most demanded competences in marketing advertisements. Based on a content analysis of 250 online-advertised posts for entry-level marketing positions, Wellman (2010) found that the work planning and prioritisation, general and written communications, office ICT applications are the mostly searched attributes, while creativity and innovation, as well as attention to detail are the top desired personality traits. In another study based on an extensive survey of students, faculties and recruiters, soft skills also ranked at the top, including taking initiative, team-working, interpersonal skills, oral communication, motivation and personal selling (Hopkins, Raymond, & Carlson, 2011). A very similar result was obtained by Finch, Hamilton, Baldwin, and Zehner (2013), who interviewed 115 employers. Even if soft skills may be considered as a support to knowledge,

1 nonethless they are a pre-requisite for a successful marketing professional (Walker et
2 al., 2009). Although these studies provide an articulated picture of the marketing
3 profession, they missed to consider the impact of the digital transformation on
4 employability.
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10 Even if technology may be considered as an enabler of classic marketing theories and
11 principles, its impact requires marketing graduates to develop an extensive knowledge
12 of the specific digital tools and of how they can support marketing strategy and
13 operations (Harrigan & Hulbert, 2011; Royle & Laing, 2014). However, the digital
14 revolution has disrupted the marketing landscape, transforming not only the way
15 marketing strategies are developed and implemented, but also the role of marketing
16 within an organisation (Harrigan & Hulbert, 2011; G. Kerr & Kelly, 2017), and
17 revolutionising marketing research, marketing communication, customer relationship
18 management, and channel management (Quinn, Dibb, Simkin, Canhoto, & Analogbei,
19 2016). If on one side, technology is an enabler of marketing processes, on the other side,
20 it requires a dedicated and deep knowledge and skillset. Focused on customer centrality,
21 the “New Marketing DNA” (Harrigan and Hulbert, 2011) puts forward an emerging set
22 of capabilities, including digital marketing communication, data mining, analytics,
23 predictive analysis, online channels. Acquiring these capabilities demands high
24 technical skills, leading to the identification and development of specific technical skills
25 and an in-depth knowledge of new Internet-based technologies (Pefanis Schlee &
26 Harich, 2010). Nonetheless, such technical skills must go hand-in-hand with the
27 development of marketing skills (Brady, Fellenz, & Brookes, 2008). In this regard,
28 Royle and Laing (2014) propose a “Digital Marketer Model”: an integrated strategic
29 approach that identifies both strategic business knowledge of digital marketing and
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1 specific technical skills, such as technological knowledge (e.g. SEO, mobile apps, 3d
2 animation, video editing), measurement monitoring and evaluation skills, and strategic
3 integration of digital marketing skills within the existing marketing approaches. Benson,
4 Morgan, and Filippaios (2014) highlight how ICT, social media skills, and usage of
5 Internet-based technologies are increasingly considered important in marketing job
6 positions. In this context, marketing roles and functions are working towards including
7 and integrating traditional marketing skills with new digital skills; the digital world
8 crosses the traditional professions of marketing and either creates completely new roles,
9 or forces to redesign traditional professions in the marketing area (Mulhern, 2009;
10 Royle & Laing, 2014).

11 This study offers a comprehensive and integrated view of the changing nature of the
12 marketing jobs and of the skills required to marketing graduates in the new digital
13 domain. Some firms have embraced the digital world and are highly involved in digital
14 marketing, while others have approached digitalisation at a slower pace. This study
15 compares the needs and requirements in terms of job positions among highly versus
16 lowly digitalised firms and points out the necessary skills that marketing graduates
17 should develop to succeed in a new labour market centred on customers and digital
18 technology.

19 **Method**

20 This research adopts a multi-method approach that integrates a qualitative and a
21 quantitative component to empirically analyse the changing nature of marketing roles
22 and functions and of the skills required to marketing graduates in the new digital
23 domain. The first research component applies a qualitative approach based on content
24 analysis to explore the job positions and skillset that are in great demand on the job

1 market. The second research component adopts a quantitative approach based on a
2
3 cross-sectional survey aimed to analyse job opportunities for marketing graduates and
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5 provide a better understanding of the skills marketing graduates should be equipped
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7 with to succeed in the new digital era. The research setting is the Italian job market.
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10 11 *Qualitative research component*

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13 A content analysis of job advertisements published both online and offline was carried
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15 out using Nvivo Capture and Nvivo11 (McMillan, 2000). According to Raju (2014, p.
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17 166), this qualitative approach is very useful to understand what is actually being
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19 practiced in the labour market.
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23 The study analysed the content of “Work with us”, “Job Opportunities” and “Careers”
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25 web pages of the top 100 firms of “Future Brand Index 2015” ranking, of the Big Four
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27 consulting companies, of the five top Italian Universities and of the three main
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29 employment marketplaces (LinkedIn, Adecco, and Monster). The search engine of these
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31 websites, keywords and filters were applied to select marketing job opportunities
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33 dedicated to graduates (Pefanis Schlee & Harich, 2010). The keyword “marketing” was
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35 used as the primary screening criterion. Afterwards, only advertisements requiring or
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37 indicating preference for marketing graduates were included in the sample. Data
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39 collection covered one month, retrieving a total sample of 359 job advertisements,
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41 which were organised in a database listing company name, job title, date of publication,
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43 geographical location, type of work, and basic requirements and desired skills.
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51 In addition to the online job advertisements analysis, the “Corriere della Sera”, a daily
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53 newspaper nationally known also for issuing job advertisements every week, was used
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55 as a source to capture longitudinal trends in the job market for marketing graduates.
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57 Applying the same selection criteria as per the online analysis, all relevant job
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1 advertisements published into the “Corriere TrovoLavoro” section of the newspaper
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3 were retrieved in 2010 and 2015. A total of 417 marketing job advertisements were
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5 added to the database previously created.
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8 As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), data were analysed looking for recurring
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10 themes and concepts, specifically with reference to work type, basic requirements and
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12 desired skills. Afterwards, content analysis was performed and a coding was carried out
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14 by identifying all of the texts associated with these particular topics using codes within
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16 nodes to tag job descriptions, by grouping together keywords, synonyms and related
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18 attributes and thus assigning to each node either the most representative job title or the
19
20 most representative skill title (Wellman, 2010).
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27 *Quantitative research component*

28 Data collection was conducted through an online survey of marketing practitioners. The
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30 sample was sourced through LeFAC database managed by the TBS group in order to
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32 reach marketing practitioners from a wide range of industries and different company
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34 size. The LeFAC database stores information about key executives and senior
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36 executives of firms that operate in Italy and invest in marketing and communication
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38 activities. A selection criterion was applied to ensure that participants were in the
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40 position to identify and evaluate the requirements for a successful marketing career,
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42 specifically for marketing graduates (Kelley & Bridges, 2005).
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48 A preliminary questionnaire was designed based on the literature review and the
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50 findings emerged from the qualitative research component. To examine the reliability
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52 and the clarity of the questionnaire, a pre-test was carried out involving 10 marketing
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54 practitioners. The final flow of the questionnaire was articulated in four sections: a)
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1 digitalisation; b) job opportunities; c) graduates' knowledge and skills; d)
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3 demographics.
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6 The survey was distributed to 16,183 contacts via the online survey platform
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8 Limesurvey. The final sample comprised 1,562 valid responses, with an overall
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10 response rate of about 10%. This response rate is in line with the common standards for
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12 online-based surveys (Anseel, Lievens, Schollaert, & Choragwicka, 2010; Cychota &
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14 Harrison, 2006). The majority of respondents hold a marketing position (45%); the rest
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16 of the sample works in a sales position (23%), in a communication position (15%), in a
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18 general management position (7%), or in other positions (10%).
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23 An index to compute the level of firm digitalisation was created by averaging the
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25 number of activities conducted using digital channels and the number of digital
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27 channels used by the company for their marketing activities. The digital index allows to
28
29 distinguish between lowly, moderately and highly digitalised firms. Lowly digitalised
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31 companies (n=673) use on average at least 3 digital channels to conduct between 1 and
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33 4 marketing activities, showing a digitalisation index ranging between 0 and 0.42.
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35 Moderately digitalised firms (n=799) use on average at least 5 digital channels to
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37 conduct between 5 and 7 marketing activities, showing a digitalisation index ranging
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39 between 0.43 and 0.79. Highly digitalised firms (n= 90) use on average at least 7 digital
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41 channels to conduct between 8 and 9 marketing activities, showing a digitalisation index
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43 ranging between 0.80 and 1. Data were analysed using a one-way analysis of variance
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45 (ANOVA) and an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, &
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47 Tatham, 2010).
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Results and discussion

Longitudinal analysis of job opportunities for marketing graduates

According to our data, the last 15 years have been characterised by an increasingly rapid evolution towards digital transformation of business processes. In 2000, the Corriere della Sera dedicated 23 to 25 pages/per week to job advertisements, representing a fundamental tool to assist both demand and supply in the job market. Job advertisement content was rich, detailed, often celebrated companies' achievements, and was written in a way to target a specific applicant type. In 2010, 10 years later, the situation has dramatically changed. The Corriere della Sera pages dedicated to job advertisements decreased significantly (on average 5 instead of 24) and were positioned at the end of the newspaper. From 2010 to 2015, the newspaper pages dedicated to job advertisements have decreased further by almost 30% (on average from 124 pages/per year to 88). Within these pages, job advertisements focused on job titles related to the marketing function have fallen by around 7% (from 216 ads/per year to 201), with on average 4 marketing advertisements per week (from 4.1 ads/per week in 2010 to 3.8 in 2015). Despite this decrease in offline job advertisements, from 2015 the newspaper pages directed readers to browse the online job search engine "trovolavoro.it". These results suggest that the job market has undergone a digital transformation, by definitely moving online on dedicated websites. Since the digital transformation has become imperative (Fitzgerald, Kruschwitz, Bonnet, & Welch, 2013), offline job postings have lost their effectiveness in favour of online platforms.

In relation to the 359 online job advertisements, among the working positions that are in great demand, Brand/Product manager ranks first (15%), followed by Trade marketing manager (11%), Marketing specialist (10%), and Business development specialist (8%).

1 More "traditional" job titles hold the top five positions, while the following job titles are
2
3 more "digital", "social", and "customer-centred", such as Customer experience
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5 manager, Digital marketing manager, Content producer, Customer relationship
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7 manager, Social media manager, E-commerce manager, SEO/SEM manager,
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9 Community manager, and Programmatic advertising manager. The 417 offline job
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11 advertisements and the results from the survey portray a similar picture, with
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13 Brand/Product manager ranking first in terms of popularity, followed by digital job
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15 positions. In fact, the majority of the respondents identified digital and online marketing
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17 professions as the most promising jobs, with 27% of the sample recognising Digital
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19 marketing manager as the key job of the future, followed by Social media manager
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21 (11%), and Big data analyst (8%).
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27 Considering the level of digitalisation, Brand/Product manager steadily ranks first for
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29 both lowly and moderately digitalised firms (14.6% and 11.6% respectively), followed
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31 by Web/Digital/Online marketing manager (6.5% and 7.6% respectively). When
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33 considering highly digitalised firms, the first position is held by Web/Digital/Online
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35 marketing manager (13.3%), followed by Brand/Product manager (12.2%), and Social
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37 media content producer (12.2%).
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42 These results suggest that Brand/Product manager has been the most requested role in
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44 the marketing area over the past years and it will also be in the near future. After more
45
46 than 80 years, the brand management function is now more alive than ever (Low &
47
48 Fullerton, 1994). Brand/Product manager is not an emerging profession in the area of
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50 marketing, but it remains key to address the challenges generated by the digital
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52 revolution.
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1 Moreover, digital-oriented careers are strongly emerging, with Digital Marketing
2 manager has been identified as one of the most promising job positions of the future,
3 followed by Social Media manager, and by Big Data analyst. Besides these highly
4 technical jobs, the digital transformation has pervaded all marketing activities, opening
5 the door to other professions that either complete or integrate the physical and virtual
6 realities, and blend the offline and the online worlds. This is the case of marketing roles
7 such as Customer Experience Manager, Customer Relationship Manager, and E-
8 commerce Manager who are responsible for managing customers across a variety of
9 touchpoints and channels. From an omnichannel perspective, nurturing a customer-
10 focused culture within the organisation represents one of the top challenges of customer
11 experience management and one of the main obstacles in terms of organisational
12 structure (Manser Payne, Peltier, & Barger, 2017; Peppers & Rogers, 2017). Hence, this
13 study suggests that there is a potential intention among firms to re-think and reconfigure
14 their organisational structure, adding new positions allowing for a more integrated
15 management of the customer experience.
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39 ***The new digital skillset***

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41 Based on the literature review and on the survey, the study identifies 29 skills that
42 graduates should develop to start a career in the marketing field.
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45 An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using a principal components extraction and a
46 promax rotation was carried out to uncover the factorial structure of the 29 skills and
47 group them into categories. Five factors explaining 63.4% of the variance were
48 identified. Except the *stress resilience* item, all factor loadings have values higher than
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The identified factor structure was interpreted to label the five employability skill categories as follows: basic soft skills, analytical skills, digital and technical skills, core marketing skills, and customer insight skills (Table 1). Each employability skill category is discussed in the following sub-sections.

Table 1. Skills affecting marketing graduates' employability.

Category	Factor Loadings*	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean	Standard Deviation
Basic soft skills	3.02 (E)	0.770	6.06	0.95
Initiative	0.662			
Teamwork	0.708			
Interpersonal skills	0.714			
Motivation	0.627			
Flexibility	0.713			
Oral communication and presentation skills	0.651			
Stress resilience	0.487			
Digital and technical skills	2.56 (E)	0.724	5.94	1.02
Knowledge of social media	0.707			
Knowledge of Mobile	0.529			
Knowledge of E-commerce	0.705			
Knowledge of Analytics and real time practices	0.716			
Knowledge of Internet & software knowledge	0.660			
SEO & SEM	0.582			
Core marketing skills	2.51 (E)	0.717	5.75	1.11
Planning, organisation and time management	0.675			
Contents creation across channel	0.633			
Creative thinking	0.650			
Precision and attention to detail	0.661			
Sales knowledge and management skills	0.659			
Ability to manage multiple marketing tasks	0.598			
Analytical skills	2.17 (E)	0.716	6.02	0.96
Data-driven/data-oriented	0.744			
Good conceptual and analytical skills	0.751			
Statistical knowledge	0.706			
Problem-solving	0.744			
Critical thinking	0.705			
Ability to synthesise information into meaningful and actionable reports	0.714			
Customer insights skills	1.72 (E)	0.514	5.44	1.52
Knowledge of company and of its customers	0.675			
Knowledge of research methods	0.663			
Knowledge of customer touchpoints and journey	0.708			
CRM and relational skills	0.575			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.0835		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	4378.619		
	df	190		
	Sig.	.000		

* E means Eigenvalue

1 *Basic soft skills*

2
3 In line with previous research (Chamorro- Premuzic, Arteche, Bremner, Greven, &
4
5 Furnham, 2010; Finch et al., 2013), basic soft skills are more and more valued by
6
7 employers and are an important predictor of employability. They include graduates’
8
9 willingness to take initiative, team working capabilities, interpersonal skills, motivation,
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11 flexibility, verbal and written communication skills, and stress resilience. Findings
12
13 reveal that basic soft skills ranks first: even if basic soft skills are not typically
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15 interpreted as academic skills (Finch et al., 2013), academic marketing curricula should
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17 integrate these skills in their course portfolios, by developing appropriate pedagogical
18
19 methods. The result suggests that having and demonstrating strong and effective basic
20
21 soft skills will help marketing graduates to be hired and to be more competitive in the
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23 job market.
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31 *Analytical skills*

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33 Analytical skills include capabilities and knowledge related to data analysis, synthesis
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35 interpretation, and presentation. Harrigan and Hulbert (2011) highlight how analytical
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37 skills are in short supply among marketing graduates and suggest marketing educators
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39 changing marketing curricula by integrating data analysis in marketing courses and
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41 developing new courses completely dedicated to analytical skills. This is still an urging
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43 need, as data informed marketing, statistical knowledge, problem-solving, and ability to
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45 synthesise information into meaningful and actionable reports are still greatly valued by
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47 marketing practitioners. The evidence that the quantitative and analytical nature of
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49 marketing (Floyd & Gordon, 1998; Harrigan & Hulbert, 2011; Mitchell & Strauss,
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51 2001) is not separated from marketing management stimulates reflection on the
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53 configuration of the academic marketing curricula.
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1 In marketing management, analytical skills are of paramount importance to effectively
2 develop and implement successful strategies. Although marketing graduates are usually
3 exposed to capstone courses in statistics and mathematics, the analytical skills required
4 by the job market go beyond the basics and value the ability of critically interpreting
5 data, figures and statistics to inform marketing decisions. With data becoming the
6 world's most valuable resource, what is on shortage is the capability to visualise,
7 articulate, and solve complex problems based on data using the most effective
8 techniques and critically interpret results to serve businesses' purposes.
9

10 *Digital and technical skills*

11 Digital and technical skills are the third most important employability skill category in
12 the recommended skillset for marketing graduates. This category concerns new
13 technology-related skills, digital marketing capabilities and knowledge and other
14 specific skills currently needed to face the digital environment.
15

16 At the end of the 1990s, the rapid growth of the Internet and the digitisation of the
17 marketing relationships (Varadarajan & Yadav, 2009) have stimulated business to
18 dramatically reconfigure their marketing strategies. The knowledge of social media,
19 mobile applications, e-commerce, analytics and real time practices, and more in general
20 of Internet and software is not only a technical knowledge, but it reflects a broader
21 domain, in which content and technicalities are merged into a new holistic approach
22 toward content and marketing communication (Rowley, 2008; Royle & Laing, 2014). In
23 line with the extant literature (Gilbert, 2017; Quinton & Simkin, 2017), the findings also
24 suggest that marketing graduates should understand the nuances of the new web
25 paradigms, how these paradigms interact, how each of the social and digital channels
26 operates and interacts with each other and the synergies that could be created. In this
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1 light, marketing graduates should develop a wide variety of digital and technical skills
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3 to meet these evolving job requirements.
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6 7 *Core marketing skills* 8

9 Core marketing skills are related more to the organisation of marketing activities than to
10 the specific knowledge of marketing discipline, which is taken for granted. In fact, these
11 skills include creative thinking to generate contents relevant for different customers'
12 touchpoints, effective planning and time management, and precision and attention to
13 details. Also, in this category of skills, it is evident that soft skills seem to be in a higher
14 demand than the knowledge of marketing management theories, probably because while
15 marketing knowledge can be learned through the study, soft skills are much harder to
16 learn because they require long training, good integration between emotional and social
17 intelligence and effective marketing practice. This result confirms that there is still a
18 disparity between the degree of importance attributed by marketing practitioners to
19 emotional intelligence competencies and the levels displayed by marketing graduates
20 (Jameson, Carthy, McGuinness, & McSweeney, 2016).
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40 *Customer insight skills* 41

42 Customers have always been the focus of the marketing discipline. In fact, the AMA
43 definition of marketing puts customer value as the core of the marketing concept
44 (American Marketing Association, 2013). The fact that customer insight skills emerge
45 as a separate employability category reveals that customer focus is not enough: the
46 choice of the most appropriate research methods, both qualitative and quantitative, and
47 the knowledge of customers are necessary but not sufficient conditions. Customer
48 intelligence must then be put into practice by connecting in the most effective and
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1 efficient way the company and its brand with the right customers through CRM
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3 (customer relationship management) and relational skills. These considerations are at
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5 the core of the customer-led marketing approach of the “new Marketing DNA”
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7 proposed by Harrigan and Hulbert (2011), according to which customer insight skills
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9 seem to be one of the genes to be developed to connect the organisation to its
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11 customers.
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17 **Employability skills and level of firm digitalisation**

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19 A one-way ANOVA was conducted to assess how the importance of each employability
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21 skill category included in the digital skillset differs according to the level of firm
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23 digitalisation. The results show a significant difference across digital level groups for
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25 basic soft skills ($F(2, 947) = 3.716, p = 0.025$), digital and technical skills ($F(2, 1165) =$
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27 $40.616, p = 0.000$), and core marketing skills ($F(2, 1136) = 11.188, p = 0.000$) (Table 2).
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30 The importance of analytical skills and customer insights skills does not significantly
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32 differ across digitalisation levels. Thus, findings reveal that there is a statistically
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34 significant effect of firm digitalisation level on the importance of three out of five
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36 employability skill categories.
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Table 2. One-way ANOVA.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	p-value
Basic soft skills	6.538	2	3.269	3.716	.025
Digital and technical skills	56.511	2	28.256	40.616	.000
Core marketing skills	15.844	2	7.922	11.188	.000
Analytical skills	1.672	2	.836	.959	.383
Customer insights skills	10.214	2	5.107	2.158	.116

Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicate that the mean scores of basic soft skills for lowly digitalised (M=5.80; SD=0.91) and moderately digitalised firms (M=5.81; SD=0.96) are significantly different than the highly digitalised firms' (M=6.11; SD=0.85). In terms of digital and technical skills, the three groups significantly differ from each other, with highly digitalised firm giving significantly more importance to this employability skill category (M=6.29; SD=0.58). The same pattern is observed for core marketing skills, with highly digitalised attributing significantly stronger relevance to this employability skill category (M=6.13; SD=0.76) (Table 3).

Table 3. One-way ANOVA: means by firm digitalisation level.

	Lowly Digitalised	Moderately Digitalised	Highly Digitalised	F	p-value
Basic soft skills	5.80	5.81	6.11	3.716	.025
Digital and technical skills	5.54	5.88	6.29	40.616	.000
Core marketing skills	5.71	5.86	6.13	11.188	.000
Analytical skills	5.87	5.88	6.03	.959	.383
Customer insights skills	4.75	4.73	5.11	2.158	.116

Taken together, these results suggest that highly digitalised firms differ from other firms as they give primary importance to digital and technical skills, followed by core

1 marketing and basic soft skills. On the contrary, analytical skills are the most
2 appreciated by lowly digitalised firms, followed by basic soft skills. The results
3 highlight a key difference in focus when evaluating marketing graduate profiles
4 according to the level of firm digitalisation. This should be considered by brand new
5 graduates when targeting companies with their applications, as well as by universities
6 when developing specialised programs and courses aiming at educating marketing
7 managers of the future.
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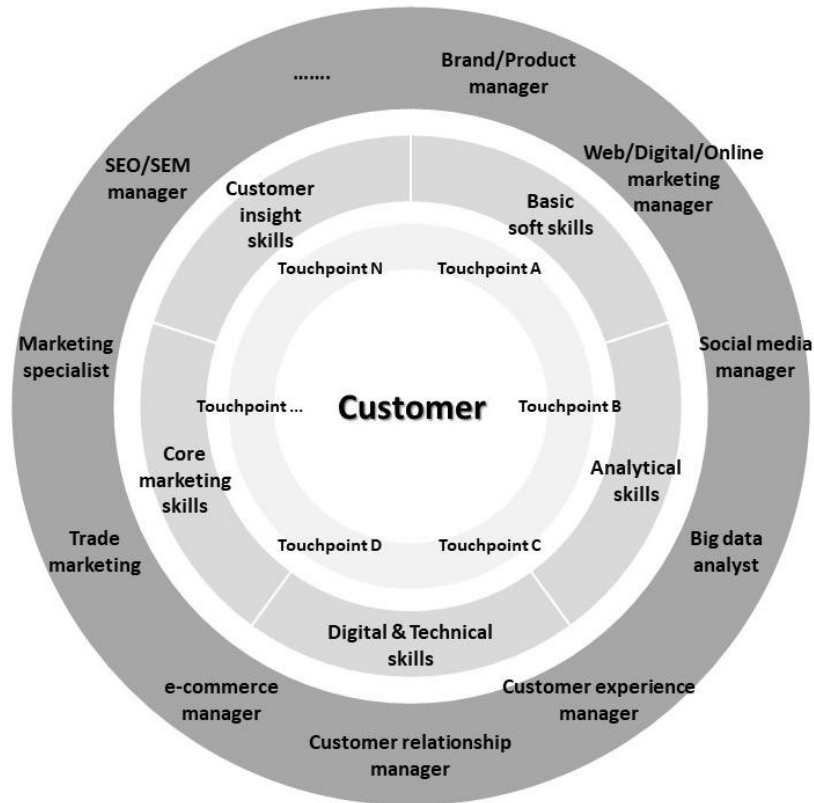
10 ***Toward an integrated model of customer-centred skills***

11 Based on our findings, this study proposes an integrated model of employability skills
12 in the marketing field (Figure 1).
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14 The model is rooted into the concept of customer-centricity and has at its core
15 customers surrounded by the touchpoints through which they connect with the
16 company/brand. The spokes of the wheel identify the five employability skill categories
17 that marketing graduates should develop during their studies to be hired: basic soft
18 skills, analytical skills, digital and technical skills, core marketing skills, and customer
19 insight skills. These skills do not qualify a specific marketing position, but rather define
20 the skillset that any marketing student should develop to enhance his/her employability
21 in the marketing field (Pefanis Schlee & Harich, 2010). Once marketing graduates are
22 equipped with the required skills, they are more likely to have access to a broad
23 portfolio of marketing job opportunities. The study also provides insights into how the
24 level of firm digitalisation impacts the importance given to the different employability
25 skill categories by marketing managers when recruiting and screening marketing
26 graduates' profiles. While highly digitalised firms prioritise digital and technical skills,
27 lowly digitalised firms appreciate analytical skills the most.
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1 The increasing awareness that the customer is the real asset of the company has
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3 stimulated companies to integrate the customer dimension into the more traditional
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5 brand management system (Low & Fullerton, 1994). With the development of the
6
7 digital technologies, customers have begun to interact with companies through both
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9 physical and virtual touchpoints, which customers combine in many different ways in
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11 their shopping journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The shopping journey can be
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13 interpreted as the relationship path that starts in a touchpoint and then develops and
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15 grows by crossing other touchpoints selected according to the needs that they can
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17 satisfy (Neslin et al., 2006). The rapidity with which customers shift from one
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19 touchpoint to another, from physical to digital, and from one device to another, requires
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21 a strong effort to understand the whole path without losing the sight of the single
22
23 customer. To reach a single view of the customer, all the marketing job positions
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25 identified must be tuned on the customer and the touchpoints he/she is using by
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27 combining the five categories of skills to maximise the value of customer knowledge.
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29 While extant literature has shown that a 100% single view of the customer is not always
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31 paying off (Neslin et al., 2006, p. 99), and that the biggest obstacle to consistent
32
33 customer experience is system and data integration (Harvard Business Review Analytic
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35 Services Report, 2014; Neslin et al., 2006; Neslin & Shankar, 2009), there is no
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37 questions that customer experience management provides competitive advantage.
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39 Hence, if new marketing graduates possess both technical and core skills, they are better
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41 equipped to significantly contribute to the changes necessary for effective customer
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43 experience management.
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Figure 1. Integrated model of customer-centred skills.



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Conclusions

This paper aims to contribute to the debate over how the digital transformation is impacting the marketing profession and the job opportunities available to new graduates. In a world where mass education is becoming available in an unparalleled way, academic education is becoming business-like and gives increasingly attention to expectations of companies, employer stakeholders, governments, as well as students (Uncles, 2018). In addition, the digital revolution is bringing a dramatic change in how marketing is practiced and the nature of marketing roles within firms (Quinn et al., 2016).

By analysing the job market and the perceptions of marketing executives, the study assists both companies and universities with understanding the changing nature of the skills and capabilities required to start a successful career in marketing in the new digital domain. First, the study provides a longitudinal perspective on the evolution of the marketing profession. Although the job market has heavily moved to online platforms and specialised websites, the traditional job title of Brand/Product manager still holds a strong position no matter the level of digitalisation of a company. This clearly suggests that the strategic nature and core activities ascribed to the marketing profession are still in great demand in the new digital era. However, the skillset and capabilities required to conduct such activities has broadened. In fact, the marketing job market has been characterised by a proliferation of new job titles in recent years, proving that the marketing profession is expanding and offering increasingly specialised opportunities in digital, analytical and technical roles.

The study identifies five employability skills categories: basic soft skills, analytical skills, digital and technical skills, core marketing skills, and customer insight skills.

1 Even though, new skills and capabilities are arising, our findings suggest that basic soft
2 skills and core marketing skills are of critical importance in the new digital domain.
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6 New marketing graduates cannot miss to develop the building blocks of the marketing
7 profession, i.e. core capabilities linked to organisation, planning, critical thinking, and
8 strategic acumen. Companies also require new graduates to invest on and develop their
9 soft skills to succeed in a marketing career, with team-work, flexibility and
10 interpersonal skills being among the most appreciated talents. Alongside these
11 competences, the study shows how analytical, digital and technical skills are in high
12 demand. However, these new competences are not replacing the traditional marketing
13 skills, but rather an integration between soft, managerial and technical skills is
14 encouraged. This is particularly true for highly digitalised firms, which are leading the
15 charge in harmonising the marketing skillset by offering digital, social, and customer-
16 centred job opportunities. Indeed, highly digitalised firms give primary importance to
17 digital and technical skills, followed by core marketing and basic soft skills. The
18 integration and harmonisation of the marketing skillset represents a real challenge that
19 both practitioners and academics should face to ensure that traditional and digital
20 marketing activities collaborate and create synergies to deliver value to current and
21 prospective customers.
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44 Besides the relevance to practitioners in generating a deeper understanding of today's
45 marketing job market, this study has critical implications for universities and marketing
46 students. The integrated model of customer-centred skills can assist universities in
47 identifying the current gaps in academic curricula and re-designing degree programs to
48 equip graduates with the appropriate skillset to operate in the digital domain. This will
49 facilitate bridging the historical gap between theory and practice, which has been one of
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1 the most fervently debated issues in the discipline (Hunt, 2002). The study also provides
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3 clear guidelines for prospective students when selecting degree programs and for brand
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5 new graduates approaching the job market and investing in their career to become the
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7 marketing managers of the future.
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10 11 **Limitations and implications for further research**

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13 This research has some limitations, which offer opportunities for future research. First,
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15 the data consider only the marketing managers and recruiters' perspective with
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17 reference to the Italian job market. Future research will benefit from examining views in
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19 different countries and in different company functions, such as strategy, finance,
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21 accounting, human resources and operations. Analysing different company functions
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23 could also contribute to a better understanding of the specific skillset required to
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25 graduates in the broader discipline of business management.
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32 Finally, the study does not focus on a specific industry and does not investigate the
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34 extent to which different industries may request different categories of skills from
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36 marketing graduates. In fact, some of the job positions and some of the skills required to
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38 marketing graduates could be prioritised differently on the basis of the industry wherein
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40 a firm operates, transforming the store of knowledge and the wealth of experience that
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42 future marketers should develop. Future research will contribute to understand if and
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44 how job positions and skills have different priorities in different sectors of activity.
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46 Although the study provided a longitudinal perspective on the evolution of the
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48 marketing job positions, further research is required to understand future patterns and
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50 identify emerging opportunities for current marketing students.
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2

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