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To be a marketer or to do what marketers do? Using a mixed methods approach to explore the aspiring marketer mind-set

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A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

Both anecdotal and evidential testimonies posit marketing as a “wicked” endeavor, in thrall to sales and profit and at odds with society's needs. Using social identity theory as our primary frame of reference we look to obtain some foreground understanding of those flowing through the educational/occupational transition system and towards this occupation. We explore how aspiring marketers perceive both marketing and marketing practitioners and evaluate how those perceptions contribute to a sense of social-self at an early-stage of career formulation. Our aim is to evaluate the potential for a link between reported marketer behavior, occupational perceptions and group character. A qualitative/quantitative mixed-model research approach is adopted combining both projective techniques and personality testing. Results, derived from UK university cohorts spanning three levels of study, suggest respondents focus primarily on externally oriented aspects of marketing work, with occupational aesthetics and conspicuous representation seen as both object and subject of a marketer role. Respondents self-report as strong on traits associated with promotion and persuasiveness but less on those related to an espoused creativity. We conclude there is evidence suggesting the study group perceives being a marketer at least as important as doing what marketers do and discuss the implications this might have for how and why marketing is practiced as it is.

1. Introduction

Although organizations regard marketing as essential, its practitioners are mistrusted (e.g., Heath et al., 2017; Sheth & Sisodia, 2005; Stoeckl & Luedicke, 2015), their “malfeasances and misdemeanors” (Schultz & Holbrook, 2009) the stuff of public disquiet and disdain. Such testimony posits marketing as “wicked” endeavor, in thrall to sales and profit and at odds with society's needs. But marketing is as much a reflection of its practitioners as it is of its methods. Marketing is praxis, and as such is both theoretically and socially constructed (Ardley & Quinn, 2014). Given this, researchers have been eager to explore marketers' integrity (e.g., Hill, 2017; Marta et al., 2008; Ramanathan & Swain, 2019). Yet despite findings identifying a range of situational and/or psychological factors that impact marketers' behavior, suggestions that they are more *malevolent* than other occupational groups have long been refuted (Hunt & Chonko, 1984). Researchers continue to speculate, therefore, on what underpins both anecdotal and empirical accounts of an

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implied "high level of perceived misconduct" (Moorman & Day, 2016, p. 20).

Research into marketer behavior has focused primarily on practitioners and is framed in the context of marketing strategies, tactics and their outcomes. But this, to coin a phrase, is "to close the stable door after the horse has bolted". Key to understanding how marketing both performs and evolves is knowing more about its aspirants - those who choose marketing degrees as a conduit to work and who will set the future direction for marketing activities. And for academics generally there is an obligation to ask (e.g., Oxford, 1992), "who are our students?" What motivates them to choose this occupation towards which our degree course leads? If we are to aid both student *and* society derive mutual advantage in post-university life, then a better understanding of a) the raw material that flows into our universities and b) how we might both shape and manage student expectations, is essential.

There is a broad consensus suggesting people look to fill jobs that allow best for personal expression, and that we are only occupationally satisfied if work fits our vocational interests (e.g. Furnham, 2001; Su et al., 2019), values and abilities (e.g. Dæhlen, 2005; Dierdorff & Morgeson, 2013) and/or our trait personality (e.g. Rossier, 2015; Whittingham, 2017). Similarly, self-efficacy – the belief in our ability to perform well in a role – is cited as influencing both job choice and success (Van Vianen et al., 2013). There has also, though, been a rise of interest in identity/identification related to work (e.g., Bayerl et al., 2018; Dickens et al., 2019; Miscenko & Day, 2016) suggesting that how we "see" ourselves in a job helps determine our associations with it. We take this as a point of departure, therefore, our aim to explore the identity-related perceptions of students transitioning through different levels of a marketing-related university education. In so doing we also explore connections between their socially constructed perceptions of marketers (with marketing as context) and the concerns outlined at the start of this article.

Some authors (e.g., Bayerl et al., 2018; Bennett, 2010) discuss *professional identity* reporting how those in work may possess a strong collective feeling connecting themselves to others in the same occupation. University students, however, have no continuous professional context in which to anchor such feelings, and even though work experience may be either a formal or informal part of their learning, such context will be both temporary and at one remove from the practice/practitioners they encounter. Rather, their future community of practice will exist as a reference group (Kemper, 1968), a point of aspiration (or *longing*) rather than membership (or *belonging*). Identity formation is a major assignment of adolescence involving both self-evaluation and social comparison (Neff & McGehee, 2010), and there is evidence linking social comparison and career choice (Li et al., 2015). For our subject – the aspiring marketer - social aspects of identity are key, and we therefore set social identity (e.g., Hogg et al., 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as our conceptual focus.

Prior studies on student marketer/marketing perceptions have focused largely on marketing awareness/worthwhileness (Camey & Williams, 2004; Danko & Schaninger, 1988; Ferrell & Gonzalez, 2004) and the satisfaction potential of marketing roles (e.g., advertising – Anderson et al., 1992; market research – Brush et al., 2014; sales – Sojka et al., 2000). Others have considered student-perceived relationships between marketers and customers (Dailey & Kim, 2001), marketing and sustainability (Pantelic et al., 2016) and marketing and creativity (McCorkle et al., 2007; Prabhu et al., 2008). And while there is some limited work on social identity and career attractiveness (e.g., Banks et al., 2015; Celani & Singh, 2011; Degrassi, 2019) this focuses on organizations rather than occupations. We have not found, however, prior research exploring the socially focused identity perceptions of those who aspire to a marketing career. We focus, therefore, on the following: (1) how those studying for a future career in marketing perceive this occupation, and how they perceive those who practice it; (2) what it is that attracts these students to the job of marketer; (3) how marketing students characterize the social identity of marketing and its practitioners; and (4) whether those of a particular character are attracted to marketer work and, thus, to their course.

Note, these questions are not premised on assumptions of unethical intent but on obtaining a foreground understanding of the embodied impressions of marketer hopefuls. Our emphasis is thus not the *concept* of social identity but rather the *phenomenon* of social identity, as perceived in one specific context. We deploy both projective techniques (Soley & Smith, 2008) and self-report personality testing (John et al., 1991) to provide evidence for the testing of five associated hypotheses. Hogan and Blake (1999) suggest personality traits reflect job-related character from an external perspective, but that the actor's view of themselves is more an issue of identity. Both are important, however - intersecting and overlapping in particular ways (Hoff et al., 2020; Stoll & Trautwein, 2017; Syed, 2017). And though our focus is social identity we deploy personality testing to augment our results. Our research design is thus mixed model (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), triangulating both interpretive and realist data.

Hogan and Blake (1999) further note that interest and identity are related, and given projective techniques explore complex/deep-seated beliefs (Hofstede et al., 2007) we consider these appropriate to our aims. Our contribution is both academic and practical. First, we reveal insights into the socially constructed identity beliefs of marketing hopefuls, aiding a better understanding of those entering a key, yet contested, occupation. Along with this we demonstrate how our mixed-method approach helps surface and qualify occupational expectations. We also discuss the practical implications of our findings – how knowing students' tacit occupational understandings can help shape future marketing course positioning and recruitment, and how we might also incorporate these understandings into our strategies for teaching and learning. We make recommendations, accordingly.

Our study is focused on three student cohorts, taken as a more-or-less cross-sectional sample across the years 2019 to 2021. Firstly, and primarily, we consider First Year Undergraduate students at the beginning of their academic career and take these as a benchmark for then comparing students at later stages of learning. This subsequent group is split between Final Year Undergraduate students on the verge of completing their undergraduate course, and then Masters students. These have made a targeted commitment to further, advanced, marketing study and we consider these *young professionals*. Our narrow time interval assures for all a similar frame of global socio-cultural experience, considered important given the fast-moving nature of both marketing theory and practice.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Vocational fit

The notion of fit, or congruence, is now a well-established pillar of occupational enquiry. There is a broad consensus suggesting this plays a substantial role in predicting both choice of, and success in, a career (Van Vianen et al., 2013). Its converse, misfit, is considered an occupational stressor (Ford, 2012). Based primarily on the ideas of John Holland (see Furnham, 2001 for a review) it is suggested career-related satisfaction is most likely to occur where the person and their occupational environment are aligned. For *person* Holland suggests the proxy of vocational personality (e.g., Holland, 1968) though his RIASEC dimensions (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional) are often alternatively named vocational interests so as to distinguish these from personality trait taxonomies (e.g., the *Big Five*: Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism: e.g., Goldberg, 1992; John et al., 1991).

Although different constructs, it is suggested interests and traits are related in various ways and to different extents dependent upon context and contingency (Larson & Borgen, 2002; Stoll & Trautwein, 2017; Šverko & Babarović, 2016). Both provide important insights into an individual's character, and though Hollands' interests-related taxonomy is more often emphasized in vocational behavior research, trait personality models of varying types are still frequently addressed in either a primary or supporting role (e.g., Furnham & Pendleton, 2016; Satterwhite et al., 2009; Stoll et al., 2020; Whittingham, 2017). Hogan and Blake (1999) suggest measures of trait personality provide an external/objective view on an individual's character whereas interest and (see further below) identity represent the individual's personal/subjective perspective on themselves. The one can thus serve as an adjunct to the other, dependent upon focus of interest.

Although trait personality can be assessed in many contexts, vocational interest pertains primarily to person/working environment fit (often therefore called person-organization fit) and is thus applied extensively in counselling and associated research into work (Morgan et al., 2019). For our specific problem, though, respondents (university students) are unlikely to have engaged extensively with the context to which they aspire, with *fit* ideational rather than concrete. It has been suggested, though, that personality (Rossier, 2015) and interest (Hogan & Blake, 1999) both help define/develop an individual's identity and this has recently emerged as an area of interest for vocational behavior scholars (see Miscenko & Day, 2016 for a review). Identity is an area of especial relevance also for understanding adolescent and young adult behavior (Neff & McGehee, 2010), its development a crucial task with implications for both personal growth and choice-making (Albarello et al., 2018). In the later stages of this period "vocational direction" (Marcia, 1980) emerges as key, with identity a major cause of both potential and actual congruence/conflict in work (Bayerl et al., 2018).

2.2. Identity and self-categorization

Identity is associated with distinctiveness (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and the literature (Stets & Burke, 2000) suggests the human identity domain comprises two related, but separate, concepts: personal identity and social identity. These are complementary ideas suggesting we can concurrently be both *I* or *me,* and also *we* or *us* (Turner & Onorato, 1999). The first, suggests Farmer and van Dyne (2017), pertains to individual role while the second aligns with group association. Social identity requires a social context, so its possession means having "cognition of oneness" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) with those in a defined group. This is the *in* group, and all others are the *out* group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Social identity scholars (e.g., Jetten et al., 2001) suggest that similarity (with those in the in-group) can also be a source of differentiation (from those in the out-group). Both inclusiveness *and* exceptionality, therefore, characterize social identity (Hogg et al., 2017).

Stets and Burke (2000) argue identity, "… is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in relation to other social categories or classifications" (p. 224). Such identity work is performed as self-categorization, with categories embodying internalized representations reflecting the lifestyles and social goals towards which individuals aspire. And following work by Turner (1985) and Turner et al. (1987) social identity and self-categorization theories have fused - Hogg and Terry (2000), for example, state self-categorization is the process of depersonalization that culminates in a social identity being adopted.

Group and social identity may be considered anomalous, but Stets and Burke (2014) suggest they are distinct. Social identity, they argue, refers to *identification* with others while group identity suggests *interaction.* Our interest is in the first - how identity serves to attract, rather than bind together those already working. This distinguishes social identity from professional identity (Bayerl et al., 2018) which needs a working context to apply. There are other identity domains addressed within the vocational behavior literature: occupational identity (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011), career identity (LaPointe, 2010) and vocational identity (Porfeli et al., 2011). These are similar though distinct fields and all chiefly viewed as a *condition* that can be ascribed. We are concerned, however, with identity as a *phenomenon.* One that can be *de*scribed and portrayed as a defined social category.

2.3. Social identity and work

Gini (2001) argues for three meanings accorded to work. First, there is an economic/instrumental meaning representing work as a conduit to lifestyle. Second, work is purposive, providing opportunities to strive, accomplish, and self-actualize. Third, there is a socio-psychological meaning, aligning with desires for self-esteem, status and social recognition. Gini (2001) further argues work's chief purpose is not to produce goods or services but to fashion meaning for employees. Dutton et al.'s (2010) notion of *evaluative* social identity focuses on the positive aspects of career and captures subjective feelings of self-regard or -esteem. It is thus a key motivator for occupational choice.

A number of authors (Banks et al., 2015; Celani & Singh, 2011; Degrassi, 2019) have identified social identity as a factor in career attraction but as with much of the literature on identity and work (see Miscenko & Day, 2016) the unit of analysis is organizations rather than occupations. Ybema et al. (2009) suggest social identity is constantly under construction. The self-categorization leading to this embodies a "process model of self" (Haslam et al., 2000) and directs individuals towards that self. Individuals are thus inclined to positively represent not only the occupation to which they belong or aspire, but also the groups that perform that occupation (Goldberg, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Indeed, Hogg and Mullins (1999) suggest that social identity is motivationally directed by a need for both positive distinctiveness *and* self-worth, while Li et al. (2015) note a positive relationship between social/group comparison and career choice.

2.4. Social identity and the marketer – setting the hypotheses

Marketing focuses on identity primarily in respect of consumers, for whom possessions are considered an extension of self (Belk, 1988), with consumption the medium through which joint meanings of consumer and good are negotiated. But what does identity mean for aspiring marketers? How do *they* locate themselves in an increasingly complex and materially oriented world? There is a discrete literature on how student marketers perceive various aspects of marketing work (e.g., Brush et al., 2014; Dailey & Kim, 2001; Ferrell & Gonzalez, 2004; McCorkle et al., 2007; Pantelic et al., 2016; Swanson, 2019) though not on how they perceive the occupations' character or identity. Most studies examining relationships between students, occupation and identity/image focus on other frequently typecast careers, primarily accountancy (Caglio et al., 2019; Fisher & Murphy, 1995; Kaenzig & Keller, 2011) and engineering (Cadaret et al., 2017; Jungert, 2013; Papafilippou & Bentley, 2017). Meaning marketing is thus ripe for exploration.

Brownlie and Saren (1997) refer to taken-for-granted myths to illustrate how a marketing identity is stereotypically constituted in the minds of society. For example, in the public eye marketers are frequently perceived as untrustworthy and exploitative (e.g., Schultz & Holbrook, 2009; Stoeckl & Luedicke, 2015) with suspect moral framing (Kreps & Monin, 2011). This is not new (e.g., Packard, 1957) and researchers have long sought to uncover that which underpins their apparently less creditable behaviors. Is this, for example, Machiavellianism (Hunt & Chonko, 1984); ego (Ramanathan & Swain, 2019); a lack of religiosity or ethical values (Marta et al., 2008) or a myopic view on their responsibilities (Hill, 2017)?.

This stereotype draws extensively on the trope of marketing itself, an "oppressive force" (Heath et al., 2017) that seeks to manipulate consumers in an increasingly "post-truth" manner (Kozinets et al., 2020) and is delivered at scale through ubiquitous communication platforms such as tv, cinema, print and social media. Marketing is thus imbued, perhaps especially for the young, with a "renegade" social status (Gurrieri, 2012) and Woodall (2012) suggests that marketing recruits may be attracted purely *because* of its ill repute. And this may even be because the perceived character of the in group (marketing) is at variance with expectations of the out group (society). Latrofa et al. (2012), for example, suggest that adverse status perceptions by "outsiders" will strengthen in-group appeal. From this we develop our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. Respondents will construct a social identity for marketers/marketing that is characterized as edgy/cool/renegade, challenging the norms of respectable employment and equating well with the rebellion of youth.

It is likely that those newly aspiring to a career establish a sense of "pre-professional identity" (Jackson, 2016) from the media, through school, hearsay, or perhaps also via exposure to what Fine (1985) has called, occupational aesthetics. We all have a personal archive of occupational stereotypes (Benyamini & Gati, 1987) but occupational aesthetics specifically represent the expressive rather than instrumental side of work, and occupations where this applies have been portrayed as aesthetic labor - "looking good, sounding right" (Warhurst & Nickson, 2001). Aesthetic labor conventionally denotes work where being outgoing, attractive or of smart appearance are deemed necessary for organizational compliance (Karlsson, 2012). In some fields (Pounders et al., 2015; Van den Broek, 2011; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007) aesthetic labor connotes emotional labor, a pejorative manifestation of organizations' attempts to impose constraints and uniformity on employees.

Much of the research on identity for those already working in marketing (e.g., Alvesson, 1994; Cronin, 2004; Hackley & Kover, 2007; Nixon & Crewe, 2004; Nyilasy et al., 2012; Roberts, 2005; Round & Styhre, 2017; Schauster et al., 2021; Svensson, 2007) emphasizes creativity, and is associated with advertising and similarly aesthetic endeavor. These studies often depict occupational aesthetics as evidence of cultural authority though, rather than institutional repression, and similarly attest to a positive-expressive presence depicting identity as a personal *and* social condition. For example, Hackley and Kover (2007), Nixon and Crewe (2004) and Round and Styhre (2017) report on agency worker clothing styles. These observe the artfully casual appearance of producer staff (analysts, copywriters) and the sharper/tidier character of "the suits" (account executives, senior creatives, etc.) - the latter, especially, exemplified in TV programs such as Mad Men and The Apprentice. In a Swedish advertising agency Alvesson (1994, p. 559) observed that "Symbolism in appearance, in style, talk and espoused values is important …". This embodies cultural imperatives within the organization and business priorities outside.

Hypothesis 2. Respondents will construct a social identity for marketing/marketers that implies the potential for practitioners to pursue both creative and stylish endeavor - of undertaking ephemeral work, and of "looking good" and "sounding right".

Beyond the above, Cronin (2004) suggests advertising practitioners are "taste makers" aligned to the *zeitgeist*, while Gurrieri (2012) - although focusing on a specific marketer type (coolhunter) - also cites the importance of creatively externalizing the self. Marketing as thus idealized might be viewed as the perfect route to both corporate- and self-interest (Kadirov et al., 2014). It is imbued, perhaps especially for the young, with a "cool" social status (Nancarrow et al., 2002), perhaps one step up – both socially and remuneratively – from Misra and Walters' (2016) fashion store workers who identify also with the *accoutrements* of their labor. There is also a growing belief (Besen-Cassino, 2014; Misra & Walters, 2016) that the young consider work as much a social as a mercantile opportunity with certain careers perceived as providing opportunities both for "fun" and for social credibility. Further, identity at work has been recently viewed as an issue of personal branding, in turn evidence of both acquiescence to neoliberal norms (Vallas & Christin, 2018) and the commoditization of employees (Pagis & Ailon, 2017). It has also been demonstrated, though, that aesthetic compliance with a perceived in group (or reference group) may obviate such negative connotations acting instead as "status symbolism" (Millan & Mittal, 2017).

Hypothesis 3. Respondents will construct a social identity for marketers/marketing that allows for a form of personal branding that accentuates a socially desirable and youthful "cool".

Work undertaken previously on marketer (e.g., Ardley & Quinn, 2014; Bennett, 2010; Round & Styhre, 2017) and marketing student (e.g., Celuch et al., 2009; Dean & Jolly, 2012; Kleine, 2002) identity has focused on identity formation (role) rather than identity aspiration (projected membership) and addresses these as an in-group rather than a reference group. Further, Johnson et al. (2012) observe social identity researchers have largely emphasized situational rather than dispositional determinants of self, and that in this context individual difference is rarely explored. "Propensity to identify" (Albert et al., in Johnson et al., 2012, p. 1143) therefore, appears to be under-researched, especially in the context of *longing* rather than *be*longing. The extent, to which personality embodies this propensity remains also unclear. Given that trait measures of personality can provide an external/objective view on an individual's character (Hogan & Blake, 1999) we are interested therefore to evaluate this as an adjunct to marketing student identity perceptions. Discussions on the nature of marketer/marketing identity further above suggest that to accomplish their stylish and socially desirable aspirations – and also to enact their perceptions of what marketing is (selling, advertising and promoting: Ferrell & Gonzalez, 2004; Swanson, 2019) - aspirant marketers should be confident and outgoing. Recent studies comparing the personality of marketing students with those of different occupational leaning (Kothari & Pingle, 2015; Noël et al., 2016; Pringle et al., 2010) indeed found these to be especially assertive, venturesome and expansive in communication.

Hypothesis 4. Respondents will score relatively higher on expressive personality traits – especially Extraversion and Agreeableness - than those not pursuing a marketing career.

Donellan et al. (2007, p. 258) articulate a largely consensus view when stating, "personality traits should be most appropriately conceptualized as development constructs", meaning they shift over time in response to both contingency and context. From a situational perspective, Roberts et al. (2003) suggest that for any distinguishable group, at any given time, personality reflects shared normative experiences, and that situational change will impact this. Given that our respondents represent three different age groups that will iteratively experience increasingly real life exposure to what marketers do, we expect aspects of self-report personality to change. According to Borghuis et al. (2017) trait rank order remains stable throughout transition from adolescence to early adulthood whilst others (Elkins et al., 2017; Hoff et al., 2021) suggest this same period will result in changes to specific trait scores - a decrease in Extraversion, an increase in Conscientiousness and Agreeableness, with both Neuroticism and Openness likely to either increase or remain *as is*.

Hypothesis 5a. Although for respondents Extraversion will be higher than the norm, this will decrease as learning level increases. There will be no fall in either Neuroticism nor Openness whilst Conscientiousness and Agreeableness will rise.

Hypothesis 5b. This trajectory towards a more mature personality trait profile will impact hypotheses H1 to H3, with more moderately expressed social identity perceptions emerging with increased age.

3. Method

3.1. Research design and methods

We use contrasting research logics and a mixed model (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), mixed methods (Harrison & Reilly, 2011), approach to our research. Our methods are utilized in the context of three groups of students - First Year, Final Year and Masters (see 3.2 *Sampling,* later) - this to capture evolving understandings as marketing students edge closer towards their occupation of choice. The first method (projective techniques) is highly interpretive requiring a creative response from both researcher and respondent. The second (personality testing) is realist in nature. Mixed methods can provide strong evidence for reaching sound conclusions through both convergence and corroboration of outcomes (Harrison & Reilly, 2011). These can provide for better understanding through using complementary data (Creswell, 2013). In our case, qualitative and quantitative outputs provide for both data and methodological triangulation (Harrison, 2013). We combine abstract and concrete insights, capitalizing on the rich data derived one and the more objective potential of the other. See below for more detail.

3.1.1. Method 1 - projective techniques

We wish to surface student received wisdom concerning both marketing and the marketer. Hofstede et al. (2007) identify projective techniques as data collection methods allowing participants to project subjective/deep-seated beliefs onto objects, ideas, words or imagery. Technique categories are *association, completion, construction, expression* and *choice ordering* (Porr et al., 2011). Originally developed for exploring personality disorders, these have typically been used for analytical and therapeutic purposes. Recently though, they have been adopted by social scientific researchers who claim they reveal deep respondent insights (Dykens et al., 2007; Porr et al., 2011; Soley & Smith, 2008) surfacing implicit/covert meaning. These further offer a largely non-intrusive path to disclosure; make few linguistic demands; and help overcome barriers to communication (Dykens et al., 2007). It is suggested also they provide a creative/enjoyable experience helping respondents relax (Belk et al., 2003). These thus augur well for research involving a young and – at First Year at least – a perhaps readily distracted constituency.

For qualitative research, major rigor-related aims are validity, trustworthiness and credibility (Golafshani, 2003). In the absence of statistical compliance tests, deriving thick descriptions of respondent beliefs, and ensuring analyses deliver deep, accurate and insightful interpretations of respondent accounts are key (Warren & Karner, 2005). As with quantitative research, rigor should be built-in to all stages of the process (Patton, 2002) and drawing on recommendations by Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) we set four pillars of observance: a) pilot to assure the most effective/efficient collection methods, b) take all necessary steps to assure consistency of collection and analysis over succeeding data handling events, c) guide and then probe respondents to maximize both comprehensiveness and veracity of output, and d) triangulate for best meaning by drawing on a range of both data collection techniques and subsequent analyses. Warren and Karner (2005) suggest also assessing each stage of data collection and analysis to ensure ongoing congruence with aims and objectives and contesting both findings and assumptions at each turn. This latter was achieved via ongoing group discussion while the four pillars underpinned our research design.

In line with the above, Hofstede et al. (2007) argue that although each of the five projective categories can occasion a specific mode of insight, a mix of techniques should be deployed. To determine the most appropriate selection we drew on a process of cyclical development (Gillham, 2005). A provisional pool of activities was identified, then modified, elaborated and/or supplemented through discussion, addressing both research context and questions. A final set of activities (focused on surfacing the characteristics of the student-perceived phenomenon "marketer social identity") was organized into a 13-page workbook (one page included for an associated exercise) for participant completion. Table 1 provides a brief outline of projective techniques/tasks adopted for this study.

Occupations for Activity B (*association*) were selected as being, a) sufficiently diverse for contrast purposes, and b) familiar enough to allow young respondents to associate with confidence. To compare with marketer, we chose two occupations (teacher and police officer) occupying socially respected public service roles, and two (accountant and lawyer) more closely associated with commerce. Our aim was for participants to compare the marketer with roles both different from, and similar, to their own. Topics for conjecture pertained to broad lifestyle choices: for example, motor car and clothing brands and holiday destination. Other Activities (A, C and D) focused on marketing and/or marketers only.

3.1.2. Method 2 – personality testing

In addition to projective techniques a personality test was deployed. As identified earlier, we use trait personality as an adjunct to our study, primarily to derive an external/objective perspective on our respondents both for comparative and diagnostic purposes. Various measures of trait personality have been used in vocational behavior studies, primarily the Cattel and Cattel 16PF5 and MaCrae et al. NEO-PI-3 scales (see Rossier, 2015, p. 337). We have chosen the John et al. (1991) Big Five Inventory (BFI) mainly because item counts for both NEO-PI-3 and 16PF5 are comparatively large and we were conscious of avoiding the potential for response burden (Yan et al., 2020). The BFI comprises just 44 questions and was added as the final page to the workbook.

John et al. (2008) suggest the Big Five captures the shared aspects of a wide range of personality description taxonomies. It thus enacts the high level of compatibility existing between different personality measures. All BFI test items begin, "I see myself as someone who…" and are scored 1–5 on a Likert scale for each of 44 conditions (e.g., "… is talkative."). Analysis delivers scores for all five traits - which can be further sub-divided into intrinsic and extrinsic traits (Ryan & Deci, 2000) - and though a little more sensitive to acquiescence bias than other measures, BFI has well-established validity and reliability (Schmitt et al., 2007). It is used extensively in social-scientific contexts and has a high level of researcher consensus on both validity and reliability (Peng et al., 2012). BFI benefits from a substantive body of prior empirical knowledge offering both academic credibility and comparative potential. For the purposes of our investigation, we compare personality trait profiles for each of our three student cohorts, and compare these also with a selection of prior, similar, studies.

Table 1
Brief outline of the projective techniques and activities used in the study.

Category	Brief Outline – activities
Association The practice of connecting the research object with images, photographs, words, colors, thoughts and feelings.	Activity A: Participants were asked to highlight words, age, characteristics and skills they associated with a marketer. Activity B: Respondents were asked to characterize different jobs - a marketer, a schoolteacher, a police officer, an accountant and a lawyer, via association with a range of day-to-day activities, experiences and/or objects
Construction/expressive *Construction* utilizes collages, models, speech bubbles, cartoons, etc. to harness the link with the research object. *Expression* is using role playing, storytelling, drawing and painting to highlight illustrations related to the research object.	Activity C: Participants were encouraged to, (i) make a drawing of marketing, in whichever way they might view this; (ii) draw marketing 'as if it were a car'; and (iii) draw how they thought a marketer might look.
Completion Finishing sentences, stories or arguments.	Activity D: Students were presented with a number of incomplete statements, questions or scenarios focused on queries such as, "marketing is….?", "how would your parents describe marketing?"; "how old do you 'picture' a marketer?"

3.2. Participants

Marketing courses vary, but the one we selected for our undergraduate evaluation emphasizes marketing strategy and management; has strong professional ties; and is designed with occupational ambition in mind. These same criteria apply also to all Masters marketing courses. All students were thus considered to have salient career focus and were deployed as context-specific target populations (Espinosa & Ortinau, 2016). We have been collecting data from First Year students for a number of years (since 2013 when the undergraduate course concerned first began), but for the purposes of this study we wished to compare results from this, our initial primary category of interest, with those from more mature student groups also, so – as suggested earlier - we could evaluate whether our key evidence parameters (perceptions of social identity and personality) might shift, as vocationally oriented education becomes more advanced and as students are increasingly exposed to marketing practice. To achieve this, we believed we should adopt as close to a cross-sectional sample as we could, given the fast-moving nature of both markets and marketing mores and to ensure that respondents at all learning levels had a common frame of global socio-cultural experience. For our First-Year constituency we thus took our most recent set of data (relating to 97 students recruited for the 2019/2020 academic year) and for comparison a similar number of more mature students, 95 in all, comprising 48 Final Year students at the end of their 2020/2021 study year, and 51 Masters students also attending the university in 2021. The 97 First Year students were all those attending the week-one induction session for that year's intake. For more detail on our Final Year and Masters students see *3.3 Data collection* immediately below.

3.3. Data collection

The same exercises were deployed for each cohort and took between 45 and 60 min to complete. For First Year students, data collection was accomplished face-to-face, using a hard-copy workbook, and via a time-tabled induction event. Attendance was thus mandatory. This differed, though, for both Final Year and Masters cohorts. First, we had to rely on volunteers giving up an hour of their free time and, second, data was collected during the Covid-19 pandemic, meaning our research events took place online using Microsoft Teams meetings. Here, relevant course leaders (both members of the research team) led an incentivized recruitment exercise using Amazon retail vouchers, whilst methods were re-designed to accommodate virtual execution through a combined use of the Qualtrics survey platform (for narrative/numeric responses) and synchronous email exchange of drawings between students and the research team. We conducted several relevant events and ceased recruitment once we had achieved the numbers we were aiming for.

To maintain consistency, each data collection event (whether "live" or via Microsoft Teams) was managed by members the research group only and preceded by pre-determined statements on ethics, event purpose, and instruction on exercise completion. Participants were guided/encouraged to annotate and elaborate responses as necessary during each event, and researchers constantly spoke with respondents both to nurture engagement and to prompt a full consideration of issues (echoic probing - Branthwaite, 2002). Some students admitted to limited drawing skills but were advised this was fine and that any visual representation would be adequate provided this was purposeful and considered (Tracy & Redden, 2015).

3.4. Data analysis

The range and nature of our qualitative data opened up a number of analytical options. We determined the following would provide for a rich and varied body of evidence: 1) a lexical/content analysis of words used by respondents to characterize marketers (from Activity A, see Table 1); 2) a comparative/content analysis of occupational assumptions (from Activity B); and 3) a thematic analysis of figurative/narrative evidence focused on both *marketer* and *marketing* (Activities C plus D).

Based upon activity C plus D data collected from 2013 to 2017, a model was already available that had been iteratively developed identifying themes at both a micro (sub-themes) and macro (super themes) level. Analysis for this model incorporated a two-stage approach outlined by Butler-Kisber (2010) and refined by Pich et al. (2015) specifically for complex projective data. Stage one involved preliminary assessment/re-assessment of projected expressions; formulating broad categories; and then cyclical contrasting to identify narrative themes. A grounded-theory approach was initially adopted, but over time the data we accumulated emerged gradually as a "context of tradition" (Arnold & Fischer, 1994) providing for "root metaphors" of pre-understanding that helped shape a more reflexive analytical approach (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018). Thematic analysis thus gradually shifting from development to confirmation and/or adjustment. The model was finally updated to accommodate analysis of the final 2019/2020 cohort data (see Results, later) and this then represented a benchmark against which we could compare outputs related to the two groups of more mature students (Final Year and Masters). For exhibits illustrating our thematic analysis we used data from this final cohort only in accordance with our cross-sectional goal.

For activity B we adopted a similarly iterative process, this time developing a descriptive narrative pertaining to occupation-related lifestyle choices. This involved tabulating data for each occupation group, assessing this for content, and then subsequently developing a descriptive narrative around most frequently occurring responses. Again, the final version - incorporating insight from the 2019/2020 First Year cohort – was used as a benchmark against which to compare outputs derived from our more mature cohorts. Data from Activity A – words used by respondents to characterize marketers – was analyzed numerically. 2019/2020 First Year data was analyzed first to represent our benchmark, with relative word incidence used to allow for direct comparison between younger and more mature cohort groups of differing sample sizes. As with data from Activities C/D, a further level of analysis was performed, this time categorizing similar groups of words on a hierarchical basis and then further classifying groups as having either Functional or Aesthetic meaning.

Quantitative personality data was analyzed according to guidance in John et al. (1991), reversing scores as relevant, to deliver personality profiles for each of the three groups of students considered. Data from each cohort was tested for reliability and, as appropriate, inferential tests evaluating for difference/similarity between independent group means were performed. As personality is not an absolute, we further drew on previously completed studies of student groups assessed in the UK for comparative purposes. Here, objective comparison was possible, and we were able to achieve similar for content analysis in connection with our review of words used to characterize the marketer. For our thematic and occupational comparison analyses though this was not possible. Consequently, we adopted the broad principles of pattern matching (e.g., Hyde, 2000), whereby support is demonstrated for a theory if collected data matches some pre-determined benchmark. We applied this in three ways: 1) to confirm/adjust models developed qualitatively from our earlier analyses of First Year data; 2) to test theory-based hypotheses using our new First Year's qualitative data; and 3) to evaluate data collected from Final Years and Masters students against patterns apparent from 2).

4. Results

Given the nature of both student groups and data collection tactics, sample representation, sample constitution and response rates varied. The 97 First Year students represented the bulk of the cohort concerned, but the 95 more mature students were smaller proportions of their groups. The 48 Final Year students were a little under half their cohort and the 51 Masters students approximately one third. The constitution of the three samples is shown below:

First Year ($n = 97$). 97 usable personality questionnaires were collected. Sample details: 55% identified as Male, 45% as Female; age profile, typically 18–19[1]; 94% UK, 6% international. From these 97, 96 sets of projective data were collected for qualitative and content analysis.

Final Year ($n = 48$): 44 usable personality questionnaires were collected. Sample details: 41% identified as Male, 59% as Female; age profile 20–35, m = 22.3; 84% UK, 16% international. From these 44, 42 sets of projective data were collected for qualitative and content analysis.

Masters ($n = 51$): 51 usable personality questionnaires were collected. Sample details: 43% identified as Male, 57% as Female; age profile 20–36, m = 24.3; 49% UK, 51% international. From the 51 students, 41 sets of projective data were collected for qualitative/thematic and content analysis.

We noted from our ongoing work with First Year students that the relative proportion of men to women at intake varies year on year but that overall there are typically more women than men on these marketing courses. Details above indicate both this same variability and tendency. Similarly, although the relative proportion of UK to international students does vary at undergraduate level (see First Year vs Final Year above), at Masters level international students are proportionally higher (in our sample, 51%). As a guide, the population of the UK in June 2021 comprised 14.2% non-UK born, and 85.7% UK born individuals (Stickley, 2021). We address the relevance of this for our personality evaluation later.

4.1. *Lexical/objective content analysis*

We examined all words perceived as characterizing/describing a marketer and organized these into 11 categories. At the foot of Fig. 1 we show both categories and typical words used and show also how we cluster these under two headings and four sub-headings: Aesthetic Characteristics (Expressiveness, Assuredness) and Functional Characteristics (Resolution, Acumen). The line graph at the top of Fig. 1 shows, comparatively, the rank order of the 11 categories for each of our three student groups, whilst the bar chart beneath this – again comparing the three groups - shows the relative proportion of students offering descriptors attributed to each category. On the word tiles at the foot of Fig. 1 we also show overall rank order of word categories via group proportions for each category totaled. From this (and by reference visually to the bar chart immediately above) we can see that the most populated category is Creative, followed by Confident, Aware, then Organized and Shrewd. At the bottom we have Poised and Enthusiastic. We can further see from the line graph that relative importance is closely shared across groups for several categories, most notably for Aesthetic characteristics Creative and Confident. Major differences between groups are at Enthusiastic (apparent for Final Years but not the other two groups); Organized (more relevant for older students than younger), and also Shrewd and Aware (collectively Acumen) similarly more apparent for older groups. From a rank order perspective First Years place Persuasiveness higher than do older students but they defer on being Organized.

4.2. *Comparative/interpretive content analysis*

Focused on *association*, respondents were asked to compare marketing with other occupations – both different from (teacher, police officer) and similar to (lawyer, accountant) their own. Our aim was to cause students to think about the adornments of their chosen career and also to set these comparatively within the context of other potential alternatives. Using content analysis we identified key perceived socio-cultural characteristics and relative strengths of each. See summaries immediately below.

4.2.1. *Comparison 1 - marketer vs teacher and police officer*

Students in all groups suggested marketers would drive a prestigious car. Top marques were Audi® and Range Rover® with other

[1] Given these are normally school leavers we didn't ask specifically for age. So, although there will be a small number of slightly older students, typically these will be in the age range 18–19, 3 to 4 years younger than Final Year students

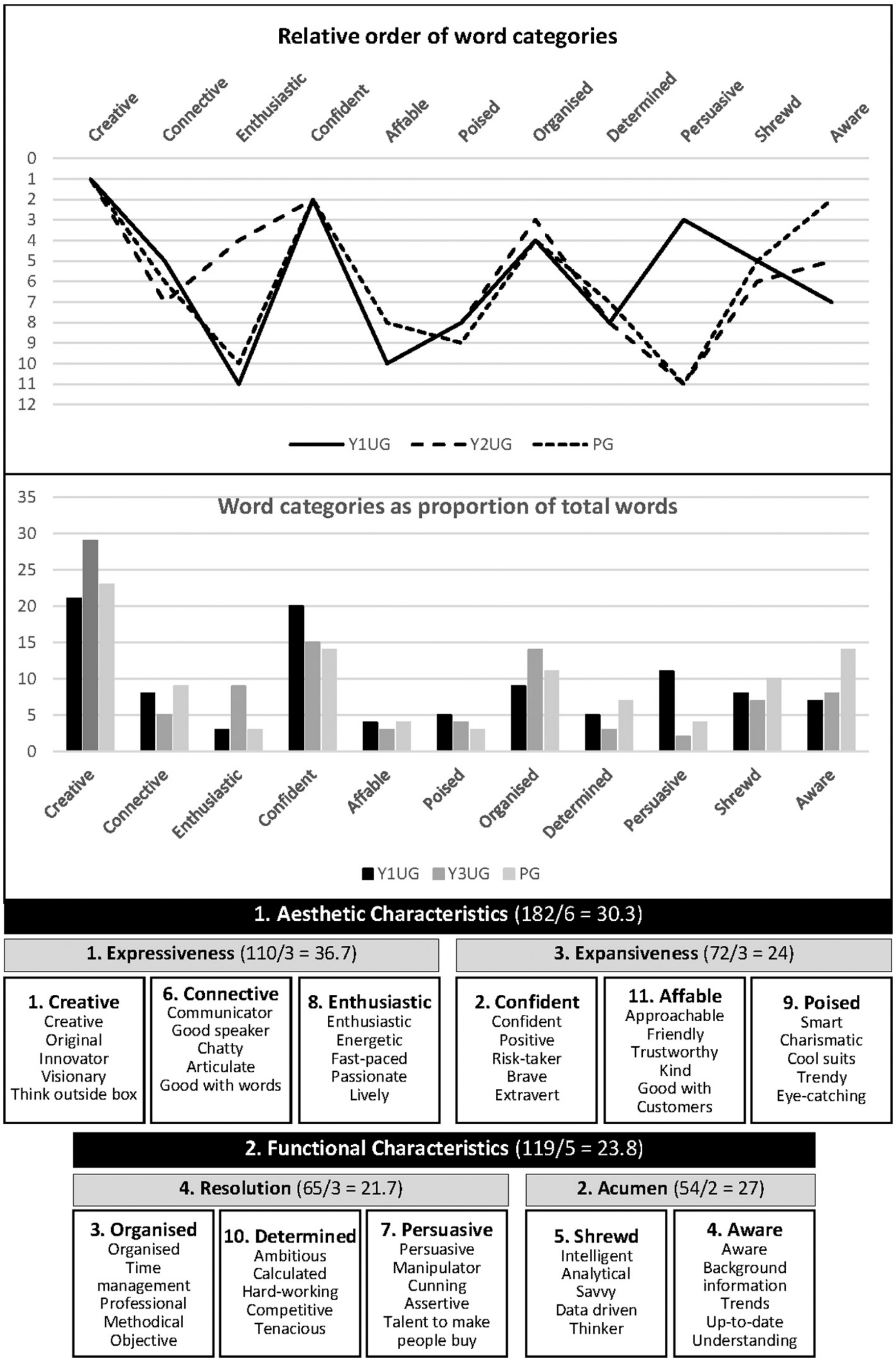


Fig. 1. Analysis of words/terms used to describe perceived desirable characteristics of a marketer.

distinctive brands such as Mini® and Tesla® also notable for their inclusion. Teachers by contrast would choose a more affordable or practical car, favoring more mundane brands such as Ford®, Nissan® or Vauxhall®. Police Officers would drive variously branded SUVs and off-roaders. Marketers would holiday in the USA (especially New York) or some cosmopolitan European city (e.g., Paris, Barcelona, Milan), but Maldives, Thailand and Caribbean were also cited. Some of the more mature students offered Greece as a preferred destination, perhaps toning down aspirations but still avoiding the more commonplace choices made by teachers and police officers (chiefly the UK or Spain). These latter would be family oriented and inexpensive, with camping proving popular. Marketers by contrast, were not perceived to have families, or to be financially constrained. Students mostly cited designer clothing brands for marketers (e.g., Hugo Boss®, Gucci®, Armani®, Louis Vuitton®, Prada®) while teachers favored practical or cheaper brands from the high street or supermarket. Police officers might adopt more active brands - Nike® for example – but marketers embraced a more stylish appearance – typically of "good taste" and quality, both expensive and of the latest fashion, but also on occasion, sustainable.

4.2.2. Comparison 2 - marketer vs accountant and lawyer

Public service employees were viewed as dull and poorly remunerated, dowdy in dress and utilitarian of habit. Accountant and lawyer, jobs clearly considered of higher social status, proved more attractive. BMW®, Audi® and/or Mercedes® were believed appropriate for both them and marketers as, occasionally, were Aston Martin®, Porsche® and Bugatti® - marques not emerging in the first set of comparisons. Accountancy was perceived to be the least stirring occupation, yet expensive brands were still chosen, though likely on the basis of affordability than of style. Holidays were also more competitively positioned with marketer and accountant/ lawyer more likely to share destinations (e.g., USA, Bahamas, the Caribbean) than would marketer and teacher/police officer. For First Year students New York featured for marketers with Dubai cited as a new/exclusively marketer location. Again, Greece was seen as attractive by older students. Clothing brands for accountant and lawyer largely aligned also with marketers (e.g., Ralph Lauren® and Hugo Boss®), though more expensive brands (e.g., Gucci® and Armani®, and Chanel®) were largely just for marketers and lawyers. A singular feature for marketers was the choice of more independent and occasionally (e.g., Levis®) "OK" brands, perhaps to evidence awareness of niche and/or alternative retail options.

4.3. Figurative/interpretive thematic analysis

We pattern-matched the data from our 2019/2020 First Year students against the model we had iteratively developed for Year One students previously. The model initially comprised 11 Marketer themes, further sub-divided to create four super-themes, and 10 Marketing themes, similarly further sub-divided into four super themes. Via the pattern matching, we confirmed the original broad model structure, but re-named one Marketer theme, and further sub-divided a number of the Marketing themes to create 13 rather than 10. There was a consensus within the research team that this better represented our understanding of how First Year students perceived the career they had elected to pursue (see Fig. 2). This model was then used as a benchmark so as to compare perceptions of level one

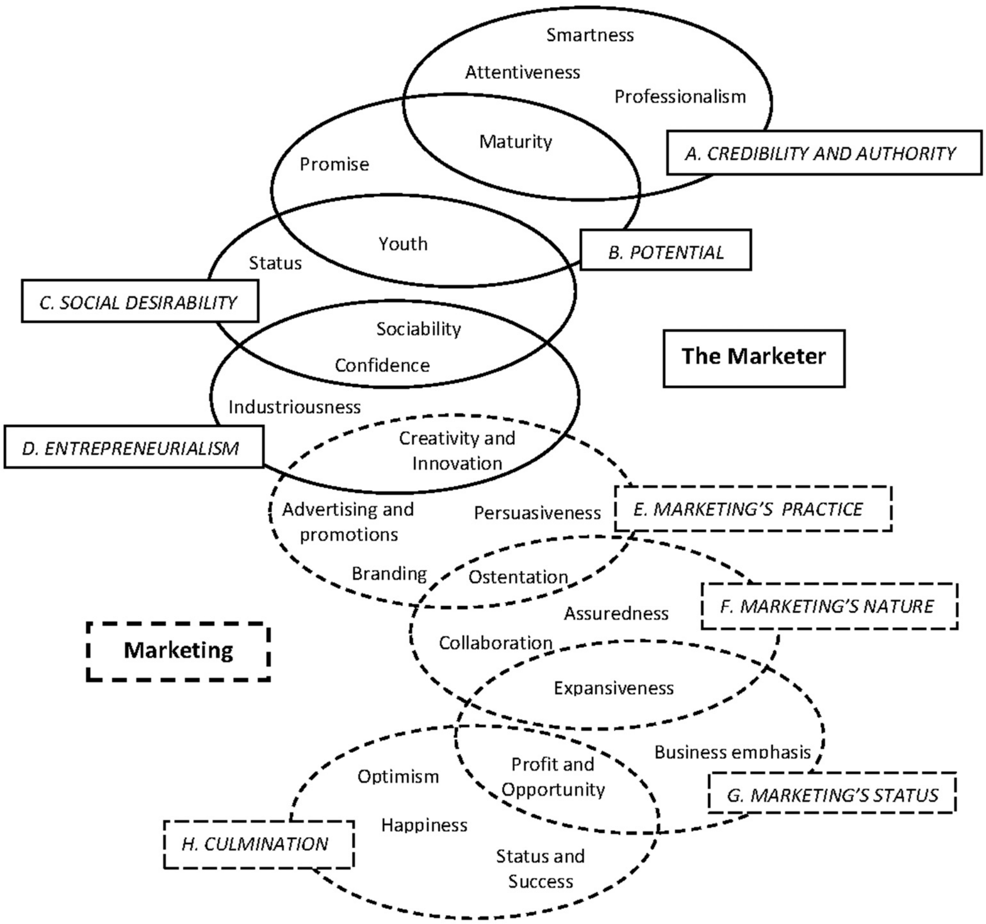


Fig. 2. Confirmed themes from an interpretive analysis of projective activity outputs.

students with those of Final Year and Masters students. In the narrative below we describe the eight super themes identified through First Years' data analysis and comment on the extent to which perspectives of the more mature students either coincide or diverge.

4.3.1. Perceptions of marketer

4.3.1.1. Credibility and authority (related themes: smartness; professionalism; attentiveness; maturity). For many respondents the marketer had professional status, and expectations were that practitioners should project an appropriate image, thus characterizing the marketer as a businessperson with influence. A marketer should be comfortable at board, or other significant meetings, contributing to firm strategy and objectives. Respondents acknowledged the importance of a persuasive character, reinforced by a credible persona evidenced both physically and behaviorally.

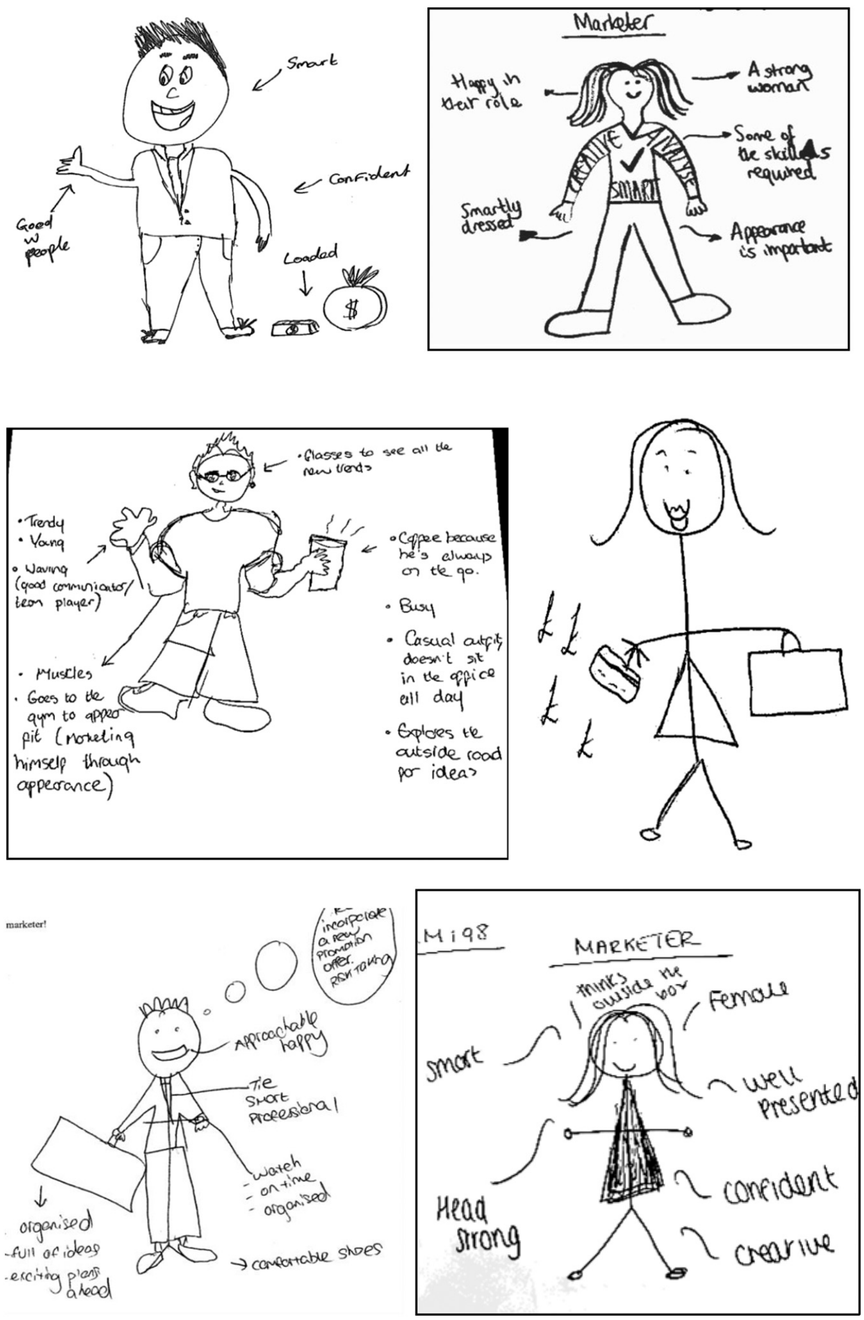


Fig. 3. Respondent drawings of marketers #I.

Although Marketing was assumed a universal accomplishment it was one that educated practitioners would perform better. Smart appearance and smart mind were linked (See Fig. 3, bottom RH; Fig. 3, bottom LH), positioning marketers as coincidentally poised and competent. Students across all age groups envisaged practitioners as visually prepossessing - mostly in business wear, sometimes casual - but always "on trend", sure that for them appearance is important for marketing the self (see Fig. 3, middle LH; Fig. 3, top RH). Despite frequent allusions to youth (see B. Potential, immediately below), reaching middle age was thought acceptable as this could lead to a directorship/partnership.

4.3.1.2. Potential (related themes: promise; youth; maturity). Respondents across all groups acknowledged they were unready to be called marketers and that occupational evolution would depend upon course completion. The question, "Are you a marketer?" (inserted into one of the *completion* exercises to trigger student speculation on their suitability for the role) resulted in a largely literal "no". Collectively though, respondents believed they were primed for success, and that via appropriate study this could be transformed

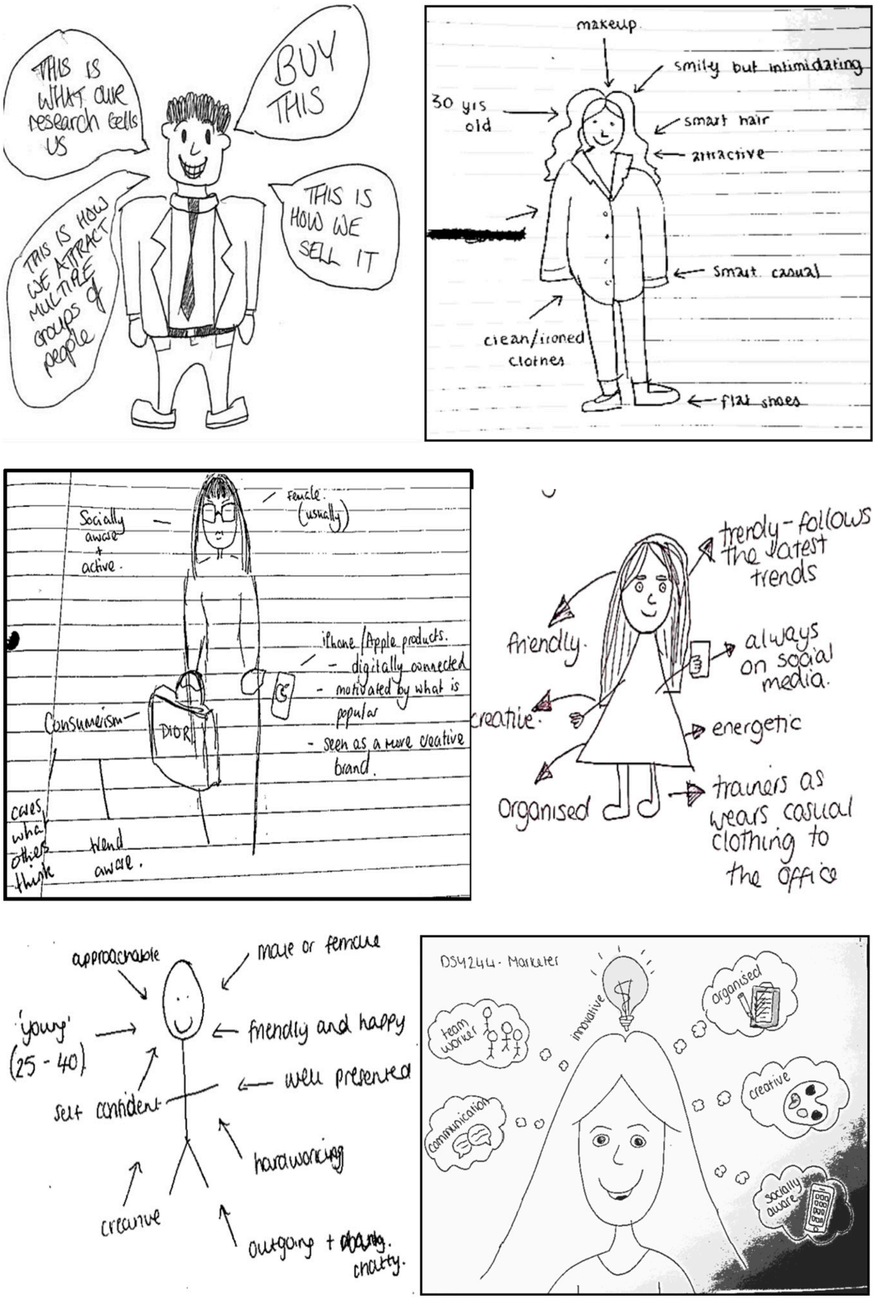


Fig. 4. Respondent drawings of marketers #2.

into something tangible. Responses implied the journey towards marketing expertise and maturity as non-problematic, with a marketing career seen as both secure and durable. Despite acknowledging that some marketer constituencies could be older, these were normally perceived as young (Fig. 4, top RH; Fig. 4, bottom LH), energetic and in tune with the *zeitgeist* (e.g., social media) – e.g., Fig. 4, middle LH; Fig. 4, Middle RH.

4.3.1.3. Social desirability (related themes: sociability; confidence and expressiveness; youth; status). Themes here denoted social appeal. Being outgoing, talkative, and able to speak with confidence were deemed pertinent to both social and professional success for all groups (Fig. 3, bottom RH; Fig. 4, bottom RH). The role appeared to offer social status and, perhaps even, to engender envy. The age most frequently identified with the marketer (25/40) perhaps stands proxy for social desirability too. This is coincidentally post-study and post-parental control, with individuals assuming personal sophistication and self-determination. As suggested at 4.3.1.1. above, marketers would be smartly/fashionably dressed, but may also mix this with the brash trappings of success (Fig. 4, top LH; Fig. 4 middle LH).

4.3.1.4. Entrepreneurialism (related themes: sociability; creativity and innovation; confidence and expressiveness; industriousness). Here we

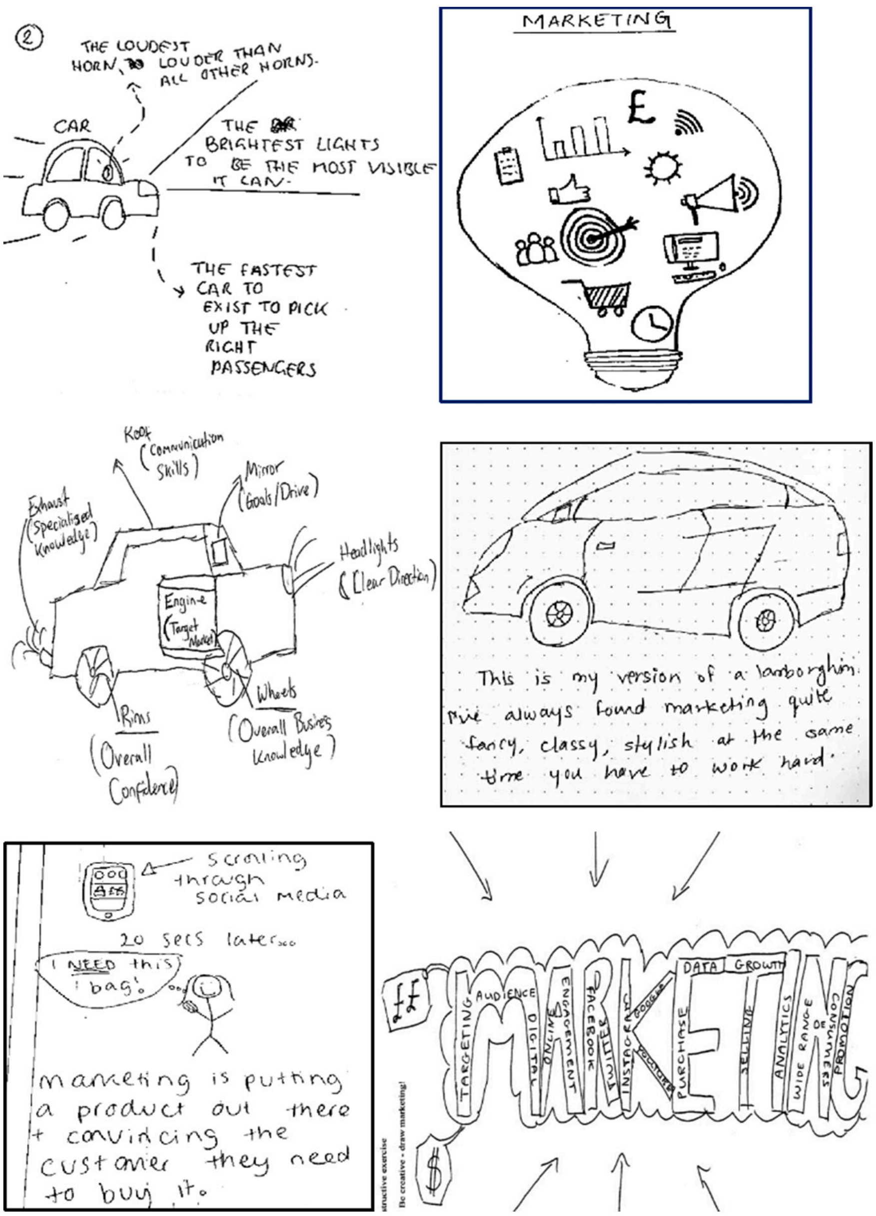


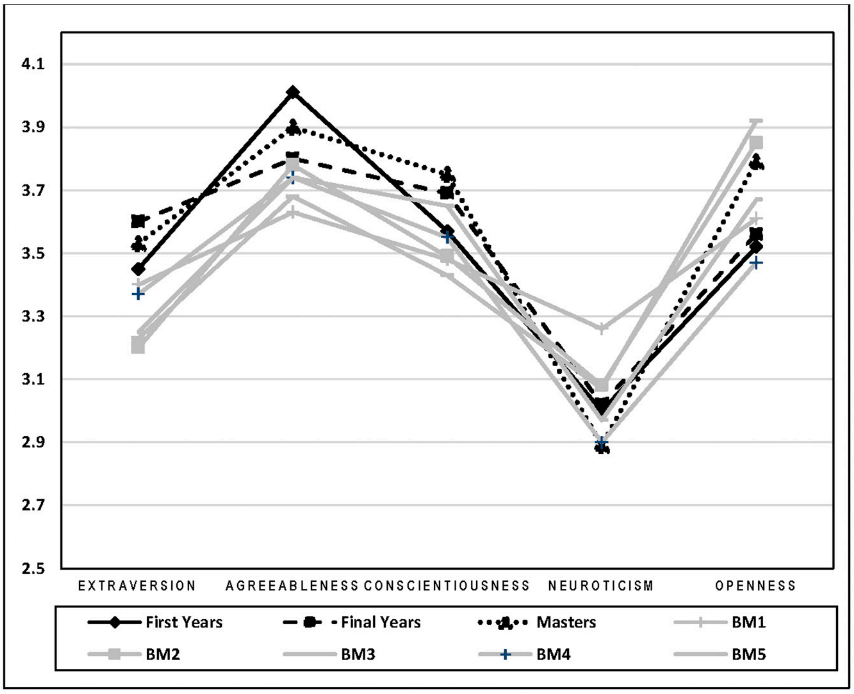
Fig. 5. Respondent drawings of marketing.

drew again on sociability and confidence/expressiveness themes, this time linked with creativity/innovation and industriousness. Respondents across all groups believed marketers should demonstrate high levels of personal energy and endeavor. They emphasized the importance of an innovative and creative approach, and of having the confidence and personality to deploy this (Fig. 3, bottom RH; Fig. 4, top LH; Fig. 4, bottom RH). They perceived this as representing all that is desirable socially, and also key to organizational and financial success (Fig. 3, top LH; Fig. 3, middle RH). It was noticeable also that social awareness and prudence/sensitivity were rarely raised. Respondents demonstrated a largely competitive, rather than compassionate, spirit.

4.3.2. *Perceptions of marketing*

4.3.2.1. Marketing's practice (related themes: advertising and promotions; branding; creativity and innovation; persuasiveness). Here we focus on how respondents believe marketing is acted out as practice. This was generally associated with branding, promotion and sales, reflecting a largely stereotypical view. In one *construction* exercise participants were asked to represent marketing by drawing a motor car. Top LH, middle LH and middle RH on Fig. 5 are typical examples. Although middle LH extols practical attributes, the other two are more representative – one signifying marketing as loud and strident, the other as "cool" and stylish. This mix of the more considered but mostly striking was evidenced across all groups. On occasion (Fig. 5, top RH; bottom RH), the creativity much lauded by respondents across all groups was manifest in drawings, and especially for the more mature students this provided an opportunity to characterize marketing as more than advertising only. The paradox that marketing can be associated with both the positive (a well-

Trait	This Study: Year One N=97 M	SD	Final Year N=44 M	SD	Masters N=51 M	SD	Benchmark Studies: BM1	BM2	BM3	BM4	BM5
Extraversion	3.75	0.58	3.51	0.62	3.56	0.69	3.39	3.20	3.23	3.37	3.25
Agreeableness	3.94	0.57	3.98	0.45	3.90	0.43	3.63	3.78	3.68	3.74	3.74
Conscientiousness	3.74	0.54	3.57	0.66	3.59	0.56	3.48	3.49	3.43	3.55	3.65
Neuroticism	2.58	0.67	2.63	0.62	3.01	0.84	3.26	3.08	3.07	2.90	2.97
Openness	3.57	0.29	3.53	0.49	3.62	0.51	3.61	3.85	3.92	3.47	3.67



Benchmark studies:

BM1 – Conner & Abraham (2001). 123 x University students, UK.

BM2 – Greven et al. (2008), Chamorro-Premuzic, Arteche & Furnham (2008). 1038 x University students, UK

BM3 – Lyons et al. (2016), Limniou, Schernbrucker, Hands & Downes, (2016). 200 x Psychology students, UK

BM4 – Grubb et al. (2015), Brown and Hall (2015). 203 x university students

BM5 – Rentfrow et al. (2015), Jokela and Lamb (2015). 588,014 x General UK population

Fig. 6. Comparison: personality data - Year One, Final Year and Masters versus benchmark studies.

planned strategy) and the questionable (persuasiveness) also emerged, though with ambivalence perhaps the key (Fig. 5, bottom LH).

4.3.2.2. Marketing's nature (related themes: ostentation; assuredness; expansiveness; collaboration). Respondents' collective view on marketing might best be characterized via the term, "flamboyantly substantive" (or "big"). Ostentation, show, and the capacity to accommodate a range of functions, opportunities and ambitions infused respondent views across the age-range. They believed marketing was important and could achieving "big" things in a "big" way, especially if practiced as a team/collaborative effort. This, it appeared, would lead to a "big" future for adherents. Assuredness - a "big" characteristic - characterized both occupation and practitioner, representing one as reflecting the other. Our exhibits (Figs. 3, 4 and 5) from across the groups evidenced this collectively.

4.3.2.3. Marketing's status (related themes: business emphasis; expansiveness; wealth and opportunity). Here, evidence was partially revealed through the imagined thoughts of parents, who were seen to view marketing as a business essential. A view emerged that business and marketing were complementary and mutually substitutable ideas. The term *business* appeared to evoke a sense of authority/standing, and for all groups this could readily be projected onto marketing too. Profit – both social and financial – representing the manifest outcome of both. Fig. 3, top LH; Fig. 3, middle RH; and Fig. 5, bottom RH) demonstrate how marketing will enrich both firms and their marketers.

4.3.2.4. Culmination (related themes: optimism; wealth and opportunity; success; happiness). All groups believed marketing leads to great things. The discipline, though, was frequently considered less an entity itself and more a reflection/representation of those working within it (e.g., Fig. 4, top LH). That marketing was a good career, coincidentally associated with high earnings - both for business and those serving it - was again clearly surfaced. Evidence suggested respondents believed well-known brands and marketing itself were mutually attuned. High cost/aspirant brands (e.g., Lamborghini®, Apple®, Dior®) seen in drawings/annotations signified both marketing and the social world that marketers inhabit. Irrespective of study level, respondents viewed marketers as happy in their work with marketing a "fun" occupation. Note, that almost every face in both Figs. 3 and 4 carries at least a smile – though the marketer in Fig. 4, middle LH does appear more "cool" and detached.

4.4. Personality testing – quantitative survey data analysis

Data from 192 usable questionnaires was analyzed to determine personality profiles of each of our three respondent groups. We were concerned to evaluate the extent to which these profiles might differ, both from each other, and also from other broadly comparable student constituencies acting as a benchmark. Cohort parameters are reported in the first three data-columns of Fig. 6; benchmark study means are in columns BM1 to BM5.

4.4.1. Comparison between study groups

For multi-variate/vector-based measures MANOVA is recommended to test for between-group difference (Hair et al., 2014). These allow for possible dependent variables covariance, and given they are subject to type 2 error will provide more conservative estimates of effect for studies where differences between groups are hypothesized. By contrast, ANOVAS are subject to type 1 error - tending to overestimate difference – and are more appropriate where variation is not hypothesized. In our case, difference between groups *was* hypothesized, but we were also keen to explore traits individually in addition to understanding these as covariants. Consequently, we performed both MANOVA and ANOVAs. Given uneven and moderate sample sizes (97 vs 44 vs 51), data for both analyses was bootstrapped using 10,000 iterations as a precaution. By re-sampling/replacing from the original data, bootstrapping helps overcome distribution-based limitations and improves the accuracy of the confidence interval (LaFlair et al., 2015).

BFI scores are likely to vary according to culture (Schmitt et al., 2007), gender (Schmitt et al., 2008) and age (Srivastava et al., 2003). We believe the gender imbalances within and between each study group are not so great as to be problematic, and as we are anyhow testing for differences between groups we are coincidentally testing also for difference between ages. However, we noted earlier that for Masters students the relative proportions of UK- to internationally-based students (49% vs 51%) are substantially different than for our undergraduate groups (e.g., First Year, 94% vs 6%). Also, our benchmark studies are likely also to be predominantly UK citizens. So before assuming this group to be homogeneous we compared means for UK and international segments using bootstrapped independent-samples t-tests (selected again as the most conservative route) for each trait. No significant differences were noted, so we considered this group to be sufficiently uniform for us to continue between groups (learning levels) comparison.

The MANOVA test delivered a Wilke's Lambda of 0.913 and a p value of 0.83 leading us to reject the null hypothesis that age differences between late adolescence and young adulthood in the case of marketing students predicts personality profile. Our ANOVA test suggested a similar result other than for Openness. Here a difference in means *was* noted ($F[2185] = 3.728$; $p = 0.026$), and Tukey post-hoc tests suggested the Masters group differed significantly on this trait from both First Year and Final Year students. Profiles for First Year and Final Year students did not differ.

Although BFI is a well-established construct, scale reliability was also checked as a precaution. Given relative instability of Cronbach's Alpha at moderate-to-low sample size (Charter, 2003) data for the three groups was aggregated ($n = 192$). Results varied 0.86 (Extraversion), 0.68 (Agreeableness), 0.80 (Conscientiousness), 0.79 (Extraversion) and 0.73 (Neuroticism) - thus no real cause for concern.

4.4.2. Comparison with benchmark studies

To achieve a suitable comparison, we searched for previously reported personality studies focused on mixed-gender student groups from UK universities. BM1 (Conner and Abraham, 2001), BM2 (Greven et al., 2008) and BM4 (Grubb et al., 2015) scores relate to a mix of undergraduate and post-graduate students, and BM3 (Lyons et al., 2017) scores are for undergraduate psychology students. For BM2 (Greven et al., 2008) some community members are also present in the sample. BM5 (Rentfrow et al., 2015) is included for a broad comparison against the general UK population. These are clearly selective but were the first handful of useful/comparable BFI studies we found. Fig. 6 demonstrates that all line graphs exhibit a typical big five pattern. A visual comparison though, reveals that results from this present study (reproduced in black) differ in some respects from comparison studies (in grey). Primarily, extrinsic personality traits (Extraversion and Agreeableness) traced by the black lines run higher than do grey, and for internally oriented traits (Neuroticism and Openness) these tend to run lower (though less obviously so, especially given the significantly different Openness score for Masters students). Conscientiousness appears also to be largely higher for This Study. Although - given the sample sizes concerned (three of This Study vs five benchmark) - it is not possible to be prescriptive about these observations, there is some evidence to suggest Marketing students demonstrate a more expressive and less introspective (at a younger age, at least) personality than do comparable groups.

4.5. Evaluation of hypotheses and overall observations

For our study we set four research questions operationalized via six hypotheses. H1, H2, H3 and H5b pertained to the construction of a perceived social identity for marketers/marketing, whilst H4 and H5a pertained to trait personality. Hypotheses H5a and H5b were set because our study adopted a broadly cross-sectional approach accounting for three different marketing study levels. This coincidentally accounted for three different age groups spanning both personal and disciplinary development over a period from late adolescence to early adulthood. Further, whilst Hypotheses H4 and H5a were evaluated objectively the evaluation of others focused largely on pattern matching our theory-based hypotheses (interpretively and collectively) against both qualitative and content analyses.

Although we set our research instruments specifically to evaluate marketer and marketing separately our hypotheses set these as analogous entities. And our results suggest also that the one reflects the other, with marketing perceived as both occupation and opportunity for self-expression. Results overall support Ferrell and Gonzalez (2004) and Swanson (2019) who observe that aspiring marketers stereotypically associate marketing with advertising and promotions and this applied especially for First Year students. More mature students were able to articulate a more sophisticated view, though public facing aspects of marketing work were still to the fore. Marketing was perceived to offer cultural standing, with well-known brands representing both marketing and the marketers' social world. Practitioners were viewed also in aesthetically aspirational terms with appearance a key concern. Marketing work was deemed culturally attractive, flamboyant and creative, as reflected in the contexts and symbols examined in other identity-related marketer studies (e.g., Roberts, 2005; Round & Styhre, 2017; Schauster et al., 2021). These observations support aspects of both H2 and H3 and of H5b.

First Year students, especially, espoused a formal dress code, visually more allied to Hackley and Kover's (2007) "suits" than their "creative mavericks". Both Roberts (2005) and Round and Styhre (2017) note that professionalism, a trait much admired by the majority of our students, is frequently associated with relatively conservative modes of dress as this helps shape perceptions of competence. Older students (Final Year and Masters) acknowledged that casual clothing could be coincidentally effective and stylish, likely given their greater awareness of what was normal and what actually "worked" in a business context. For all, though, appearance was spliced with an edge of "cool" (Misra & Walters, 2016; Nancarrow et al., 2002) perhaps to impress peers and to distinguish marketers as always up to date. Of especial interest, though, was not just the look that appealed, but the relatively high premium placed on externalizing the self. This, perhaps, with the coincident potential (*I* and *us,* Hogg et al., 2017) for personal branding at work (Vallas & Christin, 2018) and distinctive community membership at large. Again, our observations support aspects of both H2 and H3 whilst also helping uphold H5b.

Both "looking good" *and* "sounding right" (Warhurst & Nickson, 2001) were respondent priorities, with creativity and confidence to the fore. And contrary to Pounders et al. (2015) and Warhurst and Nixon (2007), observations suggest aesthetic pressure emerges as a group imperative and is a source of attraction ("status symbolism", Millan & Mittal, 2017) rather than repression. It would be easy to imagine respondents believing themselves to be contestants on television's *The Apprentice* - youthful and sleek, seemingly creative, and apparently well-rewarded. This resonates with both Misra and Walters (2016) and Besen-Cassino (2014) who note the young are increasingly attracted to jobs with positive socio-cultural connotations. For marketers, though, this does not compensate for low pay or precarious conditions (Vallas & Christin, 2018) but implies some can pursue both high pay and peer credibility, especially where traits both proscribe and facilitate this. Again, we take this as support for H2 and H3.

We noticed also that although creative work might be considered ephemeral, both through words and pictures our respondents considered marketing work as requiring a high level of commitment and endeavor, with a *hard work* and *organized* ethic frequently cited. This slightly constrains support for H2 and suggests our respondents see no conflict in undertaking work that is coincidentally creative and industrious. Also, although we didn't encounter this in our literature review, our respondents - especially the older ones - also acknowledge the value of market knowledge/technical acumen.

In both drawings and brand associations respondents linked marketing with wealth (expressed as conspicuous consumption - designer clothing, high-end car brands, expensive holidays) necessary, of course, for both stylish (H2) and socially desirable (H3) outcomes. This contrasted sharply with the perceived utilitarian characteristics of public-sector workers (who may be equally well remunerated) whilst lawyer and accountant, especially, were noted as wealthy but relatively unprepossessing. Similar identity markers are unlikely to apply for these and other "serious" corporate occupations – e.g., engineering, operations management - where a more functional character may apply (e.g., Cadaret et al., 2017; Jungert, 2013). Results suggest respondents perceived marketers as visually distinct, manifest as much a cultural (e.g., Stoeckl & Luedicke, 2015; Svensson, 2007) as an economic entity, giving some support to H1. However, the distinction from more "respectable" occupations emerged less a sign of rebellion (contradicting H1) and more a signifier of hedonist than renegade aspiration. According to drawings, marketing is a "happy" job, unlikely to be disturbed by the exigencies of more solemn enterprise.

Personality scores further imply this aesthetically oriented identity is expressed by, and appeals to, those of an expansive or expressive character. Agreeableness and Extraversion scores were generally higher than the norm, and Openness and Neuroticism a little lower, when compared to other categorically similar groups. We find here support for H4 and note this mirrors earlier empirical observations (Kothari & Pingle, 2015; Noël et al., 2016; Pringle et al., 2010). Ryan and Deci (2000) suggest extrinsic motivations are outcome-oriented, while intrinsic motivations pertain to personal interest or satisfaction. According to Judge et al. (1999), a low Neuroticism score implies a lack of anxiety and high self-confidence; low Openness suggests constrained interest in philosophical and/or scholarly concerns plus a tendency for autonomy and nonconformity avoidance; high extrinsic trait scores imply respondents are well-organized, likeable, active, and success oriented – characteristics encountered in our other analyses.

Trait profile for our three groups - characterized by a largely uniform trait rank order (Borghuis et al., 2017) and a difference in expressive traits from benchmarks - suggests a defining marketer "modal personality" (Satterwhite et al., 2009) supporting also H4. There is one statistically significant difference across the ages for This Study (Openness for our Masters group) but no evidence of a predicted dip in Extraversion as our students become older. And though Conscientiousness appears to rise Agreeableness does not – though apparent changes are not statistically significantly different. We conclude, though, that the patterns suggested by Elkins et al. (2017) and Hoff et al. (2021) may not readily apply to marketing aspirants for whom Extraversion and Agreeableness, especially, are consistently higher than the norm. These mirror identity markers emerging from the other analyses in our study. We suggest, therefore, that evidence for H5a is inconclusive.

The characteristics we identify - exhibited both in drawings and words, and self-reported through BFI test – represent the social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to which our respondents are attracted and which they expect to be reproduced in their own prospective experience. These define, further, how they self-categorize (Turner et al., 1987), strengthening the suggestion that social comparison and career choice can be aligned (Li et al., 2015). This identity emerges as a conjoint expression of both marketing and the marketer, with occupation the backdrop for a more clearly defined social self. Hogg and Mullins (1999) suggest the search for social identity is strongly aligned with desires for distinction and self-esteem, and results imply a marketing job will deliver these. This aligns too, with Dutton et al.'s (2010) view that a social identity derived through work is evaluatively focused on positive aspects of a chosen occupation, and that this captures and embodies subjective feelings of self-regard or self-worth.

It is also of note that despite respondents' espoused creativity, Prabhu et al. (2008) suggest extrinsic characteristics undermine this while, by contrast, intrinsic motivations support it. This implies key perceived marketer assets – creativity and confidence, both extolled by respondents - may not be naturally co-existing within an individual. Though others suggest otherwise (e.g., Noël et al., 2016), McCorkle et al. (2007) noted that though marketing students might cherish creativity, in practice they were no more creative than others, and to some extent our results support this. We have no comparative benchmark for this but draw attention to Fig. 4 bottom LH corner as perhaps typical of our respondent constituency. The respondent concerned is a Final Year student, identifies as female, and cites key marketer characteristics as: approachable, young (25–40), self-confident, creative, friendly and happy, well presented, hardworking, outgoing and chatty. This same respondent believes that a marketer will drive an Audi®, holiday in Greece and wear Calvin Klein® and Levis®, but – as several of our respondents did – draws just a stick person to visually represent her thoughts.

5. Discussion

We offered respondents free rein to characterize both practice and practitioner. Projective evidence suggested where participants could have focused either on *being* or *doing* then *being* emerged as a strong imperative. Fromm (1976) compares *being*, as a human condition, to *having*, but Rand (Forbes, 2011, p. 88) also incorporates *doing*. Here, *having, being and doing* are sequential states (Cohen et al., 2005). We suggest that, for our respondents, although *having* a marketing career does mean *doing* marketing, their chief aim is to *be* a marketer (career seen chiefly as *role* – Inkson, 2004) thus disrupting Rand's hypothesis of cause and effect. *Doing* and *belonging* (Farmer & van Dyne, 2017) - a conjoint condition related to work – is not yet accessible to our respondents, and though we make no knowledge claims as to the moral priorities of respondents, we can perhaps reasonably posit that if these were concerned primarily with *doing* then ethics might have emerged as a more substantive concern.

By contrast, a primary interest in *being* perhaps obviates this. Kreps and Monin (2011) suggest actors judge the moral intensity of a situation and react accordingly. If no dilemma is perceived to exist, then no ethical judgement is applied ("no moralization"); if the opposite, then conscious choice is invoked, and other moral frames apply. Our respondents appeared largely either unacquainted or unconcerned with the moral ambiguities and ethical choices they will encounter, and it was noticeable that in our word choice analysis, *ethics* and *honest* each only occurred once. However, though *persuasiveness* did appear as a factor (especially for First Year students) this was not a prevailing issue, but neither did respondents exhibit any real affinity with customers other than as an object of attention. Just like Dailey and Kim's (2001) Principles of Marketing students they found these to be of peripheral interest. Ramanathan and Swain (2019) suggest this is typical of those with a self- rather than other-directed ego.

This implies, perhaps, a focus on the self rather than disdain for others, and a relative absence of ethical concern perhaps suggests respondents see nothing to be ethical about. But here is the rub. If, as our evidence suggests, they are indeed egoistically self-directed, they may be *primed* for moral disengagement, and their focus on reward (expensive cars, clothes and holidays) may be a warning of ethical ambivalence (Kreps & Monin, 2011) to come. The connection here between occupation and individual may thus be manifest through attraction for a setting perceived as ethically neutral rather than one that is attractively unethical (Woodall, 2012).

These insights, coupled with those in Section 4.5, underpin our contribution to practice. We see these students not as "wicked" (see Introduction) but with a view on career that appeals both to their outgoing character and socio-cultural aspirations. Marketing perhaps has an especial appeal for the young, but one where perceived fit may be an idealized rather than considered condition. One also where *being* competes with *doing* and where socially appealing characteristics (creativity and confidence) are considered both corresponding and key. And for some combinations of job and aspirant the ideal will be realized, but not for all. And some marketing aspirants may see beyond the stereotype to a career that is relatedly both attractive and challenging - but again, not all. Further, if fit is imagined rather than real then there will be interrelated and negative consequences for engagement, satisfaction, success and attrition (Ford, 2012) in both educational and occupational spheres - and perhaps also for reinforcing the stereotype. We suggest for university recruiter/educators, therefore, a need to both caution and guide marketing hopefuls to help obviate potential problems both for them, their employers, and for society. We provide, therefore, the following recommendations.

First, ensure that recruitment materials do not mislead. Use these to: (a) re-set any overly idealized expectations, (b) position courses in the context of practice realities, and (c) establish realistic expectations for both course content and the nature of marketing work. Second, ensure information provided during recruitment activities (such as open days) further supports the above by anticipating and deflecting stereotypical views. In so doing, also, caution against simplistic pre-assumptions of how marketers should look and act and explain the diversity of both marketing work and those who might succeed in this work. And third, ensure open day and induction activities/associated materials give hopefuls an early opportunity to reconsider – if necessary - their choices and to transfer to another course if appropriate.

Fourth, design course structures across all levels of learning such that materials consistently and continuously provide realistic insights into both practice and practitioner to ensure these continue to address any remaining or emerging misconceptions. And finally, focus on the *doing* of marketing work rather than the *being* of a marketing practitioner and focus teaching (throughout and across all levels) on the ethics of marketing, emphasizing more the needs of customers and society than the trappings of marketing work. Emphasize that *being* can only be fully realized if the *doing* is done "well" and done "right" (Stoeckl & Luedicke, 2015).

Whilst it is evident from our results that age and experience may moderate more extreme social identity perspectives, the stereotype remains and continues to impact perspectives on what marketing is. The recommendations above are designed, primarily, to help dismantle this stereotype and to help set both realistic and socially salient objectives for practice.

6. Conclusions, limitations and directions for further research

This study concerns marketing aspirants from across three study levels. We acknowledge any student group – whether marketers, accountants or teachers - would be positive about their prospects and optimistic regarding potential for a viable future. We argue, though, that an aspirational marketer/marketing stereotype exists that attracts new student recruits and is embodied through a relationship between the stereotype, socio-cultural goals, and also self-report character. Triangulating younger and older students suggests that though this stereotype may dissipate a little over time it still persists as a strong social identity marker. Further, that it likely appeals to particular individuals given the opportunities this provides for reflecting and representing the self positively on an ongoing basis.

Our primary contribution is to provide a previously unreported account of career-focused perceptions framed within the late-adolescent to young-adult marketer mind-set. But the usual caveats will apply - our work is a case-study, focused on one institution, within one narrow time frame, and explored in a western cultural context. It is also likely that social desirability bias affected personality test results, though it suggested (e.g., Ones et al., 1996) that this is a facet of personality itself and explains specific aspects of individual difference. And we wonder if, for example, our students may have self-reported differently on personality if they were questioned outside a marketing-focused research context. We also note that trait personality is reported to vary with a range of factors (including culture, age and gender), so though we justify our choice of benchmark and literature comparisons we note their indicative nature. From a different methodological perspective we note that marketer appearance was more strongly represented via both drawings and espousal of brand names than it was in words (Poised, in our word analysis section). This, we believe, confirms the elicitation value of a diverse range of techniques in a projective design plan (Hofstede et al., 2007) and the value of mixed methods research.

We believe our findings have implications beyond our study, but further work in other institutions (and other national contexts) should be undertaken to test this. Further, it is likely that ideational impressions of marketing (*identification* - Stets & Burke, 2014) impact at early stages of career commitment and that a more instrumental identity derives later through *interaction* (see again, Stets & Burke, 2014). And such emergence is likely to derive from both educational and occupational experiences. Dæhlen (2005) suggests values change little over course duration but Ybema et al. (2009) suggest social identity is constantly under construction, and we are aware that trait personality also evolves (Rossier, 2015). We believe, therefore, that beyond repeating our study in different contexts it would be equally of interest to replicate this with those who have spent several years working as a marketer. Bennett (2010) has explored issues of *professional* identity in early career, but we wonder how a *social* identity may adapt, say, over a decade. Clearly, the two will interact, with a prospective social identity helping determine how well marketing hopefuls adjust to, or resist, this next phase. We further recommend, therefore, exploring whether, and how, this a process of learning and mixing with peers (Albarello et al., 2018) works either to dissemble or to reinforce socially focused marketer tropes.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Tony Woodall: Conceptualisation; Supervision; Investigation; Formal analysis; Visualisation; Writing – original draft.
Chris Pich: Conceptualisation; Methodology; Investigation; Formal analysis; Writing – review and edit; Visualisation.
Guja Armannsdottir: Methodology; Investigation; Formal analysis; Writing – review and edit.
Seamus Allison: Resources; Project administration; Investigation; Writing – review and edit.
Richard Howarth: Resources; Project administration; Investigation; Formal analysis; Visualisation; Writing – review and edit.
Mojtaba Poorrezaei: Project administration; Investigation; Formal analysis; Writing – review and edit.

Declaration of competing interest

Although no direct funding was used to support this study, all research was undertaken during time allocated by the researchers' employing institution to individuals for the purposes of personal research. This research was not directed by, or undertaken under the auspices of, the institution and nor does the institution have any stated or implied interest in the results of the research.

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