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Digital Marketing Skills in High Demand: Exploratory Study of Multiple Competencies for a Marketing Professional

By Heidi Neuvonen^{*} & Maria Pecoraro[±]

In recent years, there has been growing interest in studying digital marketing education. Prior research approaches marketing education from the perspective of change and challenges. Digitalization causes changes in pedagogy and curriculum design and creates challenges for educators and students to stay up to date. What is not well understood is what employers demand for digital marketing skills. The purpose of this article is to explore marketing education and especially the challenges from a multifaceted perspective of students, teachers and marketing professionals working in business. The qualitative data consists of fourteen open theme interviews with marketing professionals from different industries, four in-depth interviews of marketing teachers and two focus group interviews with teachers, and two focus group interviews with students. We have identified six different challenges that contemporary marketing practices pose in business, marketing education and learning. We describe these challenges as opposing themes that represent broad skills needed in the marketing profession. In addition, the opposing themes contribute to explain why the marketing field is so challenging. This study contributes to the marketing education literature by providing a deeper understanding of the marketing field for curriculum development.

Keywords: digital marketing, marketing education, marketing capability, marketing career, marketing skills gap

Introduction

Digitalization, technological change and artificial intelligence (AI) are revolutionizing the field of marketing and the related labour market. Marketing is evolving at an unprecedented rate, which inevitably creates shortcomings and gaps in companies' marketing capacity, available technology, strategy development and implementation. In addition, the change creates gaps in marketing capabilities and education. Businesses and educators are in a situation where the current practices of education, business and marketing no longer apply. Technological advances, innovative business models, cloud services, big data and other factors have changed the nature of marketing (Crittenden and Peterson 2019).

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Research Problem

In our research we aim to identify challenges that learners, teachers, and marketing professionals in business face in the rapidly changing environment. We explore marketing education, and especially its challenges, from a multifaceted perspective that includes students, teachers and marketing professionals working in business. Our research question is the following:

What are the talent gaps and challenges that learners, teachers, and marketing professionals in business face in digital marketing?

Objective

Our goal is to explore and describe these talent gaps or challenges by analysing the empirical data collected from students, teachers and marketing professionals. First, an attempt was made to shed light on why digital marketing is difficult to study, teach and implement in practice. However, the focus in this study is not to find out the root causes of the challenges but to identify them from the empirical data. Second, the result can establish a context for a deeper understanding of the digital marketing capabilities gap. We attempted to shed light on the phenomenon by collecting data from three different perspectives. The existing knowledge has its roots in marketing education and learning research but can and is supposed to work in practical teaching, internship and work situations. This kind of three-dimensional focus is contextually and temporally relevant.

Literature Review

The theoretical framework is built within the context of marketing education. The research on the teaching of marketing by and for marketing educators has been conducted more than 40 years through a variety of subject areas, methodologies and data. Gray et al. (2012) identified and highlighted key trends as they emerged over the years, and offered a categorization of the most popular areas. The top four categories were assessment, experiential learning, career development, and marketing mix – and related articles together made up 72% of the articles published in JME (from 1979 to 2012). In the category of Career Development, there were more articles focusing on faculty than on student needs. This study adopts a wider approach which combines three different perspectives. In addition to students and faculty needs, we follow Virtanen et al. (2020) who emphasize the importance of the working life perspective. We chose this approach as it is important in the field of marketing to be able to apply conceptual information in practice. In addition, the perspective of working life and the workplace as a learning environment is important because marketing as a field is currently undergoing a meaningful change due to digitalization and other technological developments. Smartphones, new business models, cloud services, artificial intelligence (AI) big data and other innovations have changed marketing and

business. The pace of holistic digital transformation is also challenging the ongoing renewal of marketing teaching and pedagogy (Crittenden and Crittenden 2015, Verhoef et al. 2021). Marketing professionals often gain their digital marketing knowledge on the job (Roetzer 2014, p. 3).

Digital Marketing Capabilities

Digital marketing is an evolving concept. It is defined by the Digital Marketing Institute (2018) as ‘marketing efforts that involve electronic devices or focus on online platforms, and the need for digital marketing cannot be ignored’. Alexander (2022) defines it as ‘in other words, any form of marketing that exists online’. The definition of the American Marketing Association (AMA) is similar to the previous two definitions: ‘Digital marketing refers to any marketing methods conducted through electronic devices which utilize some form of a computer. This includes online marketing efforts conducted on the internet.’ According to Wymbs (2011, p. 95), the key difference between digital and traditional marketing is the use of technologies to create digital relationships, with the latter being more oriented to mass communication.

The term *capability* is defined by Helfat and Peteraf (2003, p. 999) as ‘the ability of an organization to perform a coordinated set of tasks, utilizing organizational resources, for the purpose of achieving a particular end result’. Herhausena et al. (2020) modified the definition further in the context of B2B and digital marketing and defined it as ‘is the ability of a B2B firm to perform a coordinated set of digital-related tasks (operational or dynamic), utilizing digital resources, for achieving a competitive advantage’. They emphasize the importance of capabilities, since these endow companies with the means to adapt to market changes that stem from digitalization, new technologies and changing consumer behaviour.

Based on a systematic literature review, Herhausena et al. (2020) identified and classified critical digital marketing capabilities. They identified four themes that emerged from the articles: channels, social media, digital relationships and digital technologies. In addition to these, Kurtzke and Setkute (2021) added one more theme: digital marketing analytics capabilities. They acknowledge the limitations of this categorization, which is based only on published research. Thus, the managerial practice of new digital capabilities may be neglected. Daellenbach (2018) brought together previous research and identified four key skill sets. She suggests the following categorization: (1) Thinking and learning skills are so-called meta-skills since they rely on cognition and are not discipline specific. (2) Personal skills include communication skills, the ability to deliver presentations and to work in teams. (3) Marketing knowledge is related to job-specific skills. It consists of theories of marketing but also the ability to apply them in practice. (4) Task-specific skills include tools and techniques which are used when applying marketing knowledge. In the Daellenbach (2018) model overall, meta-skills, that is, skills of learning, thinking and collaborating, are the core around which marketing knowledge and technical skills are built. In a research article on problem-based teaching, Rohm et al. (2021) also emphasize the importance of

teaching marketing meta-skills. In the study, important meta-skills are divided into four parts: creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills. Integrating the use of technology-based tools into the curriculum is difficult since, for example, Google Ads, Facebook Ads, and other social media advertising tools are changing so fast. Education should enable the use of technology-based tools at a sufficient level alongside the more time-consuming learning of meta-skills.

Prior research acknowledges the importance of understanding the opportunities digital marketing presents, but there has been only a little attention on the actual related competences that firms need to be successful. Most of the existing literature reviews focus on published research only, thus neglecting the important perspective of digital capabilities in managerial practice (Herhausena et al. 2020). This study adapts the view that the managerial perspective is also important.

The Digital Marketing Capabilities Gap and Related Challenges

The need to approach marketing in a new way has been acknowledged as early as in the 1990s (Wymbs 2001, p. 95). The world in which marketing operates has changed, however, marketing research, education and practice have not kept up (Wind 2008, Kurtzke and Setkte 2021). Although there are studies and articles on the marketing capabilities gap, there remains a lack of clarity about what actions need to be taken. According to Roetzer (2014, pp. 3–16), the lack of formal education on digital marketing has affected marketers' abilities to execute critical digital marketing functions. Prior research (Rohm et al. 2021, Kurtzke and Setkte 2021) has also stated that it is important for business schools to maintain relations to practice so as to remain relevant to both their students and the needs of industry. An unprecedented rate of change is creating gaps in marketing talent, technology and strategy. Schlee and Harich (2010) examined the skills and knowledge that employers require for marketing positions. They concluded there were notable differences between the requirements for various levels of marketing jobs. Their findings provided one explanation for the difficulty older workers have in finding marketing jobs. Older people seem to lack the technical skills required for many marketing positions. In addition, there is a need for ongoing training in areas of marketing knowledge. The role of marketing networks such as the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) (2023) and AMA (2023) is significant in training marketing professionals.

Herhausena et al. (2020) addressed these gaps by reviewing 129 high-quality articles that investigated digital marketing capabilities and related resources. In addition to the literature review, they conducted management interviews and a survey and revealed two marketing capabilities gaps: the practice gap, which identifies the deficit between managers' 'current' practices and their 'ideal' digital marketing capabilities; and the knowledge gap, which demonstrates a significant divide between the digital marketing transformations in industrial firms and the extant scholarly knowledge that underpins this.

Based on literature review, Herhausena et al. (2020) propose that digital marketing skills are in high demand, and it is important to understand the phenomenon from various perspectives (educators, students, marketing

professionals). Furthermore, they propose that digital marketing capabilities and capabilities gaps may be slightly different depending on the perspective. Consequently, it is assumed that deeper understanding of the multiple competencies for a marketing professional is inadequately recognized in the literature.

Methodology

The research process consisted of three phases, and it used qualitative methods in both data collection and analysis since the aim was to study the phenomenon in depth and detail (Patton 2002). The aim of the first phase was to identify the key categories of marketing competencies based on a literature review. Following the guidelines from the literature, we developed a discussion guide to organize the interviews and the focus group sessions in such a way that they covered all the topics of interest.

The aim of the second phase was to collect and analyse empirical data. Past studies (Daellenbach 2018, Wymbs 2011, Zahay et al. 2022) have focused on collecting data from relevant literature, curriculum designs and faculty. According to Patton (2002, p. 14), it is important that the selection consists of people who know about the phenomenon and/or that they have experience. Thus, we decided to collect the data from people with one of three backgrounds: marketing professionals, marketing teachers, and students of business management and marketing. The data consists of fourteen open theme interviews with marketing professionals from different industries, four in-depth interviews of marketing teachers and two focus group interviews with teachers and two focus group interviews with students. The emphasis in the selection of the respondents was on quality. The respondents were chosen based on their ability to provide information on the research topic and on their representativeness in relation to the studied phenomenon. The aim of the third phase was to analyse the data and present the results and conclusions.

Results

The findings indicate that the requirements for present-day marketing skills are almost contradictory. The requirements from a job seeker's perspective are broad and unclear, as illustrated in the following reflection by a marketing professional:

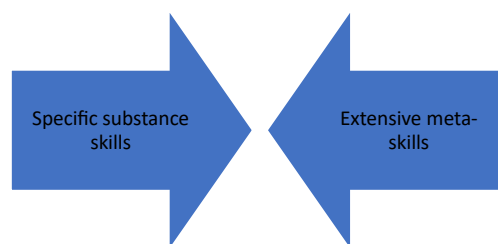
We should have a very wide range of skills and not just look at marketing as a silo, but as I said, we need people who can interpret the data. We need different generalists and so on. So maybe expanding to the so-called toolkit is what is required. (Interview: marketing professional)

We have identified six different challenges that contemporary marketing practices pose in business, marketing education and learning. We describe these

Challenges as opposing themes that represent broad skills needs in the marketing profession. We wanted to present the results specifically as opposing themes to highlight why it is challenging for marketing stakeholders to work, teach and study in the field. These opposing themes describe the challenges of the marketing field in depth. In addition, they set the marketing field apart from all the other fields that are also experiencing rapid change. In other fields, stakeholders are not involved in such major opposing phenomena.

The challenges of digital marketing education and practical implementation at the workplace are as follows:

- 1) Challenges related to the management of professional, specific substance skills vs. extensive meta-skills (e.g., interaction, teamwork, self-direction)



In practice, marketing is mainly done in collaboration, which requires meta-skills. Cooperation takes place in many different directions, within the organization, hierarchically both up and down, between all the different activities and between different stakeholders. In the data, the skills that refer to interaction are manifested both as skills and as a person's personality traits. Teamwork skills are highlighted as a key skill in collaboration, with one interviewee using the term 'digital collaboration'. So, professionals need to be able to network, outsource functions and brief assignments to different professionals and personalities. Furthermore, teamwork enables the development of skills.

What kind of type you would like to hire for work, then of course you want to hire the one with teamwork skills and anyway that they are so called good guy. (Interview: marketing professional)

I tip my cap to all the graduates who end up in a company where there are no other marketers and if you get results there, then I say that it is more challenging than having a longer background or ending up with a slightly bigger company. (Interview: marketing professional)

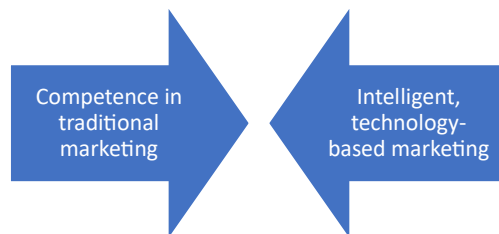
Students value business visitors and hands-on projects during the courses. In addition to being a chance to learn practical skills, visits provide an opportunity to network. It was recommended that students start networking at the beginning of their studies. Through networks, students hope to get internships and jobs.

The wider the network around you, the easier and better it is from your point of view. (Focus-group interview: student)

On the other hand, a portion of the work is done independently, focusing on specific expertise. Marketing offers a range of tasks for a person who is analytical, attentive and able to listen. The person is usually technology oriented and able to apply various techniques and tools. Indeed, many people prefer to work independently.

I don't want to work in a team all the time. (Focus-group interview: student)

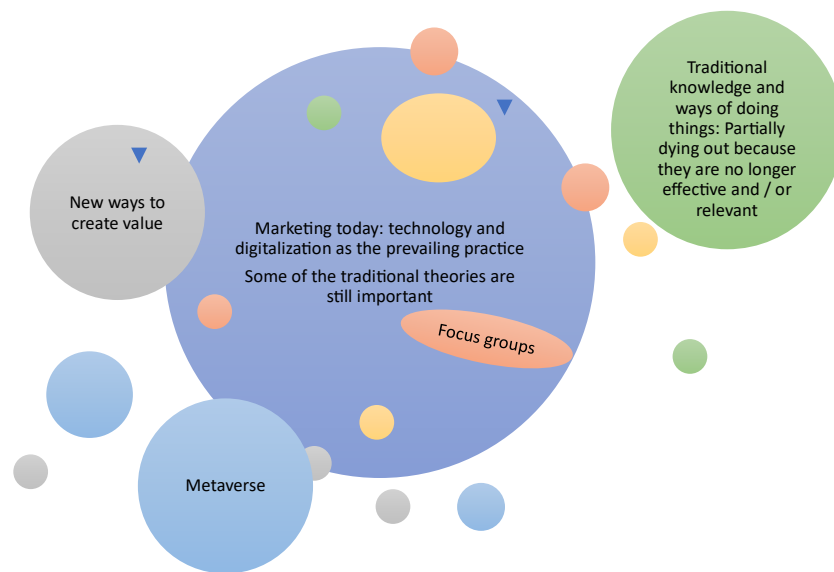
- 2) Competence in the marketing of traditional marketing vs. the utilization of new, intelligent technology-based marketing
- 3)



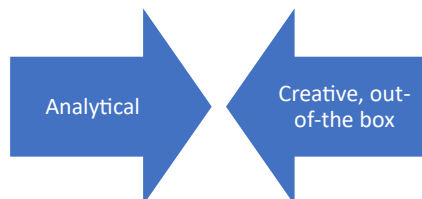
Marketing professionals in our data describe the reality of marketing as a combination of traditional and digital reality. Marketing can be understood as a large circle that has at its core technology and digitalization integrated into all activities (see Figure 1). Some of the traditional theories remain an important part of marketing, illustrated by the small, coloured balls within the largest circle. Some of the traditional knowledge and ways of doing things have already been pushed aside as ineffective and unnecessary. This marginalization is reflected in the figure as a larger ball outside of marketing. The main circle also features an arrow that points away, indicating that soon some knowledge will not appear in reality at all. In other words, the new generation does not even recognize the current knowledge and ways of doing things. New technologies and ways of working are constantly emerging. This powerful change is illustrated by the various balls floating around the main circle. They move fast in one direction and another, and every day the pattern looks different. Figure 1 summarizes and illustrates the view of marketing professionals on the reality of marketing.

The educators highlight the importance of understanding the role of traditional marketing theories. Digitalization cannot be the purpose of marketing.

Actually, all these digital things, they have to be a tool, but as I can see from my perspective, sometimes it [digitalization] becomes an end in itself. It does not matter what you do, just do it digitally and it will be okay. So, sometimes we choose a digital marketing tool instead of a traditional one just because it's digital. But we do not think about what the result or the outcome for the target group will be. So, that's why I'm afraid that we will just use digitalization instead of thinking about the person for whom this marketing is developed. (Interview: marketing educator)

Figure 1. *The Reality of Marketing as Described by the Marketing Professionals*

4) Analytical vs. creative out-of-the-box problem-solving skills



This pair of opposing themes is identified in several different contexts in the data. Without analytical skills, marketing professionals would not be able to take such actions today as they are now able to do. In addition to analytics, complete systems, so-called technological stacks, are being developed. This finding is in line with prior results (Kurtzke and Setkute 2021, Scheel and Harich 2010, p. 350) that many middle- and upper-level marketing jobs require technical skills, and they appear to be more important than documented in earlier research.

The value of analytical skills was acknowledged in the data of the present study but the opposite side of the phenomenon was also highlighted. You need to be able to approach new issues, content and customer value creation from many different and new perspectives. It requires a creative mind-set and problem-solving skills.

We often make systems that are nice in many ways, but they don't necessarily solve the business problem. (Interview: marketing professional)

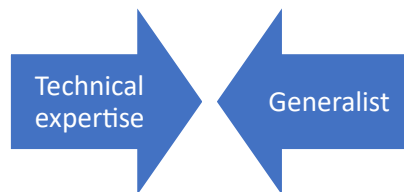
The need to be creative also applies to the design of the curriculum, planning of the courses and learning material, and implementation of teaching. Teachers

themselves have understood this need, but feedback from students is also increasing the pressure to change teaching.

I think, when it comes to literature or learning material, we need to be much more innovative. (Interview: marketing educator)

The students do not accept traditional teaching with only theory. They want applications, they want to apply their knowledge. That's developing all the time. But not around the digital, the aspect of digitalization, actually. (Interview: marketing educator)

5) Specific technical expertise vs. holistic view of a generalist



Learning and maintaining technical task-specific skills require that an organization invests in a variety of hardware and software. These are often provided by large technology companies whose products may not integrate with each other. However, giant companies make it possible to manage the work, but at the same time they pose a technological risk. Marketing professionals and educators must manage technology risk and think about the following questions: Can we afford it? Do we know how to buy and use the right technologies?

The shift to digital marketing is primarily a change in culture, not just a new technology, nor does technology on its own solve business problems. Thus, the importance of the overall vision and the understanding of the customer needs was clearly emphasized in the data. According to one marketing professional, the strategy and the vision help determine the needed technology:

You have to have a pretty strong strategy that you are able to see that this is significant to us. Otherwise, you just run between technologies and panic. You are not able to set limits and say: these are just important technologies for us, this is how we build our business. (Interview: marketing professional)

The importance of the holistic view was also emphasized in the data by the marketing educators. They pointed out that the learning takes time and only seldom students have a chance to see the outcomes of their decisions. This makes it difficult to understand the causalities of their actions and the impact of them.

But most of the students have the difficulty of understanding how one activity interacts with the others and what the outcome would be. So, to make sure, using these digital things, digital forms, different kinds of tools, understanding the outcome, the result of the marketing. How it can change. (Interview: marketing educator)

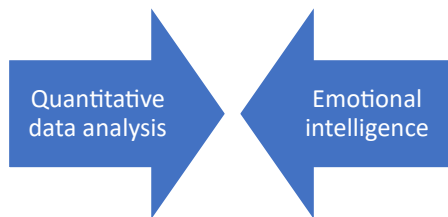
For students, the perception of the whole is important for learning. They want to understand how the specific detail we are now studying relates to a larger context. One student described that learning happens in the wrong direction if one moves from the details to the whole:

I drew myself in the middle of it and put a big circle around it, because black feels like I want that big picture first of what you're not doing, so now it feels like I'm going to go wrong about this. That I learned some specific information about search engine marketing, and then somehow expanding on that, you don't really realize what marketing as a whole is. So maybe it's been challenging to somehow learn first how you do marketing as a whole. (Focus-group Interview: marketing student)

The respondents of marketing professionals emphasized that marketing should not be seen as a silo of its own. Interdisciplinarity which includes business competence, purchasing competence, definition of resources and following future trends is important.

It all starts with that overall understanding from a business perspective, and then perhaps a bit like a life perspective. (Interview: marketing professional)

6) Quantitative data analysis understanding vs. skills based on empathy and emotional intelligence



Data analysis is perceived as an important and independent area of expertise. According to marketing professionals, it is a precondition for data management, for improving efficiency and effectiveness, and is increasingly used as the basis for content production as well as for rapid modification and evaluation of the measures taken.

In my opinion, if all marketing was done on the basis of data, it would be much more relevant. (Interview: marketing professional)

Collaboration with coders is valued and the importance of their work is understood. The expertise of the coders is needed for the technical implementation of the channels. Coders also help monitor technological developments.

Themes of self-regulation emerged clearly from the data. Marketers must learn new things all the time to be able to maintain their professional skills. In addition to content, learning meta-skills such as information seeking, self-steering, facilitation, or self-management skills were identified. Organizations support learning with, for example, weekly internal meetings where successes and best practices are shared. The majority of the training is held by various media. The

role of international mega-companies as providers of education and maintenance of skills is significant. The internationalization of operations is also naturally related to digital change.

The results of the present study are in line with previous research (e.g., Hökkä et al. 2019, Linnenbring-Garcia et al. 2016) that shows the importance of the emotional perspective both in learning and at work. Students worry about their up-to-date competence, and this results in a wide range of uncertainties. Often, they do not dare to admit that their knowledge is incomplete or that their skills are lacking. They want hands-on instructions, mainly to increase their self-confidence. Learning slows down if the student is left to work alone. In particular, emotional reflection and support are needed to deal with challenging and problematic situations. In addition, sharing successes and positive experiences is important. This finding is in line with earlier research (Schlee and Harich 2010, p. 350) which found that new marketing graduates rely more on skills than marketing knowledge for their jobs.

The emotional theme that emerges from teachers' responses is related to the feeling of inadequacy, as stated by one professor at a university:

We do not feel totally comfortable with modern media and modern, digital marketing. So, we tend to stick to the more traditional way of teaching and the messages are still quite traditional. (Interview: marketing educator)

The feeling of inadequacy can lead to a variety of consequences, such as early retirement:

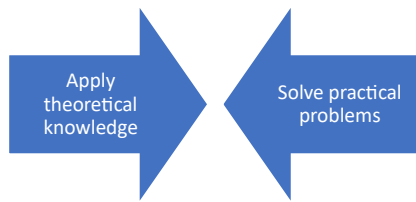
Where the older generation, like me and some of my colleagues, are actually going to give a place, space, for a newer generation. (Interview: marketing educator)

The best marketing professionals stood out from the others in their strong self-regulatory capacity. Self-regulation enables the exercise of knowledge and skills. It is the ability to regulate one's own behaviour, that is, how much room one gives to emotions, thoughts, and desires. The regulation of emotions and behaviour is needed for fluent interaction with others (Virtanen et al. 2020, pp. 16–20).

In addition to the company's culture, marketing professionals need to adopt a team culture. The work is demanding, because in addition to a wide range of skills, one must have emotional intelligence, understanding and tolerance of differences: different personalities, ways of working, professional language and schedules. Listening and attentiveness are also important, as one can learn from best practices and apply them quickly. At its best, diversity is turned into a resource and utilized to achieve optimal results.

Experts also understood well how the requirement for continuous learning can contribute to burnout at work. An important part of self-regulatory skills is identifying one's own strengths and recovering. The work can also be inspiring, 'work at its best', as one interviewee said. Self-regulatory skills are difficult to teach. In the data of the present study, the experts emphasize one's own motivation, desire and the ability to take on challenges and succeed.

7) The ability to apply theoretical knowledge to solve practical problems



The problems and challenges of teaching crystallize very much in this pair of opposing themes. Marketing educators are considering ways to add practical substance know-how and tools to the curriculum. In addition, students value knowledge and skills that they could immediately apply in practice. However, many marketing professionals see that the most important skills of a recent graduate student are that they know how to acquire knowledge, combine knowledge, make analyses and draw conclusions. Marketing skills allow a graduate student to apply knowledge when they encounter problems and have to make the necessary decisions. Marketers understand that it is difficult to provide up-to-date substance-know how in the rapidly changing marketing field. They are looking for people with the right motivation, attitude and procedures. They assume that theory is taught in educational institutions and practice is learned in work, as one respondent summed up:

I have learned to do in practice myself, but it is as if the vision is there at the bottom and the understanding of the general level comes from school. (Interview: marketing professional)

However, students recognize that they have learned meta-skills in addition to theory. When asked what comes to their mind regarding their studies, a few of them highlighted the development of problem-solving skills.

But then maybe I also think first of all the problem-solving skills and know-how to change things quickly. That you are able to do it. Students are encouraged to do that problem-solving and their own critical thinking, and through that they can also bring new ideas to life and into working life and somehow. These are the first that come to mind now. (Focus-group interview: student)

Table 1. *Summary of Six Different Challenges and their Counterparts that Contemporary Marketing Practices Pose in Business, Marketing Education and Learning*

Digital Marketing Challenge	Digital Marketing Counter Challenge
1. Management of professional, specific substance skills	1. Extensive meta-skills (eg interaction, teamwork, self-direction)
2. Competence in the marketing of traditional marketing	2. Utilization of new, intelligent technology-based marketing
3. Analytical skills	3. Creative out-of-the-box problem-solving skills
4. Very specific technical expertise	4. Holistic view of a generalist
5. Quantitative data analysis understanding	5. Secondly skills based on empathy and emotional intelligence
6. The ability to apply theoretical knowledge	6. The ability to solve practical problems

Discussion

The present study has discussed the challenges and requirements for present-day marketing skills. Similarly to the findings in the present study, prior studies (Crittenden and Crittenden 2015, Daellenbach 2018, Herhausena et al. 2020, Wymbs 2011, Zahay et al. 2022) have demonstrated that digitalization has not only transformed the practice of marketing but also created a knowledge and talent gap. Even though many marketing professionals gain their digital marketing knowledge on the job (Roetzer 2014, p. 3), it is crucial that educational institutions understand the core competencies needed in today's marketing.

The digital marketing industry is advancing at breakneck speed, challenging marketing professionals to keep up with the pace of development. Marketing teachers face the same challenge when they ponder what skills students will need in the near future after graduating to working life. In this research, we analysed the challenges through six opposing themes, which relate to the skills and requirements needed by modern marketing professionals. Herhausena et al. (2020) pointed out four core knowledge areas in digital marketing: channels, social media, digital relationships and technologies. In addition to these core skills, our research highlighted the importance of creativity and problem-solving skills and holistic business understanding. Social skills such as teamwork, self-directedness and empathy also turned out to be the key working life skills in marketing in our analysis. Consequently, technological and analytical skills alone do not guarantee success in the marketing profession in the long run. Our study is in line with

Daellenbach (2018), which structures the marketer's key skills through personal skills, social skills, technological skills, and task-specific skills, while adding to the understanding of multi-skill requirements in the field of marketing.

Nevertheless, our research does not dispute the importance of technology. With the rapid advancements in technology, it is essential to stay up to date with the latest developments and opportunities in digital marketing. Learners, teachers, and marketing professionals need to continually learn and update their knowledge and skills. New technological advancements and marketing automation software might pose a challenge to educational institutions, since they don't necessarily have access to those major marketing automation systems that are commonly used in business. Cooperation between education and companies could be one solution to the challenge brought by updating technology and providing access for students to familiarize themselves with the marketing systems before entering working life. In cooperation, the educational institution would get access to, for example, new software, and the companies would benefit in terms of recruitment. Marketing students may be more prepared for the demands of working life. Cooperation could especially benefit the teaching related to marketing data analytics. Kurtzke and Setkute (2021) showed that data analysis is an essential core competence since digital marketing relies heavily on data analytics to measure the effectiveness of campaigns. Therefore, marketing professionals need to have a thorough understanding of data analytics tools and techniques to analyse and interpret data effectively. In line with Kurtzke and Setkute (2021), our research also sheds light on the often opposing demands and requirements for marketing professionals: analyticity and the ability to interpret quantitative data is not enough, but also creativity and out-of-the-box-thinking and empathy are much needed in today's marketing. Hence, these opposing demands and requirements the core of customer understanding.

Content marketing is an integral part of digital marketing, and creating engaging content that resonates with the target audience is crucial (Lou and Xie 2021). Teachers and marketing professionals need to understand how to develop effective content strategies and create content that engages the target audience. Teachers and marketing professionals need to have a strong understanding of consumer behaviour and how to use this information to create effective marketing campaigns. It is obvious that marketing students should be taught a wide range of concepts, principles, and skills to prepare them for a successful career in the field. In conclusion, digital marketing is a constantly evolving field. Learners, teachers and marketing professionals need to continually update their skills and knowledge to keep up with the latest trends and technologies. Understanding data analytics, developing engaging content, building a strong brand, understanding consumer behaviour, and developing a social media strategy are examples of the critical skills required for success in digital marketing.

As a practical implication, the results help us to understand why different stakeholders find the marketing field challenging: students experience insecurity, educators feel their teaching is inadequate and professionals are exhausted amid all the change. The result regarding breaking down the challenges into pairs of opposing themes led to many recommendations. We now better understand the

phenomenon from an individual perspective and that it is impossible for one person to meet all the requirements of the field. However, each person should choose tasks that match their own strengths. Students' uncertainty can be moderated by communicating and guiding them to identify their own areas of interest and strengths. For educational institutes we can produce knowledge that can be used to come up with ideas and make proposals that change current curriculum design, pedagogical practices and learning content. Marketing professionals gain an understanding of how to organize tasks in house, outsource services, and recruit people for teamwork.

Conclusions

The main contribution of the present study is to the marketing education literature by increasing the related knowledge and understanding about the challenges of multiple competencies for a marketing professional. It is important to note, however, that there are some limitations in the research. For example, the data of this study has been collected in Finland, which may limit the generalizability of the results. However, professional requirements of marketing tend to be universal, although the cultural environment affects how marketing is done in practice. Secondly, the data includes interviews from marketing teachers, students and professionals, thereby providing multifaceted perspectives on the subject under study. This could be seen as a limitation if one group's point of view is emphasized at the expense of another's. A large data set challenges the identification of meaningful patterns and themes in the analysis since qualitative data is open to many interpretations. The reliability of this study was ensured by both researchers carrying out the analysis. All the stages of research, data collection, analysis and reporting were carried out carefully following qualitative research guidelines.

The findings of this study provide a deeper understanding of marketing management. This study adds to the discussion of how and why digital marketing tasks can be organized. It provides insights that can support management's assessment of marketing teams competencies, in recruitment, in investments, in managing the technology matrix and in creating strategy. Finally, we suggest that future research should focus on exploring how cooperation between educational institutions and working life influences students' learning results, skills and readiness for working life after graduation. Future research avenues include different learning approaches for marketing students as well as their relationships to personal, social, academic, and professional outcomes such as school and employment success,

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