

The Investigation of Use of AI-Powered Tools on Marketing Career Choices: Evidence from Marketing Undergraduates in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into marketing is reshaping professional practice and influencing the career aspirations of future marketers. However, empirical evidence on how AI affects marketing undergraduates' career choices in developing economies remains limited. This study explores the influence of AI-powered tools on the career choices, skill perceptions, and professional readiness of marketing undergraduates in Sri Lanka. A qualitative exploratory research design was adopted using purposive sampling to select 20 final-year Marketing Management undergraduates from seven Sri Lankan higher education institutions. Final-year students were chosen because of their proximity to labour market entry and greater exposure to AI technologies. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and open-ended surveys until thematic saturation was achieved. The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. The findings reveal five key themes: widespread awareness and use of AI tools; basic-to-intermediate AI application primarily for content generation and research support; increasing recognition of AI literacy, prompt engineering, and data analytics as essential marketing competencies; concerns about the decline of entry-level marketing roles alongside optimism for AI-driven career opportunities; and moderate career preparedness constrained by a persistent theory-practice gap. The study identifies a digital pivot phenomenon, whereby students increasingly favour AI- and data-driven marketing careers over traditional marketing roles. The findings highlight the need for AI-integrated curricula, stronger university–industry collaboration, redesigned entry-level roles that emphasise AI competencies, and policies to reduce digital inequalities. These insights provide practical implications for higher education institutions, employers, and policymakers seeking to prepare marketing graduates for an AI-driven economy.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Marketing Career Choice, AI-Powered Tools, Digital Marketing, Theory-Practice Gap.*