

THE TALENT PIPELINE: DEVELOPING AND RETAINING A FUTURE-READY MARKETING TEAM

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Abstract

This study examines the development of a talent pipeline for building and retaining future-ready marketing teams in an increasingly dynamic and technology-driven environment. As digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and data-driven marketing reshape the industry, organizations face growing challenges in addressing talent shortages and skill gaps. Traditional approaches to talent management are often insufficient to meet the evolving demands of modern marketing roles, particularly in areas such as analytics, digital platforms, and strategic thinking. To address these issues, this study adopts a qualitative review-based approach, synthesizing existing literature and industry insights to develop an integrative framework for marketing talent management. The findings identify key competencies required for future-ready marketing teams, including digital, analytical, creative, and strategic skills, and highlight the importance of managing talent across the stages of attraction, development, retention, and advancement. The proposed framework emphasizes the integration of recruitment, continuous learning, technology utilization, and organizational culture to create a sustainable and adaptable talent pipeline. The study concludes that a holistic and strategic approach is essential for organizations seeking to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving marketing landscape. While the study contributes to both theory and practice by offering a unified perspective, it is limited by its conceptual nature. Future research should focus on empirical validation and explore the role of emerging technologies in shaping marketing talent strategies.

Keywords: *Talent pipeline, marketing talent management, future-ready skills, employee development, talent retention*

INTRODUCTION

The rapidly evolving business environment has significantly increased the demand for future-ready marketing capabilities, requiring organizations to rethink how they build and manage their marketing teams. Traditional marketing roles, which once focused primarily on communication and branding, are now being transformed by the integration of digital technologies and data-driven decision-making (Plangger, Grewal, de Ruyter, et al., 2022). As markets become more competitive and customer expectations continue to rise, organizations must equip their marketing teams with a diverse set of skills that go beyond conventional competencies. This includes the ability to leverage digital platforms, analyze complex data, and create personalized customer experiences (Asfahani, 2024). Consequently, the concept of a “future-ready” marketing team has emerged as a critical priority for organizations seeking sustainable growth and competitive advantage. Developing such capabilities requires not only technical expertise but also strategic thinking, creativity, and adaptability. Therefore, building a strong and sustainable talent pipeline has become essential for ensuring that organizations can meet the evolving demands of the marketing landscape (Mikalef et al., 2023). The impact of digital transformation, artificial intelligence (AI), and data-driven marketing has fundamentally reshaped the nature of marketing work. Digital transformation has expanded the number of customer touchpoints, requiring marketers to manage omnichannel experiences and ensure consistency across platforms (Grewal et al., 2024). At the same time, AI and automation technologies are increasingly being used to enhance efficiency, optimize campaigns, and deliver personalized content at scale. Data-driven

marketing has also become a central component of modern strategies, enabling organizations to gain deeper insights into customer behavior and preferences. However, these advancements have also increased the complexity of marketing roles, demanding a higher level of technical and analytical proficiency from marketing professionals (Muthaluri, 2024). As a result, organizations must continuously update their talent strategies to keep pace with technological change. This shift has created a growing need for marketers who can combine technical skills with creativity and strategic insight. Ultimately, the integration of these technologies underscores the importance of developing a workforce that is both digitally competent and adaptable (Kobets, 2024).

Despite the increasing demand for advanced marketing capabilities, many organizations face significant challenges related to talent shortages and skill gaps. The rapid pace of technological change has outpaced the ability of many organizations to develop or acquire the necessary skills within their existing workforce (Kumar et al., 2024a). As a result, there is a noticeable gap between the competencies required for modern marketing roles and the skills currently available in the labor market. This shortage is particularly evident in areas such as data analytics, digital marketing, and AI-driven tools. Moreover, the competition for skilled marketing professionals has intensified, making it difficult for organizations to attract and retain top talent. High turnover rates and limited internal development opportunities further exacerbate this issue (Cioppi et al., 2023). Consequently, organizations must adopt more proactive and strategic approaches to talent management in order to address these challenges effectively. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to explore how organizations can build and sustain an effective marketing talent pipeline that supports both development and retention. Specifically, the study aims to identify key competencies required for future-ready marketing teams and to examine strategies for attracting, developing, and retaining marketing talent. By addressing these issues, the study seeks to contribute to both academic literature and practical management approaches in the field of marketing talent development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategic Talent Management and Workforce Planning

Strategic talent management and workforce planning serve as the foundation for building a sustainable and future-ready marketing talent pipeline. In an increasingly dynamic business environment, organizations must move beyond reactive hiring practices and adopt a proactive approach to managing talent. This involves identifying current and future skill requirements and aligning them with organizational goals and market demands (Plangger, Grewal, de Ruyter, et al., 2022). Effective workforce planning enables organizations to anticipate talent shortages, address skill gaps, and ensure the availability of qualified professionals when needed. It also supports better decision-making in recruitment, training, and succession planning. By integrating talent management with overall business strategy, organizations can create a more agile and responsive workforce. Ultimately, this strategic alignment enhances organizational performance and competitiveness in the rapidly evolving marketing landscape (Asfahani, 2024).

Moreover, talent pipelines play a crucial role in ensuring continuity and long-term sustainability in marketing capabilities. A well-structured talent pipeline allows organizations to systematically identify, develop, and retain high-potential individuals for future roles. This reduces dependency on external hiring and minimizes disruptions caused by employee turnover (Mikalef et al., 2023). Strategic workforce planning also emphasizes the importance of diversity and inclusion, ensuring that teams are composed of individuals with varied perspectives and skills. Additionally, organizations must leverage data and analytics to make informed talent decisions and monitor workforce trends. By doing so, they can continuously refine their talent strategies to meet changing business needs (Grewal et al., 2024). Therefore, strategic talent management is not only about filling positions but also about building a resilient and future-oriented marketing workforce.

Future-Ready Marketing Competencies

Future-ready marketing competencies are essential for organizations seeking to remain competitive in an increasingly digital and customer-centric environment. The rapid advancement of technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and marketing automation has transformed the skill requirements for marketing professionals (Muthaluri, 2024). Digital skills are no longer optional but have become a core requirement for executing effective marketing strategies. Marketers must be able to analyze large datasets, interpret insights, and use technology to optimize campaigns and enhance customer engagement. In addition to technical expertise, creative thinking remains a critical competency, enabling marketers to design innovative campaigns that capture customer attention (Plangger, Grewal, de Ruyter, et al., 2022). Strategic thinking is equally important, as it allows professionals to align marketing initiatives with broader organizational objectives. Together, these competencies form the foundation of a future-ready marketing workforce (Asfahani, 2024).

Beyond technical and creative skills, a strong customer-centric and data-driven mindset is crucial for modern marketers. Organizations must prioritize understanding customer needs, preferences, and behaviors in order to deliver personalized and meaningful experiences. This requires marketers to adopt a holistic perspective, considering the entire customer journey rather than isolated touchpoints (Mikalef et al., 2023). A data-driven approach enables organizations to make informed decisions, measure performance, and continuously improve their strategies. Furthermore, adaptability and continuous learning are key attributes of future-ready marketers, as the marketing landscape is constantly evolving. Organizations must therefore foster a culture that encourages experimentation, innovation, and skill development. By cultivating these competencies, firms can build marketing teams that are not only technically proficient but also strategically agile and customer focused (Grewal et al., 2024).

Talent Development and Retention Strategies

Talent development strategies are critical for equipping marketing professionals with the skills needed to thrive in a rapidly changing environment. Organizations must invest in continuous learning initiatives, including training, upskilling, and reskilling programs, to keep their workforce relevant and competitive (Nyagadza, 2022). Traditional training approaches are no longer sufficient, as they often fail to address the evolving nature of marketing roles. Instead, organizations should adopt flexible and personalized learning and development (L&D) frameworks that cater to individual needs and career goals. These frameworks should incorporate a mix of formal training, on-the-job learning, mentoring, and digital learning platforms. By providing opportunities for continuous skill enhancement, organizations can improve employee performance and job satisfaction. Ultimately, effective talent development contributes to building a more capable and future-ready marketing team (Fernandez-Vidal et al., 2022).

Equally important is the implementation of effective employee retention and engagement strategies to sustain talent within the organization. High turnover rates can disrupt operations and result in the loss of valuable knowledge and expertise. To address this, organizations must create a supportive work environment that fosters engagement, motivation, and a sense of belonging (Li, 2022). This includes offering clear career progression paths, competitive compensation, and opportunities for professional growth. Leadership and organizational culture also play a significant role in influencing employee retention, as supportive leadership can enhance job satisfaction and commitment. Additionally, organizations should focus on employee experience, ensuring that individuals feel valued and recognized for their contributions. By integrating development and retention strategies, organizations can build a stable and committed workforce that supports long-term success (Fenwick et al., 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative review-based research design to develop a comprehensive understanding of the talent pipeline for future-ready marketing teams. As a conceptual and review paper, it primarily relies on the synthesis of existing literature, complemented by insights from industry practices. The research integrates both qualitative and interpretive approaches to examine how organizations attract, develop, and retain marketing talent in a rapidly evolving environment. Data collection is based on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, industry reports, and professional publications related to marketing talent management. In addition, insights from interviews with marketing professionals and HR leaders, as documented in existing studies and reports, are incorporated to enrich the analysis. This combination of academic and practitioner-oriented sources ensures a well-rounded perspective on the topic. The sampling strategy focuses on selecting relevant and high-quality sources that provide significant theoretical and practical contributions to the field.

The analysis of the collected data is conducted using thematic and content analysis techniques to identify key patterns, themes, and relationships across the literature. Concepts related to talent management, competencies, development strategies, and retention practices are systematically coded and categorized to facilitate comparison and synthesis. Through this process, recurring themes are identified and integrated into a cohesive framework that reflects current trends and best practices. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, the study employs triangulation by cross-referencing multiple sources and perspectives. Data verification is achieved through the careful selection of credible and widely cited literature, as well as consistency in coding and interpretation. This rigorous approach enhances the trustworthiness of the study and supports the development of a robust conceptual framework. Overall, the methodology provides a structured and transparent process for synthesizing knowledge and generating meaningful insights into marketing talent pipeline development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Key Skills for Future-Ready Marketing Teams

Future-ready marketing teams require a diverse and integrated set of competencies that enable them to operate effectively in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. Among these, digital skills have become fundamental, as marketing increasingly relies on technologies such as artificial intelligence, automation tools, and digital platforms. Marketers must be proficient in using these technologies to design, implement, and optimize campaigns across multiple channels (Polomoshnov et al., 2025). Additionally, digital literacy allows professionals to adapt quickly to emerging tools and trends, ensuring that organizations remain competitive. As customer interactions shift toward digital environments, the ability to navigate and leverage these platforms becomes a critical success factor. Therefore, organizations must prioritize the development of digital capabilities within their marketing teams (Santana & Díaz-Fernández, 2022).

In addition to digital expertise, analytical skills are essential for interpreting data and generating actionable insights. Modern marketing is highly data-driven, requiring professionals to analyze customer behavior, measure campaign performance, and make informed decisions. This involves not only technical proficiency in data analysis tools but also the ability to translate complex data into strategic recommendations (Park & Kim, 2025). Alongside analytical capabilities, creative thinking remains a vital component of effective marketing. Creativity enables marketers to develop innovative campaigns, differentiate brands, and engage customers in meaningful ways. It is the combination of data-driven insights and creative execution that leads to impactful marketing outcomes. Consequently, organizations must foster both analytical and creative competencies to build well-rounded marketing teams (Plangger, Grewal, Ruyter, et al., 2022).

Table 1. Key Competencies for Future-Ready Marketing Teams

Competency Area	Key Elements	Role in Marketing	Organizational Implication
Digital Skills	AI, automation tools, digital platforms	Enable campaign execution and optimization across channels	Invest in digital training and technology adoption
Digital Literacy	Adaptability to new tools and trends	Supports agility in a fast-changing digital environment	Encourage continuous learning and upskilling
Analytical Skills	Data analysis, performance measurement	Generate insights and support data-driven decision-making	Develop data capabilities and analytical mindset
Creative Thinking	Innovation, brand differentiation	Design engaging campaigns and enhance customer experience	Foster creativity alongside technical expertise

The table as shown in table 1 highlights the essential competencies required for building future-ready marketing teams by categorizing them into four key areas: digital skills, digital literacy, analytical skills, and creative thinking. It demonstrates that modern marketing success depends not only on technical proficiency but also on the ability to adapt, analyze, and innovate. Digital skills and literacy form the foundation, enabling marketers to effectively use advanced technologies and respond to rapidly evolving digital trends. At the same time, analytical skills ensure that decisions are data-driven, allowing organizations to better understand customer behavior and optimize performance. Creative thinking complements these capabilities by enabling the development of innovative and engaging campaigns that differentiate brands in competitive markets. Overall, the table emphasizes that organizations must adopt a balanced approach in developing both technical and creative competencies to build agile, effective, and future-ready marketing teams (Ye et al., 2023).

Strategic thinking further complements these skills by ensuring that marketing efforts are aligned with broader organizational goals. Future-ready marketers must be able to anticipate market trends, identify opportunities, and develop long-term strategies that drive growth. This requires a deep understanding of customer needs, competitive dynamics, and industry developments (Das et al., 2023). Moreover, adaptability and continuous learning are critical attributes, as the marketing environment is constantly changing. Professionals must be willing to update their skills and embrace new approaches to remain relevant. By integrating digital, analytical, creative, and strategic competencies, organizations can develop marketing teams that are capable of navigating complexity and driving sustained success (Pfajfar et al., 2024).

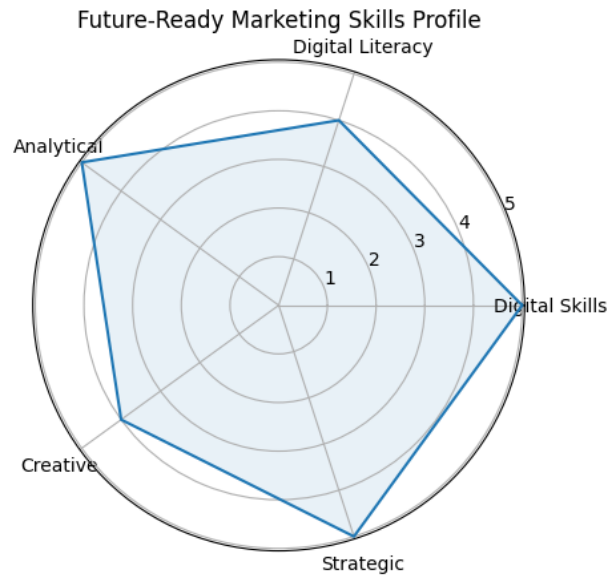


Figure 1. Future-Ready Marketing Skills Profile

The radar chart as shown in Figure 1 illustrates the integrated profile of key skills required for future-ready marketing teams, highlighting the relative importance of digital skills, digital literacy, analytical capabilities, creative thinking, and strategic competence. The shape of the chart shows a strong emphasis on digital, analytical, and strategic skills, reflecting their critical role in navigating a data-driven and technology-intensive marketing environment (Polomoshnov et al., 2025). At the same time, digital literacy and creative thinking, while slightly lower in relative emphasis, remain essential components that support adaptability and innovation. The balanced distribution across all dimensions indicates that no single skill is sufficient on its own; instead, effective marketing performance depends on the combination of technical expertise, analytical insight, and creative execution (Santana & Díaz-Fernández, 2022). The enclosed area of the chart represents the overall capability of the marketing team, suggesting that strengthening any one dimension can enhance overall performance. Additionally, the chart visually reinforces the need for organizations to develop well-rounded professionals who can integrate multiple competencies. Overall, the radar chart serves as a useful tool for assessing skill readiness and identifying areas for improvement in building future-ready marketing teams (Park & Kim, 2025).

Stages of the Talent Pipeline

The talent pipeline for marketing teams can be understood as a continuous process consisting of four key stages: attraction, development, retention, and advancement. The attraction stage focuses on identifying and recruiting individuals with the potential to contribute to the organization's marketing objectives. This involves employer branding, targeted recruitment strategies, and the use of digital platforms to reach a diverse pool of candidates (Plangger, Grewal, Ruyter, et al., 2022). Organizations must clearly communicate their value proposition to attract top talent, particularly in a competitive labor market. Additionally, aligning recruitment efforts with future skill requirements ensures that new hires possess the competencies needed for evolving roles. Effective attraction strategies lay the foundation for a strong and sustainable talent pipeline (Ye et al., 2023).

The development stage emphasizes equipping employees with the skills and knowledge required to perform effectively and grow within the organization. This includes structured training programs, mentorship, and opportunities for continuous learning. Organizations must invest in upskilling and reskilling initiatives to keep pace with technological advancements and changing market demands (Das et al., 2023). Development is not limited to technical skills but also includes leadership and soft skills that enhance overall performance. By fostering a culture of learning, organizations can ensure that employees remain engaged and capable of adapting to new challenges. This stage is critical for building internal capabilities and reducing reliance on external hiring.

Retention and advancement represent the later stages of the talent pipeline, focusing on sustaining and maximizing the value of existing talent. Retention strategies aim to create a supportive and motivating work environment that encourages employees to stay with the organization. This includes offering competitive compensation, career development opportunities, and a positive organizational culture. Advancement, on the other hand, involves promoting employees to higher roles and providing pathways for career progression (Pfafjar et al.,

2024). By recognizing and rewarding talent, organizations can enhance employee satisfaction and commitment. Together, retention and advancement ensure that the talent pipeline remains robust and capable of supporting long-term organizational success (Li, 2022).

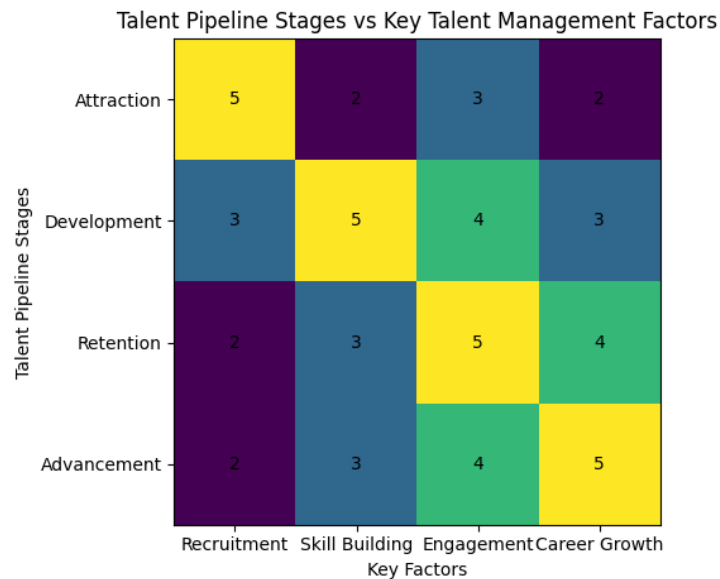


Figure 2. Talent Pipeline Stages vs Key Talent Management Factors

The matrix chart as shown in Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between the four stages of the talent pipeline—attraction, development, retention, and advancement—and key talent management factors such as recruitment, skill building, engagement, and career growth. It highlights that each stage has a dominant focus, with attraction strongly linked to recruitment, development to skill building, retention to engagement, and advancement to career growth (Polomoshnov et al., 2025). At the same time, the chart shows that these relationships are not isolated, as each stage also contributes to other factors to varying degrees, reflecting the interconnected nature of talent management. For example, development not only builds skills but also enhances engagement, while retention strategies support career growth opportunities. This overlap emphasizes that managing talent effectively requires an integrated approach rather than treating each stage independently (Santana & Díaz-Fernández, 2022). The visual distribution of values suggests that organizations must balance their efforts across all stages to maintain a strong and sustainable talent pipeline. Overall, the matrix chart serves as a useful tool for identifying priorities and aligning talent management strategies with different stages of the employee lifecycle (Park & Kim, 2025).

Proposed Talent Pipeline Framework

The proposed talent pipeline framework integrates key elements of recruitment, development, and retention into a cohesive and strategic model. Unlike traditional approaches that treat these functions separately, the framework emphasizes their interdependence and alignment with organizational objectives. Recruitment is not viewed as an isolated activity but as the starting point of a continuous process that extends throughout the employee lifecycle (Polomoshnov et al., 2025). By aligning recruitment strategies with development and retention goals, organizations can ensure a more consistent and effective approach to talent management. This integrated perspective allows organizations to build a pipeline that is both responsive and sustainable. Ultimately, the framework provides a structured approach to managing marketing talent in a dynamic environment (Park & Kim, 2025).

A key feature of the framework is its emphasis on continuous learning and adaptability. As marketing roles evolve, organizations must ensure that employees have access to ongoing development opportunities. This includes formal training programs, experiential learning, and knowledge-sharing initiatives. The framework also highlights the importance of leveraging data and technology to support talent management processes (Plangger, Grewal, Ruyter, et al., 2022). For example, analytics can be used to identify skill gaps, track employee performance, and inform decision-making. By integrating technology into the talent pipeline, organizations can enhance efficiency and effectiveness. This approach enables organizations to respond proactively to changes in the marketing landscape (Polomoshnov et al., 2025).

The stacked bar chart as presented in Figure 3 illustrates how key components of the proposed talent pipeline framework—strategy alignment, continuous learning, technology use, and culture and leadership—collectively contribute to recruitment, development, and retention. It highlights that talent management is not driven by a single factor but by the integration of multiple elements across all stages of the pipeline. Recruitment shows a strong emphasis on strategic alignment, indicating the importance of aligning hiring practices with organizational goals (Elhajjar, 2023; Homburg & Wielgos, 2022). Development is heavily influenced by continuous learning and technology use, reflecting the need for ongoing skill enhancement and data-driven decision-making. Retention, on the other hand, is strongly supported by culture and leadership, emphasizing the role of a supportive work environment and effective leadership in sustaining talent. The stacked structure of the chart demonstrates the cumulative and interconnected nature of these components, suggesting that improvements in one area can positively influence others. Overall, the chart reinforces the idea that a holistic and integrated approach is essential for building and maintaining a sustainable and future-ready marketing talent pipeline (Cillo & Rubera, 2024).

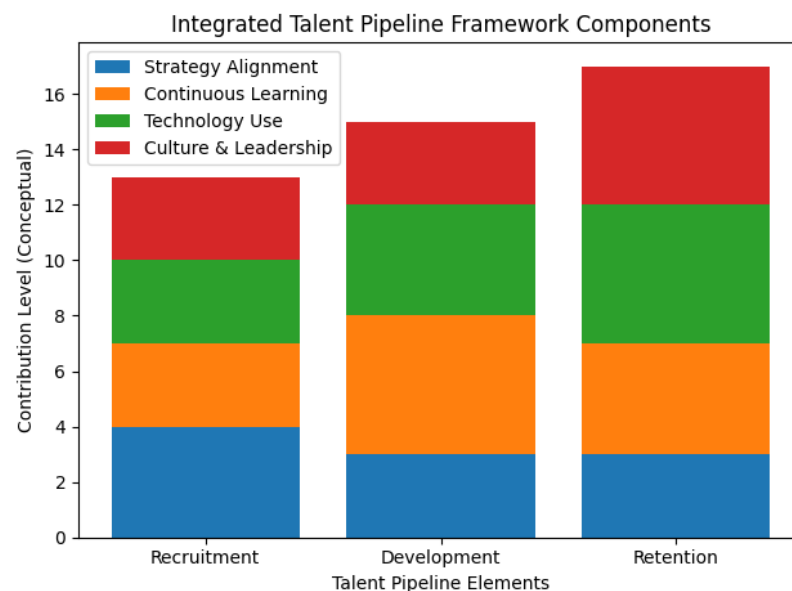


Figure 3. Integrated Talent Pipeline Framework Components

CONCLUSION

This study explored the concept of the talent pipeline in the context of developing and retaining future-ready marketing teams, emphasizing the need for an integrated and strategic approach to talent management. The findings highlight that modern marketing requires a diverse set of competencies, including digital, analytical, creative, and strategic skills, which must be continuously developed to keep pace with rapid technological advancements. By examining the stages of the talent pipeline—attraction, development, retention, and advancement—the study demonstrates that effective talent management is a continuous and interconnected process rather than a series of isolated activities. The proposed framework further underscores the importance of aligning recruitment, development, and retention strategies with organizational objectives, supported by continuous learning, technology adoption, and a strong organizational culture. This holistic perspective provides a more comprehensive understanding of how organizations can build resilient and adaptable marketing teams. Ultimately, the study reinforces that a well-structured talent pipeline is essential for sustaining competitive advantage in an increasingly dynamic and digital marketing environment.

From both theoretical and practical perspectives, this study contributes by integrating fragmented insights into a cohesive model that can guide future research and managerial practice. It offers a foundation for organizations to design more effective talent strategies by emphasizing the importance of employee experience, leadership, and continuous capability development. However, the study is limited by its conceptual nature and reliance on secondary data, which may affect its generalizability across different contexts. Future research is encouraged to empirically validate the proposed framework and examine its applicability across industries and organizational settings. Additionally, further studies could explore the impact of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and advanced analytics, on talent development and retention strategies. In conclusion, organizations that adopt an

integrated and forward-looking approach to talent pipeline management will be better positioned to attract, develop, and retain the marketing talent necessary for long-term success.

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