Abstract
Marketing as a professional pursuit has had to confront different changes as regards the modi operandorum of both companies and consultancies. The advent of new information and communication technologies has been a game changer for society as a whole, but in the field of product and service marketing it has completely revolutionised networking and information management methods. Thus, the aim of this paper is to offer both an overview of the marketing industry’s new demands and insights into the subject that may help higher education centres to develop the most suitable curricula for their students. The research described here has employed a qualitative approach based on the knowledge and perceptions of marketing professionals working in different sectors, collected in in-depth interviews. The results highlight the urgent need to adapt curricula to new market demands and to build consensuses and collaborate with the corporate sector in this regard, in order to train professionals capable of meeting the current social and corporate challenges in a context in which old-school marketing is still important but new issues have become crucial.

Keywords: marketing, education, educational demands, professional profile.

JEL codes: M53.
市场营销从业员的能力及技能有哪些？
从专业及学术角度来探索研究

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文章摘要
现时情况显示市场营销活动需要面对各种各样的变化，其进行方式在各企业与顾问公司都需要改进。先进的资讯与通讯科技的为社会各方面带来了各种益处，然而在产品及服务的营销方面，变化尤其明显，主要集中在接触与管理资讯两方面。
本文章尝试为现时行业中兴起的新要求和知识绘画有关蓝图，有助各培训院校发展适合的课程。研究集中于利用定性方法，通过深入的研究访问，探讨在各行业的营销从业员的知识和情感。结果显示大学教育需要急切地优化其课程内容来赶上市场的新要求趋势，为学生提供有效及适合现时企业界的培训课程，培养有能力克服现今社会及商业界各种挑战的专业从业员，在新问题成为重要关注点之同时，兼顾传统营销概念的重要性。

关键词: 市场营销、培训、培训需求、专业履历。

JEL 分类号: M53。
1. Introduction

The continual and rapid changes brought about by globalisation (Welfens, 1989; Levitt, 2001) and the digital revolution (Royle and Laing, 2014) have obliged not only companies, but also universities, business schools and higher education centres to adapt to the conditions imposed by social, economic or technological environments (Casanoves-Boix and Küster-Boluda, 2017) in search of new ways of gaining a competitive edge. Even though none of the areas of a company are unaffected by that quest, this study will focus on that of marketing in order to discover the competencies and skills that companies expect professionals to possess in this area in order to gain and maintain the greatest possible competitive edge.

Companies and their exchanges with consumers were the main reasons behind the advent and subsequent development of marketing (Barteles, 1964; Rodríguez, 2006; Santesmeses, 2007). Without prejudice to the contributions that it has made to other (social, political, etc.) areas, the value with which this discipline has provided business functions is readily apparent; something that would have been impossible if it had not been capable of adapting the skills of professionals to ever-changing corporate needs. That said, this immediately begs the question of whether higher education in marketing is aware of the changes that have taken place and their scope, in order to adapt efficiently the marketing student profile to the corporate sector’s current demands. In this connection, a greater level of co-operation than that presently existing between the academic world and the marketing industry would help to improve this situation (Reibstein, Day and Wind, 2009; Pefanis and Harich, 2010; Royle and Laing, 2014) by bridging the gap between what students learn at university and what is required of them in the workplace (Taylor, 2003; Harraway and Baker, 2005).

This study is justified by the concern for both the level of adaptation and the still insufficient research into the skills required by marketing departments nowadays, particularly those relating to digitisation, thus making it especially useful for higher education in this regards (Brady, Fellenz and Brookers, 2008; Akar and Topçu, 2011).

As to the objectives of this study, these are as follows: to identify the most sought-after competencies and skills in the corporate sector; to identify the shortcomings that companies detect in young marketing professionals fresh out of university; and to determine those aspects of university course content in which companies believe that there is room for improvement.

Accordingly, this work contributes to the study of possible gaps in the skills needed by companies and those possessed by university graduates. Moreover, it also helps to identify trends in the corporate sector as regards the competencies that future marketing professionals will be expected to possess in order to be able to compete successfully. Lastly, it is hoped that this work will contribute to foster collaboration, very necessary but hitherto thin on the ground (Royle and Laing, 2014), between the academic and business communities as far as marketing is concerned.
2. Theoretical framework

Since its beginnings, marketing has undergone many changes in order to adapt gradually to the business environment. For Kotler and Keller (2006), the marketplace is now very different as a result of several powerful social forces capable of giving rise to new behaviours, opportunities and threats. Thus, variables such as technology, globalisation and market liberalisation have shaped marketing functions and objectives. It was back in the 1990s when these forces emerged, with the Internet as a major component, making it necessary to develop new business and marketing practices, which in turn have led to far-reaching changes in the field of research (Kotler and Keller, 2006). According to Royle and Laing (2014), even though approximately 80% of the marketing challenges that companies currently face are being tackled using marketing research, in the near future major corporations will have developed the tools and trained the personnel necessary to obtain all the information that they require without “leaving” the Internet. It is precisely thanks to the widespread use of new technologies, related databases and the Internet that there has been a shift from transaction marketing towards relationship marketing (Santesmases, 2007).

Even so, a number of obstacles to the implementation of personal skills in digital marketing have been detected: a study performed by the Innovation Foundation (NESTA, 2012) indicates how problems pertaining to business culture and organisational know-how represent a new challenge for the development of digital marketing skills, exacerbated by the sheer dynamism and number of analytical and measurement tools currently available. Nowadays, the product of the changes that technological development and marketing itself have brought about in the marketplace can be regarded as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (American Marketing Association, 2017). Of course, the path that marketing has trodden during its brief history has consequently led to changes in the competencies and skills required by professionals pursuing a career in this field.

Before taking a closer look at the essential marketing competencies and skills covered in the literature, the concept of competence, which has a relatively short history and on whose meaning authors still have not managed to reach a consensus (Palomo, 2008), should be defined. From among the many definitions contained in the literature since 1982 and outlined by Palomo (2008), the existence of three main elements inherent to the concept can be established, namely, behaviours, knowledge and skills. Accordingly, there are many authors (Fuentes, 2009; Pefanis and Harich, 2010; Leeflang, et al., 2014) who use these three concepts indistinctly, and even those who employ them as attributes or requirements for referring to the competencies that companies look for in marketing professionals.

Reibstein, Day and Wind (2009) have stressed the importance of collaboration between the corporate world and the academic community, while also indicating that although this has never been unproductive, a greater joint effort is required.
What competencies and skills should marketing professionals possess?…

This study has been performed along those very lines with an eye to strengthening ties between marketing professionals and universities and establishing as a goal the quest for practical applications that improve the skills of marketing students. For it has frequently been noted that after obtaining their marketing degrees, these graduates are hired by organisations where, in the majority of cases, they are incapable of applying what they have learnt at university to everyday work situations (Pefanis and Harich, 2010).

In this regard, studies such as that conducted by Harraway and Barker (2005) show that there are major discrepancies between what graduates with degrees in economics or finance have learnt at university and what is expected of them at work. In light of this, these authors are in favour of combining conceptual knowledge with practical skills with the aim of providing students with the best possible education. In this vein, the range of skills and competencies contained in the literature which marketing professionals working at companies must possess is exceedingly broad, as can be seen in Table 1. While a significant number of researchers (Day, 2011; Royle and Laing, 2014; Leeflang, et al., 2014; Ortiz, Joyanes and Giraldo, 2016) have focused their analysis on the digital realm and information technologies, there are others who have turned their attention to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Boam and Sparrow, 1992; Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001). Likewise, these competencies and skills have been analysed from more general approaches (Palomo, 2008; Pefanis and Harich, 2010; Foxize School, 2014; Wroblowská and Ruda, 2015) and from those focusing on marketing research or new product development (Carbonell-Foulquié, Munuera-Alemán and Rodríguez-Escudero, 2004; Tzokas, Hultink and Hart, 2004; Micu, et al., 2011; McNally, Durmuşoğlu and Calantone, 2013).

Table 1. Main requirements for marketing professionals according to the authors under review (own elaboration)

| Royle and Laing (2014) | • Principles of corporate communication.  
| | • Customer relationships.  
| | • Forecasting.  
| | • Drawing up contingency plans.  
| | • Macro-environment research.  
| | • Strategic integration of digital marketing skills.  
| | • General technological knowledge.  
| Leeflang et al. (2014) | • Digital tools and technologies.  
| | • Digital brand management.  
| | • Good command of new metrics for measuring results.  
| | • Analytical skills.  
| Ortiz, Joyanes and Giraldo (2016) | • Web 2.0 services.  
<p>| | – Data analytics. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Gilmore, Carson and Grant (2001) | • Networking.  
|                                 |   – Communication skills.  
|                                 |   – Co-working.  |
|                                 |   • Experience.  
|                                 |   • Communication.  
|                                 |   • Good judgment.  |
| Foxize School (2014)            | • Creativity.  
|                                 |   • Leadership.  
|                                 |   • Digital skills.  
|                                 |   • Flexibility.  
|                                 |   • Empathy.  
|                                 |   • Working in liquid organisations.  |
| Palomo (2008)                   | • Strategic vision.  
|                                 |   • Customer orientation.  
|                                 |   • Decision-making.  
|                                 |   • Integrity and honesty.  
|                                 |   • Flexibility.  
|                                 |   • Team management and motivation.  
|                                 |   • Interpersonal relationships.  |
| Pefanis and Harich (2010)       | Techniques  
|                                 |   • Databases.  
|                                 |   • Office.  
|                                 |   • Outlook.  
|                                 | Meta-skills  
|                                 |   • Oral communication.  
|                                 |   • Written communication.  
|                                 | Marketing research  
|                                 |   • Consumer behaviour.  
|                                 |   • Advertising.  
|                                 |   • Sales management.  |
| Wroblowská and Ruda (2015)      | • Communication skills.  
|                                 |   • Negotiation skills, teamwork.  
|                                 |   • Analytic thought.  |
| Micu, et al. (2011)             | Technical skills  
|                                 |   • Database management (data exploration and filtering).  
|                                 | Innate factors  
|                                 |   • Creativity and curiosity.  |
| McNally, Durmuçoğlu and Calantone (2013) | Psychological and psychosocial skills  
|                                 |   • Leadership focusing on results.  
|                                 |   • Balanced risk-taking.  
|                                 |   • Ability to anticipate or avoid problems.  |
Concerning the most significant skills and competencies from a digital marketing and information technology perspective, a good starting point is the definition offered by Royle and Laing (2014). For these authoresses, the most important aspects of digital marketing that they have discovered in their research have to do with seven skills: the principles of corporate communication; skills for developing robust customer relationships; forecasting skills and the ability to draw up contingency plans in order to be able to take action in good time using tools like blogs, social forums or networks; marco-environment research skills (cultural, social, political and technological variables); the strategic integration of digital marketing skills (data monitoring, metrics, etc.); and lastly general technological knowledge (SEO, mobile apps, video editing, web development, etc.). For their part, other authors including Leeflang, et al. (2014) have isolated a series of skills that marketing professionals must now possess to tackle the threats and opportunities deriving from digital challenges and the rapid and sweeping changes in the marketplace: the use of digital tools and technologies; brand management in the digital medium; a good command of new metrics for measuring results; and, lastly, analytical skills.

In connection with the aforementioned tools, there is also the matter of big data, for even though many organisations have not yet harnessed their potential, increasingly more of them are doing so to gain new insights and to create new forms of customer value (Sanders, 2016). In this respect, Ortiz, Joyanes and Giraldo (2016) place the accent on a new set of necessary skills, i.e. the service pack offered by Web 2.0 in line with the better data gathering and exploitation techniques currently available thanks to big data. Moreover, another technology with an important development in the field of marketing, and more specifically in the supply chain, is radio frequency identification (RFID). Although many companies began to introduce this technology with certain misgivings because of its impact on consumer privacy (Boeck et al., 2011), the fact is that its adoption is becoming gradually more widespread, even going so far as to create value in its co-ordinated use with social networks (Oinonen and Jalkala, 2012).

Another approach to the study of competencies and skills is from the perspective of SMEs. Due to their idiosyncrasies, their marketing policies differ from those of large companies (Carson, 1990). For this reason, the skills and competencies pertaining to their environment do not necessarily have to be same for other companies. That said, from the SME approach “networking” is understood as a highly relevant tool whose use improves communication between a company’s top management and its competitors, building up partnerships and improving its competitive position (Gilmore, Carson and Grant, 2001). Other more theoretical approaches focus on skills in four areas – knowledge, above all of the micro environment, experience, communication and good judgement, such as the ability to assess the information obtained employing the three previous skills and to make the most suitable decisions (Carson and Gilmore, 2000). In the opinion of these authors, this skills set would be completed by experiential learning.
As regards a more general vision of the competencies and skills required by companies, in the list drawn up by Foxize School (2014) on the basis of 38 interviews with relevant marketing professionals in Spain, the following six aspects can be observed as common denominators: creativity; leadership; digital skills; flexibility; empathy; and the ability to work in liquid organisations, this last aspect being understood as the capacity to adapt to constant change and to foster and accelerate the growth of a company. Similarly, the study performed by Palomo (2008) revealed a skills set inherent to marketing directors, such as strategic vision, customer orientation, decision-making, integrity and honesty, flexibility, team management and motivation, and interpersonal relationships.

Other authors focusing on the American market have researched into those jobs that require four years of experience or less, dividing skills into two categories, i.e. “technical skills” and “meta-skills” (Pefanis and Harich, 2010). In the first category, the most sought-after competencies are database analysis and the use of Office and Outlook tools, while in the second these include oral and written communication. To this skills set Pefanis and Harich (2010) have added another group called “marketing research” which would fall into the third category and whose most noteworthy competencies include consumer behaviour, advertising and sales management. Lastly, based on the results of their research Wroblowská and Ruda (2015) have drawn up their own inventory of the skills most in demand by companies, listing them in the following order: communication skills; negotiation skills; skills inherent to teamwork; and skills relating to analytical thought.

With regard to the approach from new product research and development, Micu, et al. (2011) have stressed that the transformation of marketing research skills, which to their mind we are now witnessing, is as a result of digitisation. Thus, new skills that have not been covered in the different approaches analysed here (digital and general skills, plus those pertaining to SMEs or new product research and development) have emerged. In this connection, McNally, Durmuşoğlu and Calantone (2013) have focused their attention on personality traits, these being understood as a determining factor when coping with digital innovation, which ultimately conditions corporate decision-making.

In conclusion, a broad range of skills and competencies that marketing professionals must possess nowadays have been found in the literature reviewed here, resulting not only from the different approaches taken to the object of study, but also from other more specific ones followed by each one of the authors with an interest in the topic.

3. Research objectives and hypotheses

This study has been performed with the following specific objectives in mind:

1. To identify the most sought-after competencies and skills in the corporate sector.
2. To identify the shortcomings that companies detect in young marketing professionals fresh out of university.
3. To determine those aspects of university course content in which companies believe that there is room for improvement.

Additionally, this study has focused on three hypotheses that have helped in its development inasmuch as they pose several research questions.

H1: university curricula may indeed be gradually including the digital competencies required of marketing professionals by companies, but it is conceivable that this state of affairs has yet to be perceived by the corporate sector.

H2: the aspects that have traditionally formed part of basic marketing skills, including communication and relationship skills, will ultimately coexist with new technological applications.

H3: new digital technologies may eliminate previous technologies, necessary for developing CRM, database or SIM strategies, which marked the development of marketing at the end of the twentieth century.

4. Universe and sample

Since this study’s aim is to delve into the application of marketing in different branches of industry, a universe comprising specialists in the field was employed, bearing in mind their involvement in two well-differentiated but connected sectors as regards knowledge production and use, to wit, the corporate sector and the academic community. Accordingly, a qualitative and structured sample, based on the selection of respondents on a quota basis, was chosen.

When selecting the sample using non-probabilistic techniques as befits qualitative research, 11 in-depth interviews were conducted, taking into account the dual involvement of the respondents in the universe. From the corporate sector, respondents occupying executive posts in marketing at companies operating in Spain and abroad were chosen, irrespective of the geographical location of their headquarters. All the companies were selected on the strength of their proven track record not only in recruiting senior and junior marketing technicians, but also in offering internships to newly graduated students or those about to graduate, which allows them to gain a clear understanding of the adaptability of the professional marketing profile to their organisations. The companies comprising the sample are as follows: Röhling and Raminatrans, both logistics companies with an international scope, the former based in Germany and the latter in Valencia (Spain); the industrial companies Smufitt Kappa and Arteche Hermanos, the former based in Ireland and the latter in Munguía (Biscay, Spain), both operating internationally; and the consumer goods firms Orbea and Eroski, both based in the Basque Country and operating at an international and national level, respectively.
A total of five in-depth interviews were also conducted with the respondents possessing a dual knowledge of the field of marketing due to their involvement in both the corporate sector and the academic world. These respondents with a dual profile – executive and academic – were selected in terms of the areas of business and geographical scope of their companies: Apex Medical Corp., a multinational health-care product distribution company based in Taiwan; Eroski, a Spanish supermarket chain based in the Basque Country, with outlets across the country; Ibermática, a computer industry enterprise based in the Basque Country operating throughout Spain; Incotrans, a logistics consultancy firm based in the Basque Country with an international scope; and MKT International Consulting, a marketing consultancy firm based in the Basque Country and operating at an international level.

As to the respondents’ academic affiliation, they lecture at the following centres: Burgos University (UBU); Camarabilbao University Business School; Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (PUC); Deusto University (UdG); ESIC Business and Marketing School; Mondragón University (MU); and the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU).

When selecting the respondents, an attempt was made to obtain an overview of the business fabric, gathering data from a variety of sectors, including industry, distribution, food, logistics and consulting, while always taking into account the companies’ level of consolidation regardless of their national or international scope. Thus, it is considered that the respondents constitute, for an exploratory analysis, a robust structural sample of not only the Basque Country’s major companies, but also their international marketing needs, since many of them operate abroad.
What competencies and skills should marketing professionals possess?

Table 3. Respondents with both a professional and academic marketing profile (own elaboration)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professors</th>
<th>Reference company</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Headquarters</th>
<th>Scope</th>
<th>Marketing spend with respect to total expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Matesanz</td>
<td>Eroski</td>
<td>Consumer</td>
<td>Gipuzkoa</td>
<td>Nat.</td>
<td>NR/NK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marta Prado</td>
<td>INCOTRANS</td>
<td>Consulting</td>
<td>Biscay</td>
<td>Int.</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>María Kobetsky</td>
<td>MKM Business International Consulting</td>
<td>Consulting</td>
<td>Biscay</td>
<td>Int.</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan Liedo</td>
<td>Ibermática</td>
<td>Consulting</td>
<td>Gipuzkoa</td>
<td>Int.</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iñigo Salazar</td>
<td>Apex Medical</td>
<td>Consumer</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>Int.</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Methodology

Since its basic purpose is to get to know and understand marketing training and how it adapts to the demands of the job market, inquiry and explanation are the two main goals to which this study aspires. To this end, a transversal and exploratory study design was chosen, insofar as the intention was to approach a specific topic (Grande and Abascal, 2007), in this case the current requirements established by companies when hiring marketing specialists. In short, what is involved is an empirical study based on the direct experience of the respondents in the field (Sierra Bravo, 2007).

This study has been conducted from a qualitative perspective in order to discover aspects relating to the sense and meaning of social action (Sierra Bravo, 2007), considering that social and professional knowledge is produced in a network and accessible through experts in the field. As already noted, rather than intending to be conclusive, it is an exploratory approach that helps to gain an initial understanding of the circumstances, characteristics, needs, points of view and external demands of the different business areas analysed here.

Thus, using the in-depth interview technique, recourse was made to those experts with considerable knowledge of the marketing industry; knowledge or expertise stemming from their teaching activities and/or experience in the corporate sector.

The in-depth research interviews conducted in this study were based on a semi-structured questionnaire in which the respondents were free to answer the questions as they chose (Valles, 2007). Two research questionnaires were drawn up: one for the marketing professionals and lecturers; and another for the marketing executives. In both cases, the following thematic blocks were covered: perception of
the job market and the level of preparedness of students; determining factors in the future needs of employers; curricular overview; teaching methodologies (only for the “marketing lecturer/executive” group); and skills required in the new job market.

6. Results

In light of the results obtained from the in-depth interviews with the different respondents, first and foremost it is possible to define a set of five fields or areas of knowledge regarded as strategic in which the degree of preparedness of professionals is seen as a vital aspect (see Table 4). Several conclusions can be drawn from the initial data. It can be observed that there is no knowledge area that is considered to be inadequate or lacking in value. Although some fields, including law, Bachelor’s theses and communication technologies, are regarded as less relevant and there is a lack of consensus on knowledge areas such as mathematics and sociology, half of them are regarded as strategic.

Table 4. Importance given by companies to different fields of knowledge (own elaboration)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic fields</th>
<th>Less relevant fields</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Bachelor’s thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic and operative marketing</td>
<td>Communication technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internships at other organisations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shifting the focus of analysis towards the degree to which the main competencies covered in BA marketing programmes adapt to the requirements of the job market, Graphs 1 and 2 contain thought-provoking data.
Graph 1. Degree to which the main competencies covered in BA marketing programmes adapt to the requirements of the job market, according to the respondents working and lecturing in marketing (own elaboration)

- Languages: with a preference for English
- Ability to identify the role of the human factor in companies and to manage employees
- Knowledge of billing and financing in international operations
- Knowledge of the main analytical accounting models and the ability to apply them
- New technological tools: relational marketing, e-commerce, direct marketing
- Identifying models of transport and types of agents and operators and defining a logistical distribution plan
- Corporate communication management skills: advertising and public relations
- Being competent in trade negotiations
- Knowledge of the regulatory and legal implications of corporate management
- Ability to formulate strategies, design marketing plans and make decisions
- Knowing how to apply accounting procedures for a correct diagnosis
- Knowing how to analyse economic environments and consumer behaviours
- Understanding the company’s organisational model
- Knowledge of the basic concepts of micro and macroeconomics
- Information and communication technology literacy
- Command of mathematics, statistics and market research tools
Graph 2. Degree to which the main competencies covered in BA marketing programmes adapt to the requirements of the job market, according to the respondents working as marketing executives (own elaboration)
Firstly, it should be noted that no important differences can be observed between the perception of both groups (respondents lecturing and working in marketing, on the one hand, and those pursuing a marketing executive career, on the other). For the latter, language and information and communication technology skills are those that more fully meet the demands of the job market. While the former also add the human factor and employee management to language skills as those best adapted to job requirements.

Lastly, with respect to the competencies that are less adapted to the demands of the marketplace, the respondents lecturing and working in marketing single out a knowledge of the regulatory and legal implications of corporate management and that of the basic concepts of micro- and macroeconomics; this last perception also being shared by the respondents in the marketing executive group, who also include a knowledge of the main analytical accounting models and the ability to apply them.

What follows are some of the opinions voiced on these issues during the interviews: “The field of languages is very important”, “I see mathematics as being less relevant, while law is relative”, and “…I believe that it is essential to stress the advantages of internships.”

Although, as shown in Table 4, the companies and lecturers share the opinion that most of the knowledge areas are strategically important, it will be seen further on that in these same fields several significant gaps have been detected which should be analysed.

But prior to this, and returning once again to the information contained in Table 4, it can be observed how all the fields of knowledge considered strategic by the responding companies are of a practical nature; in other words, they regard only those fields of knowledge clearly associated with practical applications as being so.

Before identifying the skills gaps of university graduates, it is necessary to highlight the importance of two determining factors that have emerged in the research which are fundamentally transforming the profile of marketing professionals and will continue to do so in the future. For that matter, the responding companies generally agree that both globalisation and digitisation are the two most important determinants in this regard. These factors destroy and, in turn, create new competencies and skills that are still not adequately covered in BA marketing programmes (see Table 6) and which are related to some of the aforementioned strategic fields of knowledge, such as strategic and operative marketing, communication and internships (Table 4). A closer look will now be taken at those competencies shown in Table 6 which have been found to be lacking.

In the context of social and communication skills, in which communication plays an essential role, an important gap has been detected precisely concerning the management of interpersonal relationships. Regardless of the branch of industry, there is a general consensus among the responding companies on the importance of these competencies in labour relations. Delving deeper into this issue, the skills mentioned more often by the respondents as leaving a lot to be desired have to do with teamwork, public presentations, co-operative relationships with the rest of
one’s colleagues, negotiation skills and interpersonal communication, referring to the ability to start and end conversations, express opposing views and have the necessary assertiveness to voice a criticism.

Table 6. Greatest skills gaps detected in new marketing professionals (own elaboration)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic skill</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social and communication skills</td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Co-operative relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital marketing</td>
<td>Strategic use of digital marketing tools: SEO, SEM, e-mailing, e-social media and e-mobile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparedness for working in liquid organisations</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tolerance to permanent change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to learn and unlearn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social and communication skills have always been vital; as a matter of fact, the success of an individual in an organisation depends on them to a large extent (Goleman, 2006). Nowadays, however, they are gradually becoming more important for companies due to the proliferation of interpersonal relationships resulting from the interconnection of companies in the global marketplace. This has doubtless been compounded by the interculturalism underlying not only the universal character of the marketplace, but also their international dimension, since having to cater to the different cultures of their employees complicates interpersonal relationships.

Several opinions in this respect indicate how “multiculturalism must be introduced into curricula, and in an attitudinal manner, as a special skill to which I would add the ability to face adversity”, and “communication skills should be fostered more and even above and beyond: the whole issue of autonomy and the capacity for self-motivational development..., being proactive.”

A second gap detected, pertaining to strategic and operative marketing, involves digital marketing as an activity that currently encompasses most of the digitisation initiatives implemented by companies, given its relationship with the market and, more specifically, the customer. Nowadays, companies have difficulties in finding professionals with the training to understand and use technology with a view
to automating marketing processes and engaging digital customers using CRM strategies.

Such opinions prevailed in the interviews: “We would like candidates to be stronger in digital marketing”, and “when the marketing department asks me for profiles, they also request that they include digital marketing.”

Where most shortcomings can be observed is in the ability of new recruits fresh out of university to use tools such as SEO, SEM, e-mailing, e-social media and e-mobile. Similarly, they have skills gaps as regards the design of digital marketing plans and their implementation with new technologies, and conducting marketing research with only a personal computer.

The last skills gap appearing in the analysis, corresponding to the preparedness for working in liquid organisations, does not easily dovetail with the knowledge areas covered in BA marketing programmes, even though it transversally affects several of them (i.e. organisation, communication, internships, etc.), showing that higher education does not meet the current needs of companies with regard to aspects such as flexibility, adaptability, tolerance and the ability to learn and unlearn.

Some of the opinions expressed in this connection are as follows: “We prefer that they be flexible and know how to act in changing environments”, and “organisations are increasingly more liquid, and to change solid and hierarchical organisations requires people who know how to cope with change.”

7. Discussion and implications

The aim of this study has been to analyse the marketing competencies and skills required by companies, comparing them with those acquired at university by young professionals. Furthermore, it has highlighted the current importance of globalisation and digitisation for companies as determining factors in both the appearance of new competencies and the continuity of others. It is with good reason that digitisation is surely a key factor for companies in improving their positioning and competitiveness (Observatorio ADEI, 2014; Roland Berger, S.A., 2016), while market globalisation has become the main driver for change since the end of the twentieth century, as Olivares (2005) has observed.

In light of the above and the research results, it can be concluded that all the competencies and skills regarded as strategic by the companies comprising the sample respond to the challenges posed by the two aforementioned factors: globalisation and digitisation. This being the case, it has also been noted how some of the skills emerging from this rapid and far-reaching globalisation and digitisation are conspicuous by their absence in the profiles of the new generation of marketing professionals. It may therefore be concluded that university curricula should be refocused to adapt course content in order to bridge the existing gaps; shortcomings that, moreover, have to do with such important fields as social and communication skills, digital marketing and the ability to work in liquid organisations.
The results indicate that specific skills detected in the analysis, such as teamwork, public presentations, co-operative relationships, interpersonal communication and negotiation, are still required by companies and that there is nothing to indicate that this will change in the medium term. This finding is consistent with the results obtained in previous studies (Vélaz de Medrano, 2002; Cajide, Porto and Abeal, 2002; Repetto and Pérez-González, 2007). Notwithstanding this, the detection of significant gaps as regards these skills in the profiles of university graduates working in the corporate sector is also noteworthy. All things considered, H2 has been confirmed.

Another of the fields in which a significant skills gap has been detected is that of digital marketing. Nonetheless, the existence of competencies that emerged in the second half of the last century and which are still relevant have also been identified. What is involved are skills relating to the formulation of CRM strategies, including the use of databases and data warehouses. Even so, it can be seen how university graduates have skills gaps regarding some of the new CRM tools, above all those with a collaborative scope (e-mailing, social networks, e-mobile, etc.), as confirmed by the responding companies. If to this is added their difficulties in drawing up digital marketing plans, these lacunas become even more evident. So, in view of the above, HI has been confirmed, although the same cannot be said of H3, which held that new digital technologies would eliminate the use of those relating to CRM, databases or SIM, developed at the end of the last century. Since it has been observed how many of these technologies continue to be employed by companies, it has been impossible to confirm this hypothesis.

Another skills gap has been found which was not envisaged in the initial research hypotheses, to wit, the unpreparedness of the new generation of marketing professionals for working in liquid organisations. The term “liquid” has been borrowed from Zygmunt Bauman (2013) given the similarity and parallels between his theory of liquid modernity and company life. Companies expect marketing professionals to be flexible, evinced in multiple aspects such as work hours, changes as regards responsibilities, the workplace, colleagues, etc., but without any of this exceeding the threshold of tolerance required of employees. Similarly, another of the skills required of marketing professionals by companies is the ability to adapt efficiently to their specific ecosystems, both ever-changing and unstable. This does not only involve the constant and rapid renewal of new knowledge, but also the need to discard prior knowledge that, instead of being an asset, has become a liability. Thus, marketing professionals must have the ability not only to learn, but also to unlearn. In a nutshell, the interviews conducted here point to a clear trend towards a professional profile with not only a solid academic background, but also a more intangible and less easily measurable skills set which will be much in demand in the near future.

Notwithstanding the contributions of this study, it still has certain limitations. For instance, the uncertainty arising from both the size of companies and the markets that they serve (B2B or B2C) could be a relevant object of study with the aim of determining the importance and impact that both factors may have on the job skills that have been identified here. The results of this research could contribute to refocus
university curricula, bearing in mind the requirements of companies in terms of their size and market, whether they be of a mass consumption or organisational nature.

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References

Papers


What competencies and skills should marketing professionals possess?...


**Books and reports**

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