Original Paper

Career Readiness Skills for Marketing Majors: An Examination of Soft Skills, Hard Skills and Course Applications

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Abstract

What are the skills marketing majors need upon graduation from college? In today's world, many of the skills rely on technology within the field of marketing (technical/hard skills). Other skills (soft skills) can be taught across various curricula. Organizations, educators and professional job search sites are placing increasing emphasis on "workplace" or "career" readiness skills. In this paper, the authors discuss their analysis of 133 pieces of literature from practitioners and academics on the in-demand skills needed by marketing majors. The first section provides a categorization of marketing soft skills to give a broad picture of various soft skill sets that students need to be aware. Next, the paper analyzes different "hard skills", or technical abilities individuals need to perform to be successful in different marketing careers. The authors then examine the primary soft skills needed to execute different hard skills. Finally, the paper discusses course strategies to implement soft and hard skills in class. Attention is given to developing an integrative and "robust" set of soft and hard skills, and strategies, that can be used in different types, and sizes, of marketing classes.

Keywords

career readiness, soft skills, hard skills, technical skills

1. Introduction

Organizations, educators and professional job search sites are placing increasing emphasis on "workplace" or "career" readiness skills (Beaupre et al., 2022; Carmona et al., 2020; Greenacre et al., 2017; Indeed Editorial Team, 2022b; NACE 2022a). These workplace readiness skills focus on educating students at all levels with the requisite skills they need to succeed in the workplace. The National Association of Colleges and Employers in 2015 developed a list of core competencies to prepare students for success in their careers (NACE, 2022b). These competencies have been updated in 2022 to include "career and self-development, communication, critical thinking, equity and inclusion, leadership, professionalism, teamwork and technology" (NACE, 2022a, p. 9).

Career readiness skills include both soft skills (more general skills/processes such as communication, organization and decision making) and hard or technical skills (how to perform a specific task) (Anderson, 2020; Chinchanachokchai et al., 2021; Indeed Editorial Team, 2022d, 2022e). Since 2015, many researchers and practitioners have applied the concept of career readiness to their respective fields. This paper focuses on career readiness skills needed for marketing students. Why should marketing educators care about their students' career readiness? A large portion of students' "future lives" involve their careers and their career satisfaction. Undoubtedly, the ultimate success of a marketing faculty member partially depends on how well students prepare for their careers.

Despite the importance of career readiness skills for marketing students, there is a lack of comprehensive research that examines different types of career readiness skills in marketing. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of soft and hard skills needed for career readiness in marketing and to develop course strategies that will build these skills. The soft and hard skills that are discussed resulted from a literature review of academic and professional industry publications.

This paper first considers the different soft skills, or general skills and traits, that are needed in marketing. This initial section examines the different soft skills that are most often used in marketing careers. Employers want well-rounded employees who have numerous different abilities and it is essential for students to understand what these skills are. The first section provides a categorization of marketing soft skills that give a broad picture of various soft skill sets that students should acquire.

Secondly, the paper analyzes different "hard skills", or technical abilities individuals need to perform to be successful in different marketing careers. The key types of soft skills needed for the different hard skills are also determined.

Finally, the paper develops course strategies that help faculty determine students' soft and hard skills for later lives. Attention is given to developing an integrative and "robust" set of soft and hard skills, and strategies, that can be used in different types, and sizes, of marketing classes.

The field of marketing ends with, "ing", and it is concerned with "doing". Marketing is a field of "doing", and this article will provide serious, detailed scholarly attention to how students should

translate their "doing" to develop rich, life-long careers.

2. Methodology: Literature Review

The authors reviewed 133 articles of soft, hard and technical skills that were considered to be important in marketing. From this literature review. We began by reviewing 84 articles with a focus on practitioner-oriented articles such as Career Builder, CNBC.com, Forbes, LinkedIn, Indeed.Com, Monster.Com and SmartInsights.com from the past six years. We also reviewed 49 articles from academic publications including the Chronicle of Higher Education, Journal of Applied Business and Economics, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Education, Marketing Education Review, Marketing Management Association proceedings, and the Search Engine Journal. We then performed a qualitative content analysis to determine the most frequently mentioned soft, hard and technical skills which will be discussed in the following sections.

3. Career Readiness Soft Skills

Soft skills are the non-technical skills that we use to perform our daily activities at work. They include common attributes of individuals that are applicable to all professions. These skills include how one works with and relates to other employees, administration and customers. Since the majority of jobs require interaction with others, it is important that educators develop these skills in students. Educators at all levels should provide students with the opportunity to develop and showcase their soft skills (Anderson, 2020; Johnson, 2022; Karns et al., 2021; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021a; Miller et al., 2021; Wasyliszyn et al., 2022; Wingard & Farrugia, 2021).

At the university level students gain experience in many of these skills through fulfilling liberal arts requirements and through courses in their major. NACE (2022b) emphasized the importance of providing students with opportunities throughout their educational experience to develop and apply these skills that will assist with career readiness. It is also critical that we as educators develop their skills specifically within their chosen field, in this case, marketing.

Many authors have discussed soft skills that graduating students need to succeed in their careers (see Table 1). The most frequently mentioned skills include active listening, analytical reasoning, collaborating with people from diverse backgrounds, creativity, critical thinking, decision making, detail orientation, emotional intelligence, flexibility, interpersonal skills, leadership, networking, problem solving, professionalism, public speaking/presenting, resilience, storytelling, teamwork, time management, work ethic and written/verbal communication. The 22 most frequently mentioned soft skills have been assigned to six categories based on content similarity and references in literature. The six resulting categories include: Rational Thinking, Communication, Relationship Management, Business Acumen, Conscientiousness and Resourcefulness.

Table 1. Categories of Soft Skills

Rational Thinking	Communication	Relationship Management	Business Acumen	Conscientiousness	Resourcefulness
Analytical Reasoning	Active Listening	Collaborating with Diverse	Decision Making	Detail Oriented	Creativity
Critical Thinking	Presentation skills	Individuals	Emotional Intelligence	Resilience	Flexibility
Problem Solving	Storytelling	Interpersonal	Leadership	Strong Work Ethic	Networking
	Written Communication	Teamwork	Professionalism	Time Management	
	Verbal Communication				

Of more frequent reference in recent years is the ability to collaborate with diverse individuals and being aware of multicultural issues (Goodman, 2022; Henman, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021a; Stahl, 2019; Steimer, 2019; Steinberg, 2018). Students need exposure to working with individuals from different racial groups, social backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, cultures, learning styles, and communication styles to prepare them for a successful career in marketing.

Why should we care about the soft skills shown in Table 1? From a practical standpoint, in business, job sites such as LinkedIn, Indeed.Com and Monster.Com are used by students to post resumes and by employers to post job openings. When students develop an online profile listing job experience and skills, employers are more likely to find potential matches on a job site if the student lists these skills (Doyle, 2022). Therefore, it is important that educators help students determine the soft skills that should be highlighted on an online job profile. Yet, from another standpoint, Table 1 helps students determine the different sets of soft skills that they should develop and emphasize to potential employers.

Finally, why should we care about soft skills in general? Of course, soft skills are not "everything". Yet, they are generally essential. At times, employers can train strong candidates to learn "hard skills", such as statistical analyses. If the employer needs a candidate that has a detail orientation soft-skill, training will generally not be enough.

3.1 Rational Thinking

Rational thought is based on reason, logic and facts rather than emotion. Rational thinking skills include analysis, critical thinking and problem solving (Table 2). Analytical thinking is helpful in identifying connections between two ideas (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021b). "Analytical thinking is more linear and focused as compared to critical thinking which is more circular in nature" (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022b, para. 5). Critical thinking uses analysis to make a rational decision or form a judgment (Indeed Editorial Team, 2021c & 2022a; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Raska & Keller, 2021).

Problem-solving uses thought to find a solution. Problem-solving may use analytical and/or critical thinking skills for a specific purpose: to solve an issue at hand (Hain & Ritz, 2022).

Table 2. Analysis Soft Skills

Analytical Reasoning—the ability to collect and organize information (Anderson, 2020; Bortz, 2022; Coursera, 2022; Dewar, 2023; Doyle et al., 2020; Indeed Editorial Team, 2022a; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Llewellyn, 2020; Mackenzie, 2021b; Malinsky, 2022; Orechwa, 2021; NACE, 2022b; Raska & Keller, 2021).

Critical thinking—the ability to think clearly and rationally and understand connections between ideas (Bouygues, 2022; CAE, 2022; Chiew Tong, 2023; Forbes Expert Panel, 2022; Hain & Ritz, 2021; He et al., 2022; HiHello, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021b; Marr, 2022; Melnichuk, 2022; Moore, 2022; NACE, 2022a; Raymond et al., 2021; Reed, 2022; Rohm et al., 2018; Rose & Flateby, 2022; Sinelnikov, 2022; Thompson et al., 2021; Yeoh, 2019; Zay, 2022).

Problem Solving—finding solutions for difficult or complex situations (Bortz, 2022; Career Builder, 2021b & 2022; Chase, 2023; Chen, 2022; Chiew Tong, 2023; Garner et al, 2019; Kirti & Rattan, 2022; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Lyons, 2023; Mackenzie, 2021a; NACE, 2022a; Orechwa, 2021; Rose & Flateby, 2022; Smith, 2022a; Sy, 2021; Thompson et al., 2021; Yeoh, 2019)

3.2 Communication

Communication involves active listening, presentation skills/public speaking, storytelling, written communication and verbal communication (Table 3). The ability to converse verbally and correspond in written form was found to be a highly important skill for marketing students (Bortz, 2022; Bullock, 2022; Burt, 2023; Chase, 2023a; Chew Tong, 2023; Doyle, 2022; Duggal, 2022; Forbes Expert Panel, 2022; HiHello, 2022; Krakoff, 2022; Lynott, 2022; Lyons, 2023; Mackenzie, 2021a; Malinsky, 2022; NACE, 2022; Omoth, 2022; Raska & Keller, 2021; Raymond et al., 2021; Riley & Nicewicz, 2022; Rohm et al., 2018). Marketing students should be given the opportunity to communicate in groups, write papers, and give presentations to their classes to enhance these skills (Table 3).

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Table 3. Communication Soft Skills

Active Listening—involves listening and reflecting back what you hear (Chase, 2023; Chew Tong, 2023; Conant, 2019; Conti, 2022; Deesha, 2022; Doyle, 2022; Forbes Expert Panel, 2022; Kirti & Rattan, 2022; Markinokos, 2020; NACE 2022a; Omoth, 2022).

Public Speaking/Presentation Skills—ability to explain an idea to an audience (Coursera, 2022; Doyle, 2020; Forbes Expert panel, 2022; Garner et al., 2019; Heisler, 2019; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Omoth, 2022; Orechwa, 2021; Steimer, 2019; Thompson et al., 2021).

Storytelling—using a narrative to communicate a message (AMA Partner, 2022; Bennett, 2021; Booker, 2019; Dollar, 2017; Doyle, 2022; Goodman, 2022; Hattar, 2022; Lynott, 2022).

Written Communication—exchange of information in written format (Blumenstyck, 2022; Bortz, 2022; Bullock, 2022; CAE, 2022; Career Builder, 2021b; Coursera, 2022; Doyle, 2022; Duggal, 2022; Ferell & Ferell, 2020; Forbes Expert Panel, 2021 & 2022; Garner et al., 2019; HiHello, 2022; Kirti & Rattan, 2022; Lynott, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021a; NACE 2022; Omoth, 2022; Orechwa, 2021; Raska & Keller, 2021; Rohm et al., 2018; Rose & Flateby, 2022; Yeoh, 2019).

Verbal Communication—exchange of information both verbally (Blumenstyck, 2022; Career Builder, 2021b; Delong & Elbeck, 2018; Doyle, 2020; Duggal, 2022; Forbes Expert Panel, 2022; Krakoff, 2022; Garner et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2020; HiHello, 2022; Johnson, 2022; Kirti & Rattan, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021a; Malinsky, 2022; NACE, 2022a; Riley & Nicewicz, 2022; Omoth, 2022; Orechwa, 2021; Rohm et al., 2018; Singh, 2022; Smith, 2022a; Yeoh, 2019).

Active listening involves listening with intent while paying attention to other factors including nonverbal communication (Chew Tong, 2023; Deesha, 2022; Doyle, 2022). Active listening is essential for marketers as we need to listen to the wants and needs of customers, so that we can better meet their needs.

Storytelling in marketing means using a narrative to communicate about a brand/company/product (AMA Partner, 2022; Booker, 2019; Dollar, 2017; Hattar, 2022). Storytelling "taps into narrative, connecting with an audience on an emotional level, in order to help them empathize and understand the problems your business solves on a deeper level. It is a powerful way for brands to cut through the noise" (AMA Partner, 2022, para. 2). Storytelling can be particularly effective in branding on company websites and social media platforms where customers discuss their experience with brands/companies.

3.3 Relationship Management

Relationship management skills include collaborating, interpersonal and teamwork skills (Table 4). Businesses want students to be able to work in groups to achieve a goal (Bortz, 2022). Being able to work with individuals of different racial, ethnic, language, and cultural backgrounds is crucial in today's society (Hazard & Wu, 2020; Marr, 2022). Giving students the opportunity to work in teams

assists them with experiencing a diversity of viewpoints. Groups also provide an opportunity for individuals to demonstrate that they work well together with other students on a project including dividing the workload equitably and getting work in on time so that group progress can continue (HiHello, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021b; Marr, 2022; Omoth, 2022; Rampton, 2022; Schlee & Karns, 2017; Singh, 2022; Thompson et al., 2021). How each individual acts on the team towards others (interpersonal skills) gives students a chance to exhibit if they listen to diverse opinions, if they are responsive, and maintain good rapport with other students.

Table 4. Relationship Management Soft Skills

Collaborating with diverse individuals—the capability to work with people who are different from you (Chase, 2023; Coursera, 2022; David et al., 2021; Forbes Expert Panel, 2022; Goodman, 2022; Hartley et al., 2019; Henman, 2022; Marr, 2022; Omoth, 2022; Steimer, 2019; Stahl, 2019; Steinberg, 2018; Yeoh, 2019).

Interpersonal/People—skills used to interact with others (Career Builder, 2021a; Chew Tong, 2023; Deesha, N., 2022; Doyle, 2022; Kelly, 2022b; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Krakoff, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021b; Orechwa, 2021; Van Nuys, 2020; Yeoh, 2019).

Teamwork—working with a group of people to achieve a goal (Bortz, 2022; Career Builder, 2021b; David et al., 2021; Delong & Elbeck, 2018; Dewar, 2023; Forbes Expert Panel, 2022; Garner et al., 2019; HiHello, 2022; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021a; Melnichuk, 2022; NACE, 2022a; Orechwa, 2021; Riley & Nicewicz, 2022; Thompson et al., 2021; Zay, 2022)

3.4 Business Acumen

Business acumen incorporates knowledge of how an organization works and both hard and soft skills (Business Acumen, 2023; Chase, 2023b; Indeed Editorial Team, 2021a). Soft skills such as the ability to make good judgements and decisions, emotional intelligence, leadership skills and professionalism help build the foundation for exhibiting business acumen (Table 5). Emotional intelligence plays a strong role in business acumen. Emotional intelligence is the ability to manage one's own emotions and recognize and influence the emotions of others (Argianas, 2022; Kelly, 2022a; Omoth, 2022; Melnichuk, 2022; Orechwa, 2021; Sinelnikov, 2022). Emotional intelligence is a necessary skill for being a good leader. Strong leadership involves the ability to influence and guide others as well as being able to respond appropriately (Bortz, 2022; Krakoff, 2022; Ferell & Ferell, 2020).

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Table 5. Business Acumen Soft Skills

Decision Making—the ability to choose between two or more alternatives to make the best choice possible (Bortz, 2022; Doyle, 2020; Dewar, 2023; Herrity, 2023; Indeed Editorial Team, 2022b; Johnson, 2022; Kirti & Rattan, 2022; McCoy, 2020; NACE, 2022).

Emotional intelligence—the ability to read other people's emotions and respond appropriately (Argianas, 2022; Chase, 2023; Forbes Expert Panel, 2022; Kelly, 2022a; Omoth, 2022; Melnichuk, 2022; Orechwa, 2021; Sinelnikov, 2022; Zay, 2022).

Leadership—ability to influence and guide others (Bortz, 2022; Burt, 2023; Career Builder, 2021a; Chase, 2023; Dewar, 2023; HiHello, 2022; Krakoff, 2022; Ferell & Ferell, 2020; Garner et al., 2019; Lyons, 2023; Mackenzie, 2021b; Marr, 2022; NACE, 2022a; Omoth, 2022; Orechwa, 2021; Thompson et al., 2021; Zay, 2022).

Professionalism—conduct, behavior and attitude of a person in the workplace (Black et al., 2021; Career Builder, 2021a; Gray, 2022; Ewing & Ewing, 2017; Kennedy, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021b; McQuerry, 2018; NACE, 2022a; Raska & Keller, 2021; Raymond et al., 2021; Rogers, 2022b; Wilson et al., 2013; Yeoh, 2019).

Employers desire leadership skills in potential job candidates (Bortz, 2022; Career Builder, 2021a; Marr, 2022; Omoth, 2022). A senior executive found, from an analysis of new candidates for different positions of the large firm, that leadership potential was the second most important consideration that it had for initial screenings, after amount of past work experience (Pittinsky, 2021). Unquestionably, the soft skill, leadership, is a basic and central quality of both marketing, and other business careers. If anything, leadership is even increasing in importance as a soft skill for marketing and business positions (Lund & Hancock, 2021).

Professionalism encompasses the ability to understand norms of behavior and behave in a courteous and respectful manner (Kennedy, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021a; NACE, 2022a; Raymond et al., 2021; Raska & Keller, 2021; Rogers, 2022b; Yeoh, 2019). "NACE's Job Outlook 2022 survey found that while 86.9% of employers say professionalism is very or extremely important, just 44.2% indicate that new college graduates are very or extremely proficient at it" (Gray, 2022, para. 2). Making students aware of the importance of professionalism, the expectations in the business world for professional conduct and giving students opportunities to demonstrate professionalism (such as business reports or formal class presentations) gives students an advantage when they come to the workplace.

3.5 Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness reflects a person's tendency to be responsible and do a task well. Individuals who are conscientiousness show an attention to detail, have resilience, demonstrate a strong work ethic and manage their time well (Ercan, 2017; Harper, 2022; Indeed Editorial Team, 2017). Detail orientation occurs when a person pays close attention to minute specifics (Blumenstyck, 2022; Bortz, 2022; Garner et al., 2019; Indeed Editorial Team, 2019 & 2021a; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021b; NACE, 2022a; Streiff, 2022). "According to the survey, 62.6% of managers are looking for new grads that have meticulous attention to detail. As a result, make sure your resume is impeccable, free of typos and grammatical errors, and organized with the use of clear, concise, and effective language" (Bortz, 2022, para. 14).

Table 6. Conscientiousness Soft Skills

Detail-oriented—being able to pay close attention to detail (Blumenstyck, 2022; Bortz, 2022; Career Builder, 2021b; Indeed Editorial Team, 2021b; Kelly, 2022a; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021b; NACE, 2022a; Streiff, 2022).
Resilience—ability to recover quickly from difficulties (Doyle, 2022; Dwivedi, 2020; HiHello, 2022; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Orechwa, 2021; Purcell, 2020; Smith, 2022b; Zay, 2022).
Strong work ethic—a commitment to one's job (Bortz, 2022; Career Builder, 2021b; Delong & Elbeck, 2018; Goodman, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021b).
Time Management—using time effectively and productively (Career Builder, 2021b; Chase, 2023; Chiew Tong, 2023; HiHello, 2022; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021; Marr, 2022, Malinsky, 2022a; Schlee & Karns, 2017; Omoth, 2022; Singh, 2022; Steimer, 2019; Yeoh, 2019; Zay, 2022).

An attention to detail can often be a part of one's work ethic (Doyle, 2022; Garrity, 2023). A strong work ethic encompasses behaviors such as being organized, highly productive, cooperating with others, determination, taking ownership, internal motivation to succeed, and producing high quality work (Bortz, 2022; Career Builder, 2021b; Delong & Elbeck, 2018; Goodman, 2022; Leonard, 2023; Mackenzie, 2021b; Taygerle, 2022). According to NACE's 2023 job outlook survey, at least half of all employers seek employees with a strong work ethic (NACE, 2022a).

The ability to recover quickly from difficulties (resilience) is a skill that marketing students need to succeed in class and on the job (Doyle, 2022; Dwivedi, 2020; Goodman, 2022; Marr, 2022; Omoth, 2022; Purcell, 2020; Smith, 2022b). Students often face difficulties during their college career such as illness, family concerns, changing/losing a job and many other situations. When students are able to adapt to changes in their lives (or changes in a group member's life) and bounce back from a situation (e.g., group conflict) it demonstrates resilience. Students learning online platforms, navigation and

communication demonstrated resilience during the pandemic.

Time management involves prioritizing tasks and organizing one's time to complete more important tasks first (Career Builder, 2021b; Chase, 2023a; Chiew Tong, 2023; HiHello, 2022; Keiling, 2023; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021; Marr, 2022; Malinsky, 2022a; Rampton, 2022; Schlee & Karns, 2017; Omoth, 2022; Singh, 2022; Steimer, 2019; Yeoh, 2019; Zay, 2022). Time management skills can be improved by planning, setting and being aware of deadlines, communicating and collaborating with others and delegating tasks (Keiling, 2023). Instructors should point out to students that when they balance their jobs and education, juggle multiple courses and family life and work, and successfully accomplish multiple tasks in a semester, that they are demonstrating time management skills.

3.6 Resourcefulness

Resourceful employees are able to look at ideas in a new way and overcome obstacles (Ariella, 2023; Indeed Editorial Team, 2022c; Lyons, 2023). Resourcefulness encompasses being persistent when difficulties arise and using one's imagination and innovation abilities. Two of the skills highly associated with resourcefulness are creativity and flexibility (Table 7).

Table 7. Resourcefulness Soft Skills

Creativity—the ability to produce new ideas (Career Builder, 2021b; Chen, 2022; Coursera, 2022; David et al., 2021; Duggal, 2022; Forbes Expert Panel, 2022; Kirti & Rattan, 2022; Mackenzie, 2021a; Marr, 2022; McCoy, 2021; Omoth, 2022; Orechwa, 2021; Reddihough, 2021; Rohm et al., 2018; Scanlon, 2022; Sinelnikov, 2022).
Flexibility—ability to adapt to new circumstances/situations (Bortz, 2022; Career Builder, 2021b; Chase, 2023; Duggal, 2022; Ferell & Ferell, 2020; Forbes Expert Panel, 2022; Goodman, 2022; HiHello, 2022; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Krakoff, 2022; Lyons, 2023; Malinsky, 2022; Marr, 2022; Melnichuk, 2022; Orechwa, 2021; Sinelnikov, 2022; Steimer, 2019; Van Nuys, 2020; Yeoh, 2019).
Networking—the ability to connect with others to exchange information (Ariella, 2023; Career Builder, 2021a; Gray, 2022; HiHello, 2022; Indeed Editorial Team, 2022d; Kelly, 2022a; Lotfi, 2022; Marr, 2022; NACE, 2022a; Rose & Flateby, 2022; "The Most Valuable", 2022; Zay, 2022).

Creativity involves using one's imagination to produce new and original ideas. In marketing, this traditionally was thought of in relation to promotions, ads, and products, but in today's world having creative content online engages and involves customers on a higher level (Reddihough, 2021; Scanlon, 2022; Steimer, 2019; Sy, 2021; Yeoh, 2019). Marketing majors have increasing opportunities to display their creative abilities due to the continuing rise of digital content. "Creative content is moving

further and further away from pictures and captions and toward video and more immersive experiences" (Scanlon, 2022, para. 10).

The creative process must allow for new ideas and different perspectives. A student's ability to adapt to new situations and have flexibility of thought and actions will also help them to succeed (Bortz, 2022; Career Builder, 2021b; Chase, 2023; Duggal, 2022; Ferell & Ferell, 2020; Goodman, 2022; Lyons, 2023; Malinsky, 2022; Marr, 2022; Melnichuk, 2022; Orechwa, 2021; Van Nuys, 2020). The ability to adapt to changes in a calm and rational manner enables a person to work more effectively, especially when working with others.

Students should be given the chance to not only work with others, but work to increase their connections with others (Gray, 2022; Kelly, 2022a; Smith, 2022; Zay, 2022). When students join professional network sites such as LinkedIn and build relationships with other students, they are able to build their support network. Professional networking sites allow students to demonstrate their professional skills and abilities to assist them with finding employment in their careers.

4. Career Readiness Hard/Technical Skills

Anderson (2020, para 6) defines hard skills as "an employee's ability to do a specific task". Hard skills are much more dependent on career/job choice. Businesses today have much different needs for students than they did 10, 20 or 30 years ago. While some skills remain similar (e.g., branding, customer relationship management, sales management), other skills are constantly changing (e.g., content creation, digital media skills, social media skills). Table 8 discusses the most frequently mentioned hard/technical skills in literature. The table also identifies some of the primary soft skill categories and the key specific soft skills that are associated with developing each hard/technical skill.

Table 8. Hard and Technical Marketing Skills

Business/Marketing Analysis/Intelligence (Anderson, 2020; Doyle, 2022b; Lynott, 2022; Malota, 2022; Nanji, 2019; Rosales, 2021; Schlee & Karns, 2017; Van Nuys, 2019).

    *Primary Soft Skill Category***:** Rational Thinking, Communication & Conscientiousness

      *Key Soft Skills***:** Analytical Reasoning, Written Communication & Detail Orientation

Content Creation/management (Agouridis, 2022; Bullock, 2022; Burt, 2022; Coursera, 2022; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Lynott, 2022; Malota, 2022; Nanji, 2019; Rogers, 2022a).

    Primary Soft Skill Category: Communication, Business Acumen & Resourcefulness

      *Key Soft Skills***:** Written Communication, Decision Making & Creativity

Data Analytics/mining (Bullock, 2022; Doyle, 2022b; Ferrell & Ferell, 2020; Forbes Expert Panel, 2022; Krakoff, 2020; Lynott, 2022; Malota, 2022).

    Primary Soft Skill Category: Rational Thinking, Conscientiousness and Business Acumen

*Key Soft Skills***:** Detail Orientation, Critical Thinking, Problem Solving & Analytical reasoning

Design/Visual Marketing (Agouridis, 2022; Bullock, 2022; Krakoff, 2022; Coursera, 2022; Ferell & Ferell, 2020; Lynott, 2022; Nanji, 2019; Rogers, 2022a).

*Primary Soft Skill Category***:** Resourcefulness & Rational Thinking

Key Soft Skills: Creativity, Analytical Thinking & Flexibility

Digital & Social Media Marketing (Agouridis, 2022; Anderson, 2020; Burt, 2022 & 2023; Goodman, 2022; Krakoff, 2022; Coursera, 2022; Doyle, 2022; Duggal, 2022; Frederick, 2022; Hartley et al., 2022; HiHello, 2022; Kelly, 2017; Key et al., 2019; Mackenzie, 2021a; Malota, 2022; Papandrea, 2022; Rogers, 2022a; Rosales, 2022; Schlee & Karns, 2017; Raska & Keller, 2021; Rosales, 2021; Singh, 2022; Smith, 2022b; Thompson et al., 2021).

Primary Soft Skill Category: Rational Thinking and Communication

Key Soft Skills: Analysis, Written Communication, Storytelling & Active Listening

Project Management (Career Builder, 2021b; Burt, 2023; Dewar, 2023; Krakoff, 2022; Doyle, 2022; Ferell & Ferell, 2020; Landau, 2023; Mackenzie, 2021b; Nanji, 2019; Rosales, 2021).

Primary Soft Skill Category: Rational Thinking, Conscientiousness & Relationship Management

*Key Soft Skills***:** Leadership, Communication, Problem Solving, Time Management, Interpersonal, Collaborating & Emotional Intelligence

Research (Bullock, 2022; Dewar, 2023; Krakoff, 2022; Coursera, 2022; Doyle, 2022b; Duggal, 2022; Ferell & Ferell, 2020; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Nanji, 2019; Thompson et al; 2021).

Primary Soft Skills Category: Rational Thinking and Communication

Key Soft Skills: Critical Thinking, Problem Solving & Written/Verbal Communication

Search Engine Marketing/Optimization (Agouridis, 2022; Bullock, 2022; Burt, 2022; Coursera, 2022; Frederick, 2022; Kelly, 2017; Krakoff, 2020; Malota, 2022; McCoy, 2022; Rogers, 2022a; Rosales, 2022).

Primary Soft Skills Category: Rational Thinking, Business Acumen and Conscientiousness

Key Soft Skills: Detail Orientation, Analytical Thinking & Decision Making

4.1 Business/Marketing Analysis

Business/marketing analysis consists of assisting students with identifying business and marketing needs and finding a solution to problems. Marketing analysis involves analyzing a specific market within an industry. Students often conduct a situation analysis and/or SWOT analysis identifying strengths and weaknesses of the business and external opportunities and threats (Anderson, 2020; Doyle, 2022b; Lynott, 2022; Malota, 2022; Nanji, 2019; Rosales, 2021; Schlee & Karns, 2017; Van Nuys, 2019). A person performing a market/business analysis must not only see the big picture, they

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must also pay attention to small details and be able to communicate the results in written format.

Content creation involves identifying information and creating written or visual content that can be used in a way that provides value to the target audience. Students need to have good communication skills and creative in how they present information to gain consumer attention (Agouridis, 2022; Bullock, 2022; Burt, 2022; Coursera, 2022; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Lynott, 2022; Malota, 2022; Nanji, 2019; Rogers, 2022a). Content creators need also to understand the importance of business and marketing concepts that are important to customers so that they can convey valuable information.

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4.3 Data Analytics

Marketing students need to not only understand how to collect data, but they must be able to work with data from multiple sources and make decisions as to what information is relevant (Doyle, 2022b; Ferrell & Ferrell, 2020; Krakoff, 2020; Lynott, 2022). Students should be able to use marketing analytics tools such as Google Analytics, Marketo, and Whatagraph and statistical software such as R, SPSS, SAS, and Stata to evaluate and measure the performance of marketing activity. Data analytics relies heavily on analytic, critical thinking, problem solving and paying attention to detail.

4.4 Design/Visual Marketing

Students must be able to understand the fundamentals of the design of promotions, packaging, and digital media (Ferell & Ferell, 2020; Krakoff, 2020; Lynott, 2022; Rogers, 2022a). Additionally, students should know how to make the content of digital posts capture customers' attention and keep their interest. Knowing how to select appropriate images from the web to use in a promotion/website/package is a valuable tool for students to develop (Krakoff, 2020). Creativity in thought is especially important in visual marketing as is the ability to synthesize information in determining which elements to present. Marketing practitioners in this position need to also be able to adapt to the continuous ongoing changes in available and desired platforms.

4.5 Digital Marketing

Digital marketing involves promoting products, brands, companies and services through digital channels, including websites, social media, SEO, mobile applications, and email. Students should be able to understand the major digital marketing concepts and their applications. For example, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) focuses on making the content of a page more relevant in a keyword search so that it will be more likely to appear as one of the first sources in a web search (Bullock, 2022;

Frederick, 2022; Malota, 2022). To succeed in digital marketing, students need to develop their analytical thinking skills and be able to present information in a clear and understandable format that will reach the target audience.

4.6 Project Management

Marketers involved in project management need to set goals, meet deadlines, prioritize work, and accomplish tasks (Duggal, 2022; Goodman, 2022; Krakoff, 2020). Through a university education, students are often placed in situations where they need to address many of the elements of project management while balancing various classes and course projects. Marketers "need to create publishing schedules, track contacts, and maintain social media profiles. They will need to run reports, meet with designers and writers, manage ad budgets, and much more" (Duggal, 2022, para. 7). Good project management skills include leadership, written and verbal communication, time management, problem solving and interpersonal skills (Landau, 2023).

4.7 Research

Marketing students need to understand qualitative versus quantitative research and the various tools they may use within each domain (Bullock, 2022; Doyle, 2022b; Duggal, 2022; Kovacs & Zarandne, 2022; Thompson et al., 2021). Marketers need "research to build out campaigns, inform strategy, and create content" (Krakoff, 2020, para. 13). Students wishing to engage in a career of research should focus on developing their critical thinking and problem-solving skills so that they can identify issues and analyze them. Additionally, students need to be able to communicate with their colleagues and respondents in both verbal and written format.

4.8 Search Engine Marketing and Optimization

"What is SEO? It's the process of optimizing a website to get a high ranking in search engine results pages" (Malota, 2022, para. 2). Search engine optimization focuses on making the content of a page more relevant in a keyword search so that it will be more likely to appear as one of the first sources in a web search (Bullock, 2022; Frederick, 2022; Malota, 2022). Individuals who work in SEO need to have business acumen as they need to understand what attributes/features are important to a product or company. They should possess strong critical and analytical thinking so that they can understand consumer insight in order to make digital information most relevant to consumers. Finally, they must be active listeners in order to quickly and thoroughly hear and understand what customers want and if the platforms they are using work for customers so that they can reach customers more effectively.

5. Course Strategies to Develop Career Readiness Skills

As discussed previously, educational institutions and employers want to assist students in developing skills that will prepare them for their jobs in the marketing field (Beaupre et al., 2022; Carmona et al., 2020; Greenacre et al., 2017; Indeed Editorial Team, 2022b; NACE 2022a). Marketing and business courses must focus on more than merely imparting information/content/concepts to students and must provide students with opportunities to apply this information to real-life projects. Students have been found to benefit greatly from experiential and active learning (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Kolb 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005), whether this is through a real-life project or an in-class assignment or paper that reflects work done in the business world. In Table 9, different activities are suggested that apply the most commonly mentioned hard/technical marketing skills for students. These applications were derived from the combined experience of the authors (over 70 years of teaching) and from the examples in literature reviewed.

Table 9. Career Readiness Course Applications

Hard/Technical Skill	Application
Business/Marketing Analysis	Capstone course—case analysis
	Business plans
	Marketing plans
	SWOT analysis
Content Creation	Blogs such as WordPress, Tumblr or Blogger
	Website development
	Online writing apps—Grammarly, WordTune, ProWritingAid
Data Analytics/Mining	Customer analysis from a database
	Identifying social influencers
	Trend analysis
	Data Visualization
Design/Visual marketing	IMC plan—promotional creations using tools such as Adobe, Canva, Sketch
Digital/Social Media Marketing & SEO	Keyword Research
	Paid Ads creation
	SEO worksheet
	Google analytics certification
	Hootsuite certification
	Simulation software
Project Management	Course projects

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	Team projects
	Marketing campaigns
	Team charters
	Schedules (GANTT charts)
Research	Marketing Research Project
	Surveys, Focus Groups, Interviews
	Data analysis

5.1 Business and Market Analysis

Business and market analysis have many course applications. Capstone courses can be used to create a business plan to analyze a company and its associated industry, conduct a SWOT analysis, assess financial impact, and create a budget. Marketing plans can assist students in identifying new products, the influence of pricing, appropriate promotions, and distribution channels. Case analyses are also beneficial and allow students to demonstrate their analytical and critical thinking abilities as well as solve problems.

5.2 Content Creation

Content creation involves generating content that engages customers. This includes both written and visual images. Developing content requires critical thinking on the part of the marketer/student as to what images and content best meet the needs of the target audience. Marketing students have the opportunity to showcase their creativity in the images they choose and the words they write. Attention to detail in the content is important to ensure that accurate information is conveyed (such as a promotional deadline or the cost of a product or service). Depending on what platform is used, storytelling may be involved. For instance, on a blog or a website, conveying consumer experiences with a product or service often comes in the form of a story about the user experience. There are helpful tools such as Grammarly, ProWritingAid, and WordTune for ensuring writing is effective.

5.3 Data Analytics

Data analytics involves analyzing data to make data-driven marketing decisions. Assignments and activities such as extracting insights from data on the web, visualizing data, developing a predictive model to forecast future customer behavior, and allocating marketing budget based on the data would enhance students' data analytics skills. For example, instructors provide students with a sample marketing campaign dataset, and ask them to create visualizations using tools such as Google Data Studio, Tableau, or Excel.

5.4 Design/Visual Marketing

Design and visual marketing skills can be developed when students craft creative content for Integrated Marketing Communications using various tools such as Adobe, Canva, and Sketch. For example, instructors can provide students with a hypothetical brand, and ask them to develop a branding strategy

and a creative campaign that include a logo, brand colors, visuals, and brand messaging. Also, students can work on creating content for social media, websites, and email marketing which help them understand how to use design elements to create effective and engaging marketing campaigns.

5.5 Digital Marketing

Digital marketing courses must combine theory and practice in order to teach skills. One of the ways to do this is to create a project or assignment that requires students to conduct keyword research, complete an SEO worksheet, create Google Ads and social media pay-per-click campaigns, and analyze data. Moreover, requiring students to earn various types of digital marketing certifications such as Google Analytics certification is another way to teach digital marketing skills that hold value in the marketing industry.

5.6 Project Management

Various course projects are used to teach project management skills. A semester-long team project gives students the opportunity to collaborate with others, organize their schedules, communicate with members in both written and oral form, work with and meet deadlines, demonstrate their work ethic, and be professional in their interactions within the group and with the instructor. Students can be given opportunities to lead portions of the project which can be assisted with a team charter that establishes norms of expected behavior on the team, allocates responsibilities, sets deadlines, and indicates what consequences will be for not meeting group expectations (Johnson & Horn, 2019). For example, GANTT charts allow students to envision an entire project's timing and when activities need to occur.

5.7 Research

Research allows students to demonstrate their analytical, critical thinking, and problem-solving. If students are collecting secondary data, they need to search for and evaluate the relevancy and legitimacy of the information they find. If students conduct primary research, they must pay attention to detail in writing surveys, creating focus groups, or running an experiment. If the research is quantitative, students can demonstrate their analytical and critical thinking through statistical analysis and interpretation.

6. Conclusions

This paper has identified a comprehensive discussion of the soft, hard, and technical skills that marketing majors need to use. Further, this paper has identified course applications that can be used to put these skills into practice. Indeed, one powerful conclusion of this paper stems from the large number of sources that agreed with the different soft, and hard, skills found in this article. The authors identified 22 different soft skills, and they could be classified into six broader categories of soft skills in Table 1. The 22 skills were found repeatedly, and from such sources as the Indeed Editorial Team, Career Builder, and the Forbes Expert Panel, as well as academic literature. A student can possibly use a "quick" online search from less reputable sources to discover these skills, but it would take a

substantial amount of time. However, if the student is interested in marketing analytics, or digital marketing, s/he will find from this article different soft skills that have been heavily found and supported. The soft skills found in this article can be broken into some broader categories of soft skills that should be the basis of the students' preparing for their careers.

The soft skills, in turn, directly lead to strategies that marketing faculty should use when teaching courses. These ideas, in Table 9, are not comprehensive. A marketing faculty member should have confidence that each of the hard skills shown are indeed important to many students. They, too, directly correspond with some of the most central soft skills that students "must have" to be successful in them. They also help the faculty member to brainstorm about these, and other course applications, all aimed at helping students to develop in their careers even after they complete their degrees. Stated alternatively, the hard skills, soft skills, and course applications, discussed in this article, "fit together" well.

As explained in the introduction, recruiters are looking for students that have an assortment of skills, and not just one specific talent or ability. Similarly, faculty members should also seek activities that will allow students to display a variety of their skills. The overall convincing manner in which soft skills, hard skills, and course applications fit together, in this article, should help students and faculty brain storm even further about how to develop their career searches and marketing courses.

In addition, a key implication, suggested from this paper, is that many marketing courses need to have the ability to updated course content. Marketing courses cannot wait to rely on a textbook update that often involves a 3-year cycle. An invaluable solution is to use course materials that are open-access and editable. Then, instructors and students will be able to find the most current materials and resources. A study conducted by the Open Education Group shows that "most students perform as well or better using OER course materials compared with students using traditional textbooks" (Colvard et al., 2018, p. 263).

7. Limitations and Future Research

While this paper provides an overview of marketing career readiness skills and how the courses can help develop such skills, it did not discuss how colleges and employers can work together to address developing these skills. Therefore, future research should also examine the strategies to develop marketing career readiness skills at the college level and by collaborating with employers to ensure marketing students are set up for success.

In addition, the different marketing careers, discussed here, are broad. For example, marketing research includes a number of different career areas, and some require different abilities, than others. A student who wants to develop an expertise in qualitative research will develop somewhat different hard and soft skills than someone who wants to focus on survey research. For undergraduates, research students who want to develop an expertise in qualitative research, or survey research, will use both analysis and

creative soft skills. This article will benefit either type of student, or a marketing faculty member who is developing a course using both forms of research. Regardless, others should consider differences in specific areas of marketing. Furthermore, academic research, itself, should conduct empirical research on marketing career readiness, more fully.

In addition, this article should be the starting point for academic researchers to investigate general theories involved in marketing career search. For example, this article suggested six different categories of soft skills that underlie different marketing careers. The soft skills (rational thinking, communication, relationship management, business acumen, conscientiousness and resourcefulness) and not the same as the "Big 5" personality dimensions (e.g., O'Connor, 2002), often found in psychology, about the underlying traits of personality. Indeed, soft skills are theoretically very different than personality qualities. However, intuitively, the soft skills found here appear similar to the "Big 5", and these similarities may be useful for future research. Yet, this article repeatedly found similar soft skills and hard skills, for different marketing careers. Practical course applications were suggested for these different skills, too. This consistency suggests that future practical and academic research will assist both marketing students and marketing faculty to learn more about marketing careers.

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