

ESSENTIAL EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS FOR MARKETING CAREERS: GAP ANALYSIS OF EDUCATION AND PROFESSION

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Abstract

This study investigates generic skills, technical abilities and conceptual knowledge required by employers of marketing professionals. The first part of the research is based upon the content analysis of 375 advertisements of marketing jobs. These competencies were classified in two categories i.e. generic skills and technical marketing skills. With regards to generic skills, oral/written communication, leadership and team work has come out as preferred by employers. The Industry knowledge and sales management are the most desirable technical skills that are required by employers. In the second phase 16 marketing executives ranked the competencies they prefer while hiring marketing professionals. Lastly an exploratory study was conducted to find out if essential competencies are delivered through curriculum of marketing or not. 'Industry specific knowledge' and forecasting and budgeting are two areas that are not sufficiently covered by the marketing curriculum.

Keywords: Competency, Skill Gap, Curriculum

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Introduction

The purpose of this research is to outline the skills and competencies to perform and compete in the field of marketing that are required by employers in business organizations. It also investigates the gap between competencies delivered by the marketing curriculum and those that are required by employers of marketing professionals.

The specific objectives of the research study are:

- 1) To identify the competencies required for marketing related jobs in different sectors in Pakistan
- 2) To compare the competencies required at different levels of marketing jobs.
- 3) To rank the identified competencies according their importance in marketing jobs.
- 4) To perform gap analysis on the basis of curriculum and professional requirements

The prime goal of business degree programs is to prepare graduates to be 'work ready' with employable skills. However there is substantial evidence from industry that this goal is not being met effectively. Walker et.al (2009) finds out through their research study that Marketing Graduates demonstrate lack of skills to organically "fit the organization" and graduates are also deficient in application of marketing knowledge in real world. These findings call for development and redesign of curricula of marketing education to achieve two goals. One is to produce employable graduates and second to assist business schools to retain their competitive advantage.

Today business schools offer a number of courses to inculcate theoretical knowledge as well as functional competencies in students. In principal all business schools agree litmus test for the quality of students they produce can be ascertained by the skills of graduates to apply the learned concepts in the real world situations (Salami 2007). The idea behind the application of theory is to help in the smooth transition of graduates to professionals. Unfortunately a gap exists between employers' expectations and skills/competencies with which graduates are equipped (McClymont et al, 2005). The real concern of organizations is to minimize the 'skill gap' between the talent they require and the one that is available in the labor market (Aring, 2012). A ground breaking study by McKinsey (2012) 'Education to Employment' declares that "We don't have a jobs crisis in the world, we have a skills crisis" as it reveals the disparity between educational system and the job talents employers need.

Business schools often wonder what type of knowledge, skills and abilities should be imparted to their students as to make them worthwhile for their future employers. Workplace skills and competencies are often associated with the initial education that a professional receives in achieving their degrees. The purpose of this research study is to explore the professional competencies required for marketing related jobs and investigate how these skills are segregated at different levels in organizational hierarchy. It will also probe the gap between the competencies provided through curriculum by the business schools and requirements sketched by the organizations.

This study may provide a baseline for the marketers and marketing professionals to investigate and the match the academic input to the required set of skills. The scope of this study is limited only to marketing jobs that were advertised in the Daily Dawn Newspaper in the year of 2014. Only one newspaper i.e. The Daily Dawn was selected to collect data related to the competencies of

marketing professionals. There are number of other methods of recruiting which different companies use like employing head hunting companies, using referrals and posting on websites etc but in this study has taken into account only those job ads that are published in the Dawn Newspaper. Another limitation was that marketing curriculum of only three business schools is consulted to make out the deliverance of relevant marketing skills to the graduates.

Literature Review

The marketing capability of a firm impacts its organizational performance. Eysteinnsson, (2010) believes that marketing capabilities are more important than its research and development and operational abilities, thus they are a source of competitive advantage because they are difficult to copy in addition to being rare and valuable. Also the possession of marketing capabilities is not enough; they need to be deployed to the fullest extent.

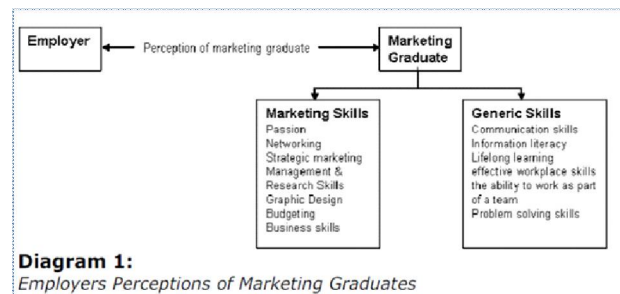
Joans (2008) bi-furcated the competencies and skills required for marketing jobs in two areas, generic skills and marketing skills. Generic skills are those transferable skills that are required in professionals across many disciplines; the presence of these skills and abilities is like assets to the individual that makes him worthy for the employers. Marketing skills are knowledge based skills that are usually taught in marketing specialization of the degree programs in business education. "Conceptual knowledge focuses on the theoretical background of the discipline of marketing and has a long life cycle" (Schlee and Harich 2010)

By using the Delphi technique Montoya (2011) identifies generic and technical marketing competencies of marketing managers. Top competencies spotted by their study are the skills to formulate marketing plan, identify the source of competitive advantage, align marketing and sales plan and manage the image of the organization. The non technical skills identified were leadership, anticipation, learning and flexibility. Further Liu (2011) in their exploratory research

by employing Analytical Hierarchical Procedure investigated about the professional competencies of marketing managers in Taiwan. Competencies identified by marketing managers are: understand customer's demands; leadership; communication and co-ordination; observe marketing ethics and law; and initiative. It can be observed that Marketing Managers need a mix of generic and technical competencies.

Figure 1:

Model presented by Sceelee and Harich (2010)



According to Luetke (2009), an individual's ability to communicate and willingness to take the initiative are highly valued in the profession of marketing and sales. The job of marketing managers revolves mostly around messages and how they were conveyed. Nearly in all scholarly work researched on finding competencies in marketing there is a common thread i.e. competency in verbal and written communication. Keeping in view the significance of communication Tanian and Ryan (2006) conducted a Meta analysis of studies on importance communication skills in marketing from three different perspectives i.e employers, students and academic. Employers believe that 75-90 % of the time of top executives is spent in communicating internally and externally; therefore oral communication is rated as more important than written communication, grades and personality. Schlee and Harich (2010) extracted fifteen most important marketing skills required by the employers after analyzing

500 marketing jobs posted on one of the most visited job website (www.monster.com) The important technical skills identified are develop marketing plans, manage marketing and supply chain management, forecasting/budgeting, research, international marketing, Customer behavior, personal Selling, sales management, digital marketing, public relations, direct marketing, merchandising and industry-specific knowledge. In the same study Schlee and Harich (2010) compared the skills and conceptual knowledge requirements of marketing at different levels of hierarchy. Marketing research, selling, internet marketing, promotion/advertising, public relations and merchandising came out as areas where subject knowledge for lower-level as well as upper-level jobs was equally required in marketing. It was found that upper level marketing jobs require more technical type of skills like database analysis and other industry specific types of soft-wares and analytics.

In academic literature there is no consensus on the most or the least important transferable skills yet communication comes out to be the most desirable skill in many surveys (Bennett, 2002). A study, conducted with employers of marketing graduates in Australia by Johns (2008), reveals that respondents rated skills communication, strategic marketing, budgeting, management and research in order of their importance. Dolnicar and Stern (2003) conducted a study on the requirements of Australian Employers from Marketing Graduates and found out that 99% of the respondents demand communication skills followed by 91% demanded presentation skills, problem solving skills, a customer focus and time management skills.

Marketing education has an important role to perform i.e. to equip the students with relevant knowledge and skills that are critical for securing good jobs (Gregory, 2013). As marketing is a dynamic field, to keep up with the requirements of the market place universities are trying to develop close contacts with employers so that they can customize the knowledge and skills that are inculcated in the marketing students according to employers wishes. Rundle et al (2005) examined

the objectives and curricula of different marketing courses that are taught at bachelors' level in Australian Universities. On comparison of the skills identified in marketing Curricula and those identified by the employers (DEST 2002) it was evaluated that marketing educators are currently meeting industry needs only half way. Universities strive to develop linkages with employers to provide job opportunities to their graduates. It implies that educators of marketing give due to importance to teach theory as well as provide opportunities to apply theory in real life situations (Walker, 2009).

Evaluation of the quality and relevance of marketing curricula is the responsibility of the marketing faculty at universities so the curricula should meet the needs of students as well as business community (Carley & Mathisen, 2000). David and David (2012) declared that in business schools whatever is taught in the class must be relevant to organization and its operations and advised business schools to revise their curricula and include technical skills required for graduates to get jobs. The continuous change in the external and internal environment of the organization demands periodic assessment of curricula. Although fundamental concepts remain same overtime but the requirement of specific skills do change. Hence educationist in the field of marketing must be attentive to the changing needs of business world and also to the competencies demanded of marketing graduates

Research Methodology

The research strategy of this study can be classified as archival research as this study is based on the content analysis of marketing jobs that are advertised in a newspaper at all levels of commercial and non-commercial organizations in the year 2014.

This study is divided into three phases. (i) Content Analysis of job advertisements, (ii) ranking of competencies and (iii) the analysis of marketing curriculum.

The first phase of the study was conducted through content analysis of jobs advertisements. Examining contents job advertisements is important as it helps higher education institutions to identify what employers really want from graduates so that these skills can be incorporated in curricula and syllabuses that are being designed by these institutions. Also, students can be informed of the qualities they need to nurture in order to sell themselves to employing firms (Bennett, 2002). A distinctive advantage of Content analysis is that it is unobtrusive that simplifies data collection and interpretation of available data (Leutek, Verna 2011).

The Daily Dawn is the most preferred newspaper by employers to advertise vacancies in their organizations in Pakistan. Most of the ads featuring jobs appear in Daily Dawn on Sundays in the Adbuzz section of the newspaper. In the study, all Dawn Newspapers that were published on Sundays from January 1, 2014 to December 31, 2014 are examined as the sample of this study. A survey form has been filled for each marketing job where the level of job, number of years of experience and required competencies both generic and technical has been documented in the form of checklist. The generic and technical competencies that have been enumerated in the checklist are borrowed from the study of Schlee and Harich (2010) because the listing of competencies in their study is quite comprehensive.

The second phase was a survey conducted to find out ‘The most important marketing competencies in view of Marketing Executives’. The participants of this phase were 16 marketing executives of sizable organizations selected on the basis of convenience sampling. The respondents were asked to rank the competencies in order of their importance out of the list of competencies that has been used as a checklist at the earlier stage.

In the third phase of the study Course outlines of various courses offered in marketing programs in three universities were

consulted to find out that how the required technical marketing skills are imparted by academia.

Data Analysis and Findings

Total marketing jobs that were advertised in the Dawn Newspaper (excluding classified ads) were 375 in the year 2014. These ads belonged to different industries/sectors and are grouped in four categories namely FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods), Pharmaceuticals and Health, Services (telecom, education, etc) and manufacturing. The sample contains nearly 26% jobs from FMCGs group, 17.3 % jobs from Pharma and health sector, 26% from services and 28.5 % from manufacturing. It can be safely assumed that all four sectors require marketing professionals and almost in an equal quantity. Marketing Professionals work at different hierarchical levels in organizations and the requirement of qualification and experience may vary with the job level. Therefore advertised jobs were segregated in three levels according to the number of years of experience required i.e. Entry level, Middle level and Top level Executives. Entry level jobs required 1-2 years experience and 30 percent jobs in the sample are from entry level. More than half of sample is mid level marketing jobs that range from 3-5 years and upper level jobs make 16.5 % of the sample and the experience required is greater than 5 years. Most of the jobs advertised belonged to Middle level Management. The entry level jobs are less than mid level jobs because many entry level positions are filled by recruiting the graduates directly from the colleges and universities. With regard to qualification for advertised marketing jobs 18.7% required bachelor's degree and 44% said that they want Masters Degree in Business Administration. 12.3 % advertised either MBA or BBA but 1/5 of the jobs from the sample did not mention any qualification. Majority of the jobs require Masters Degree.

A cross tabulation between sector and education is performed and it has been found out that FMCGs and Manufacturing sector

employ more marketing professionals equipped with Master's degree than those with the requirement of bachelor's degree. In fact Bachelor degree requirement is three times less than the master's degree in overall sample. A crosstab analysis to determine the relevance between job level and education showed that middle and upper level jobs mostly require MBAs specially top level jobs. Midlevel jobs also require mostly MBAs but at the entry level the preference of employers is equal for BBA and MBA and in upper level jobs the employers do not mention the qualifications.

Figure 1 and 2 portrays the overall position of the requirement of generic competencies and technical marketing competencies of marketing professionals.

Figure 1:
Graph of Generic Competencies

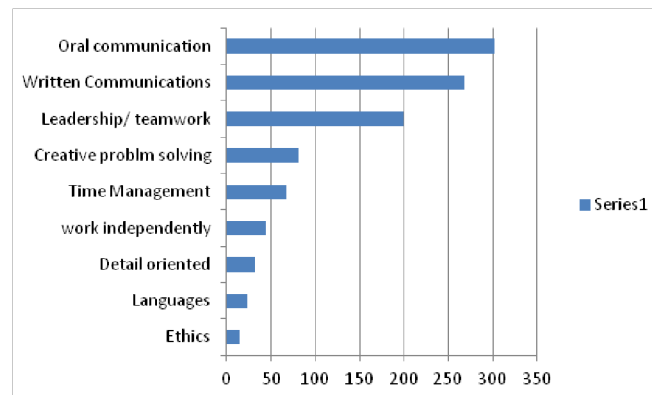
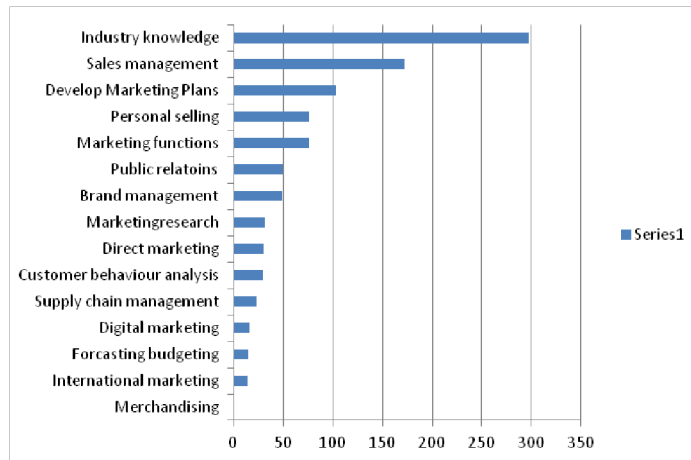


Figure 2:
Graph of Technical Marketing Competencies



Among generic competencies Oral communication tops the list followed by written communication and the third is the leadership and teamwork. Similarly in the area that we classified as technical competencies that originates from marketing education and knowledge, it is found that industry specific knowledge is ranked number one as the requirement of successful candidate for the job. Sales management is the second most required competencies according to the analysis of the sample of job advertisements.

Table 1 and Table 2 segregates the generic and technical competencies required at different job levels.

Table 1:
Generic competencies required at different job levels

	Oral communication	Written Communications	Leadership/ teamwork	Detail oriented	work independently	Time Management	Creative problem solving	Ethics	Languages
Entry Level	77.9	68.1	27.4	7.1	17.7	13.3	9.7	4.4	10.6
Middle Level	75.6	67.5	54.3	7.1	7.1	15.2	19.3	2.5	5.1
Top Level	74.2	66.1	71	8.1	16.1	27.4	37.1	4.8	1.6

Oral and written communication is required by three job levels almost equally. Even competencies like Ethics and detailed orientation has been less spelled out by advertisers but they are required by all job sectors equally. There are three categories that are found to be significantly increased with job level, they are Leadership/teamwork, Time management and Creative problem solving.

Table 2:

Marketing competencies required at different job levels

	Develop Marketing Plans	Marketing functions	Brand management	Supply chain management	Customer behavior analysis	Personal selling	Sales management	Digital marketing	Industry knowledge	Public relations	Direct marketing	Marketing research	Forecasting budgeting	International marketing	Merchandising
Entry Level	20.4	16.8	7.1	3.5	8	31	28.3	3.5	68.1	9.7	14.2	8.8	1.8	1.8	0.9
Middle Level	28.4	21.3	16.2	5.1	6.6	15.2	42.6	4.6	78.2	13.7	7.1	8.1	4.6	5.1	0
Top Level	27.4	27.4	19.4	12.9	8.1	11.3	71	3.2	74.2	14.5	0	6.5	6.5	1.6	0

In marketing and technical skills ‘knowledge of marketing functions, Brand management and Sales management increases with the job level. In contrast to this the skill level required for personal selling decreases with the job level. It is 31% at entry level, 15.2% at mid level and 11.3% at the top level. Industry specific knowledge which is one of the most desirable quality of the marketing employers is distributed almost equally at all job levels.

The second phase of this research is based on a small survey from 16 marketing executives. This survey was conducted to have an idea that whether competency requirement advertised by organizations and those required by marketing executives are in the same order or not. Marketing executives from all four sectors/industries were asked to assume that they are hiring a professional in the marketing department of their organization and then rank the same competencies that were taken out from the advertised jobs. Table 3 presents the comparison of the two rankings of generic skills, one by the frequency in ads and other by the executives.

Table 3-
Comparison of ranking of Generic Skills

	Oral communication	Written Communications	Leadership/ team work	Detail oriented	work independently	Time Management	Creative problem solving	Ethics	Languages
Ranking by frequency in ads	1	2	3	7	6	5	4	9	8
Ranking by Marketing Executives	1	5	2	3	6	4	1	3	7

The three most top rated generic skills by ranking of the frequency of job advertisements have been identified as oral communication, written communication and leadership/team work. And the ranking of Marketing Executive declares oral communication and problem solving as top most desirable qualities of marketing professionals, second is Leadership/teamwork and third are ethics and detailed orientation. Two qualities i.e. oral communication and Leadership/teamwork are common in both the groups.

It is interesting to note that that ethics is one of the top priorities of marketing executives whereas it is not advertised as one of the prime qualities in job advertisement. The ability to communicate in different Languages has been least important by the two rankings.

Table 4:
Comparisons of ranking of Technical Skills

	Develop Marketing Plans	Marketing functions	Brand management	Supply chain management	Customer behavior analysis	Personal selling	Sales management	Digital marketing	Industry knowledge	Public relations	Direct marketing	Marketing research	Forecasting budgeting	International marketing	Merchandising
Ranking by frequency in ads	1	4	2	11	3	6	9	13	5	12	10	7	8	15	14
Ranking by Marketing Executives	1	3	2	13	4	8	9	11	5	12	10	6	7	15	14

Table 4 shows the comparison of the ranking of technical competencies by their frequency in the job advertisements. The most desirable technical competencies of both groups are almost similar i.e oral communication followed by Written Communications, Leadership/teamwork and Creative problem solving.

In the third phase of the study information was gathered on the deliverance of technical skills to the marketing students in a cross-section of subjects and universities. Course outlines of three top business schools namely Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Technology (SZabist) and Institute of Business Management (IoBM) were consulted. Table 5 shows that most of the competencies that are required by the employers are inculcated in the students of marketing by offering various marketing courses. Only industry specific knowledge and Forecasting and Budgeting are not covered by any specific course.

Table 5:

Competencies delivered by Marketing Courses

Competency	IoBM	IBA	SZABIST
1 Develop Marketing Plans	• Principle of Marketing • Marketing Management	• Principle of Marketing • Marketing Management	• Principle of Marketing • Marketing Management
2 Knowledge of Marketing functions	• Strategic Marketing	• Strategic Marketing	• Strategic Marketing
3 Brand management	• Brand management	• Brand Management	• Brand Management
4 Supply Chain Management	• Distribution and Channels Management	• Dynamics of Distribution and Logistics	• Supply Chain Management • Dynamics of Logistics • Strategic Procurement
5 Analyse Customer behavior	• Consumer Behavior	• Consumer Behavior	• Consumer Behavior
6 Personal selling	• Personal Selling	• Personal Selling	• Personal Selling
7 Sales management	• Sales management	• Sales Management	• Sales Management
8 Digital marketing	-	-	• Digital Marketing
9 Industry knowledge	-	-	-
10 Public relations	• Public Relations	• Public Relations and Event Management • Integrated Marketing Communication	• Integrated Marketing Communication
11 Direct marketing	Integrated Marketing Communication	• Direct Marketing	-
12 Marketing research	• Methods in Business Research	• Methods of Business Research	• Methods of Business Research • Marketing Research
13 Forecasting budgeting	-	-	-
14 International marketing	International marketing	• Global Marketing Management	• International Business and Exports
15 Merchandising	-	• Dynamics of Distribution and Logistics	• Retail Management • Trade Marketing

Elective courses of Marketing are given in italics

Discussion and Conclusions

With regards to generic skills all sectors FMCG, health and pharma, manufacturing and services have identified the need of good communication skills. Teamwork/leadership is another generic quality that stands out as a pre requisite of job in all four sectors. Leadership quality becomes critical as the professional climbs the ladder of organizational hierarchy. Most of the results of this study like developing marketing plans, brand management and sales management are in line with the study of Montoya et al., (2011). With regards to technical skills 'industry specific knowledge' is the requirement of majority of the employers and unfortunately this skill is not being inculcated in the marketing graduates by business schools. This stresses the need of a course that talks about how marketing functions are performed across different industries.

The generic skills are employed more in lower level marketing jobs and the requirement of technical marketing skills increases as the marketing executive climbs the corporate ladder. This seconds the claim made by Schlee and Harich (2010)

A limitation of the study is that insights provided are only based on the job advertisements. There is a possibility that there might be other qualities of marketing professionals that are not explicitly stated in the advertisements but used as variable for judgment during the employment interview.

The ultimate motive of this research is to improve upon the marketing curriculum by designing it according to the needs of employers of graduates. This study has been conducted to ensure that skill development of marketing related competencies in various business schools is consistent with the needs of the employers of marketing graduates. The most important finding of this study is that there exist a 'skill gap' in the areas of 'Industry knowledge' and 'forecasting/budgeting' between employers' requirement and marketing education. This study concludes that most of the marketing jobs advertised in Newspapers belong to Mid Level Cadre and advertised jobs mostly require MBAs with 3-5 years of experience. Top level jobs rarely specify the requirement of education as they are mostly concerned with experience and knowledge in particular field.

Another important aspect of the study is the ranking of the generic competencies as oral communication, leadership/teamwork and creative problem solving in order of importance. Also for marketing competencies developing marketing plans, brand management, knowledge of marketing functions and analysis of consumer behavior are the most demanded skills.

Some of the generic competencies are required in marketing professional at all organizational levels like communication skills, detail orientation and time management but there are certain competencies whose requirement increases with job level like leadership/teamwork. Similarly competencies like 'develop marketing plans', 'analyze consumer behavior' and 'industry knowledge' are needed from marketing professionals at all levels but in contrast the requirement of the knowledge of 'marketing functions', 'brand management' and 'sales management' increases with the position of marketing professional at hierarchical level. The only competency that decreases with increase in job level is the personal selling. It is logical because sales jobs are mostly found at the entry level.

This study implies that business schools need to collaborate more with industry to redesign the curriculum of marketing so that the technical competencies can be delivered more through syllabus. The business schools must develop courses related to the shortcomings in the marketing curricula like marketing in different industries and forecasting and budgeting.

Further to this study an empirical research can be carried out to establish a relationship between competencies and job performance. This study is based on the competencies that can lead to acquire the job but it has not been established if these qualities can predict a good job performance.

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