

EDUCATION IN THE FIELD OF MARKETING COMMUNICATION. DIVERGENT EXPECTATIONS OF SYSTEM PARTICIPANTS - EXPERIENCES OF 4 COUNTRIES

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Abstract

The marketing communication sector is experiencing a particularly intensive development, mainly due to the ongoing dynamic changes in the area of media, which are the driving force of communication changes. Numerous market studies prove that in the conditions of such rapid transformation processes, it is particularly important to provide students with current and desired by employers' professional competences. The presented article verifies the system of shaping the so-called competences of the future in the sphere of marketing communication by analysing the practical form of education of Polish universities and the expectations of students from four European countries: Poland, the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovakia. Conclusions regarding the lack of correlation of expectations within the triad: employers - academia - students were supplemented with the presentation of partial results of research carried out under the project "Media and Communication in Education and Science" (project financed by the National Agency for Academic Exchange under the program "International Partnerships").

Key words: marketing communication, competences of the future, education, professional competences

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Communication competence as an element of professional qualifications and competences

The key concept describing the effect of educational activities is qualifications and professional competences, because they define the employee's preparation to meet the challenges of the labour market. The area of shaping professional competences is interdisciplinary in nature, as it is of interest to management (mainly human resource management), pedagogy, sociology, but also the science of social communication. In the Polish literature on human resource management, the concept of qualification or competence is often used interchangeably, as the scopes of both concepts largely overlap (Orczyk 2009). Over the years, professional qualifications have become synonymous with the effect of acquiring certain skills necessary to perform a job. The massification of educational processes, combined with the inability to prepare pupils or students for the comprehensive use of a wide range of skills, and at the same time the dynamics of progressing civilization changes and the need to adapt to the specificity of social, organizational and technical changes resulted in the diversification of the qualification process under the conditions of successive industrial revolutions. One of the more diversified and undefined competency resources is managerial qualifications (Chełpa 2003).

Over time, professional competences have acquired a slightly different dimension. The literature review shows that having competences more and more often does not only mean having formal powers or knowledge of procedures, but also constitutes a specific ability to perform tasks. This ability has been defined in various ways, but most often specialists in the field of human resource management assumed that it was primarily a good performance of duties related to a given job position (Boyatzis 2008) or through the prism of the assessment of work results, which is expressed in the relation between the size of the results obtained and the expenditure incurred, that is, the effort associated with the action taken (Gilbert 2007). One of the features describing professional competences is their transferability (universality), i.e. the possibility of using them in various activities. The high degree of transferability of competences means that they cannot be permanently assigned to one task or group of tasks. Performing a specific task requires the use of several competences at the same time, and each of these competences can be used in the implementation of other tasks (Jurek 2012). According to this article, not only purely professional competences and qualifications based on the area of knowledge and skills are important in the area of marketing communication but also communication competence, which is one of the foundations and, at the same time, a binder for a wide range of competences in the area of marketing communication.

Communication competence, along with other substantive competences, is one of the key elements appearing in general models of social communication. Although it is not an unambiguous concept, different research approaches are characterized by certain common components, constituting a fairly standardized set of parameters used to describe the concept of communicative competence (Mrozowski, 2001). In the area of social communication, communicative competence is most often understood as an ability expressed in interaction in a relationship with another person and is the result of relational and communicative cooperation. A person with communicative competence has the ability to participate and create interactions (Tucker, 2006). K. Marcyński (2017), after reviewing and analysing the key definitions of the concept, states that communicative competence is not a simple sum of the terms: "competence" and "communication", but it is a construct expressing knowledge about it, skills, as well as the motivation to acquire it. Communicative competence, however, is a very extensive and complex phenomenon, having many understandings and definitions (McCroskey 1994). By its very nature, communicative competence relates to interpersonal relations, it is a quality in communication, resulting from the creative tension between being appropriate and effective, expressed in a wide range of communicative behaviours. M. Mrozowski (2001) proposes to define communicative competence as "the ability to communicate, which

includes all the knowledge, skills and abilities that define the scope of human communication with the environment - both from the position of the sender and recipient of verbal and non-verbal messages”.

Future competences in the area of marketing communication

Recent years have been a time of dynamic development of information technologies, affecting all areas of social life, and the changes affect the marketing communication sector in a special way, closely related to the intensively developing media and communication technologies. The universality of the possession and use of modern technologies implies the progressive process of mediatisation of social life, understood as the process of the emergence and dissemination of new media forms and channels, as well as the penetration of various spheres of everyday life through them, as well as their growing use in various types of public institutions (Goban- Klas, 2012). This also applies to the growing need for changes also in teaching (Rasmussen et al. 2017), as well as in the area of education, the so-called competences of the future, understood as those that, on the one hand, are deficient on the part of employees, and at the same time are particularly appreciated and expected by employers.

In 2020, the Sector Council for Marketing Communication, which is an advisory body to the Minister of Development in Poland, developed a catalogue of future competences based on empirical research, which may constitute a market determinant of education in the area of marketing communication. One of the statutory tasks of sector councils is to inspire people to adjust education to the requirements of employers in the best possible way, so that people who choose a specific industry as a workplace are best suited to it. Marketing, and thus also marketing communication, is a field that undergoes dynamic transformation and revolutionary transformations, which means that the demand for competences dynamically changes over time. According to the authors of the study, the results of which will be partially presented in this article, the sector council should constitute a kind of link between the industry and public administration institutions that manage the stream of public funds and educational institutions. One of the key tasks is to recommend development services most suited to the needs of the marketing communication industry, for co-financing of which participants will be able to receive funding from public funds. At the same time, these qualifications and competences should be a determinant of modernized educational plans and programs implemented by universities in the area of marketing communication.

The competences of the future for the area of marketing communication cover a total of 13 general training and development areas, containing several or a dozen issues, differently assessed by employers from the point of view of their usefulness on the labour market. Apart from the detailed results of the study, which are presented in the report provided by its authors (Marketing Competences of the Future 2020), six key competence areas, defined by employers, should be indicated. They include: 1. Strategy area; 2. New marketing technologies; 3. Planning and effectiveness of advertising campaigns; 4. Project management; 5. The area of creativity; 6. Managerial skills. Each of these competence areas was assigned detailed issues, which, as a result of the conducted research, were then ordered according to the criterion of the training potential indicated by the participants of the labour market. In order to understand the scope of the competency areas better, the issues within the individual key areas with the greatest training potential are indicated below.

1. Strategy area: communication strategy; brand strategy; communication brief; insight; acquiring knowledge about consumers.
2. The area of new marketing technologies: e-commerce; mobile marketing; influencer marketing; content marketing; native advertising.
3. The area of planning and effectiveness of advertising campaigns: social media;

planning of online marketing campaigns; performance marketing; analytics; video in advertising campaigns.

4. Project management area: agile; time and budget management; specifying project goals and KPIs; risk management; team building and management.

5. The area of creativity: techniques of creative thinking; creative brief; creation presentation; creation; copywriting.

6. The area of managerial skills: building commitment in a team; building project teams; mentoring; diversity management; managing creative teams.

It is not the intention of the authors of this article to polemicize or verify the indicated competences, defined as the competences of the future, because their selection and ranking was carried out as part of empirical research on a large research sample by an extremely competent entity formed by representatives of the marketing communication sector in Poland. The data obtained in this study clearly shows that the digital change and education of enterprises, the return to active communication and promotion of products, services, brands and ventures is now becoming an absolute necessity and a basic need. The task of the authors of the presented manuscript was to assess the presence of the indicated competences of the future in the plans and curricula of universities in Poland, as well as to verify this presence with the opinions of students.

Methodology

As part of the project "Media and Communication and Education and Science", an international team of researchers conducted a multi-thread study of the methods of education in the field of marketing communication in Poland and three countries participating in the project (Czech Republic, Latvia, Slovakia). One of the stages of the study was to study the content of education paths related to marketing communication, conducted by Polish universities. The study population was the fields of study and specializations related to marketing communication (marketing, management-related, typically communication-media and other fields of study that were not closely related to the area of marketing communication were omitted). Based on the desk research analysis focused on examining the curricula and curricula available on the university's website, the subjects of study were verified in 115 education paths as part of first-cycle studies and 155 study paths in second-cycle studies. Taking into account the names of the subjects and the content of education contained therein, the presence of key competences of the future, as defined in the report of the Sector Qualification Council for the Sector of Marketing Communications, was verified in the plans and curricula.

As part of the project, a questionnaire study was also carried out on a group of 588 students of first and second cycle studies in the fields of marketing communication. Its aim was to verify the presence of the competences of the future in educational programs through the opinions obtained from students. The study was carried out using the CAWI method in the period May-June 2021. The obtained sample size, as well as the fact that it was deliberately selected, taking into account students of universities participating in the project, makes it impossible to extrapolate the results to the entire population. The results are, however, an important indication of educational standards, as the research carried out covered those universities that intensively develop modern education programs in the field of marketing communication and are a recognized brand on the higher education market. The study used a questionnaire as a research tool, formulating the questions in such a way as to obtain possibly true declarative assessments, in accordance with the self-assessment methodology used in measuring communication competence (McCroskey and McCroskey 1998; Duran 1983).

As part of the student opinion survey, 588 completed questionnaires were obtained. The structure of the studied sample is presented in graphs 1 and 2.

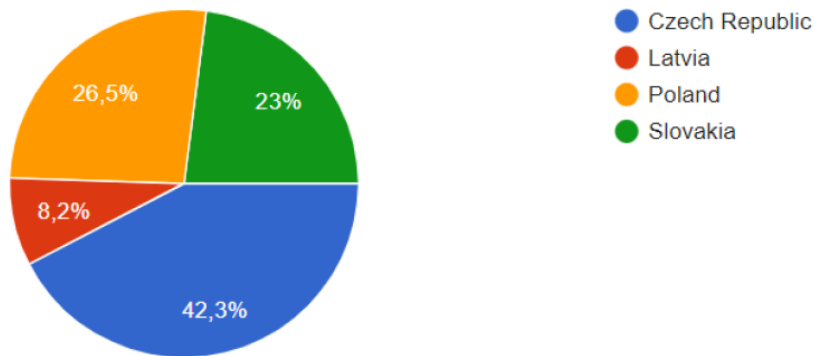


Chart 1. Nationality of the surveyed students (N = 588)
Own source.

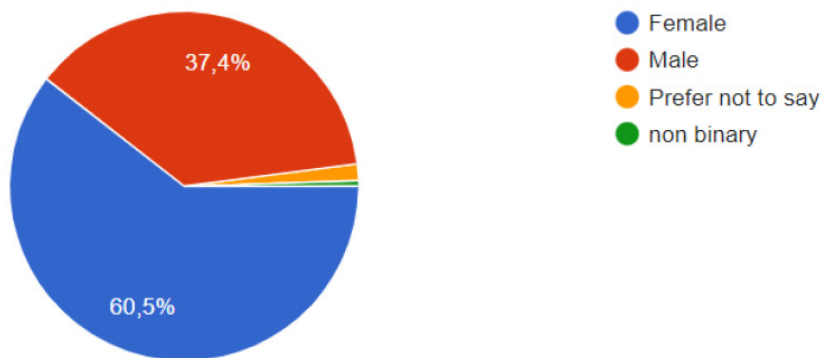


Chart 2. Gender of the surveyed students (N = 588)
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Most of the surveyed students study specializations related to marketing communication, but the research was also attended by those for whom visual communication, journalism or communication management were the leading areas of education. Chart 3 shows the structure of the respondents in the area of the studied area.

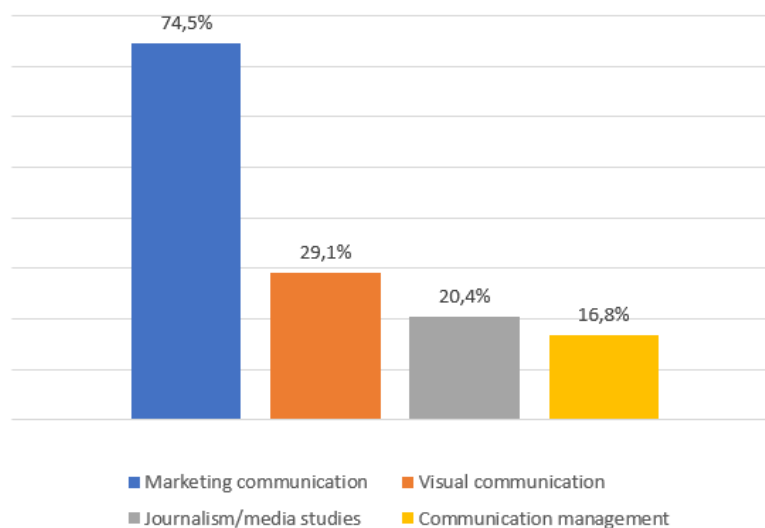


Chart 3. Structure of the sample by field of study / specialization / path of education
Own source.

Findings

Marketing communication is an interdisciplinary area of education in the higher education sector, because we find it both in the field of management, marketing, social communication and media, journalism and many others. However, the authors of the article assumed that marketing communication is primarily communication, and only then is it defined through the prism of the marketing goals and functions it implements (Gawroński and Jakubowski 2018). Thus, the courses and paths of education of a typically communicative nature, which fit into the discipline of social communication and media studies, have become a special object of interest. It was important because the research carried out under the project “Media and Communication in Education and Science” was a kind of continuation of the research conducted by the team representing UITM in Rzeszów on education in the field of social communication, including marketing. The obtained research results clearly indicate an increased amount of content devoted to marketing communication in the programs of such fields of study as Journalism and social and related communication over the past years. While even a dozen or so years ago, marketing communication was a slight supplement to completely different directional content, today there are much more subjects, learning outcomes, as well as entire paths and specialties devoted to marketing communication (Gawroński and Polak 2010; Gawroński et al. 2009; Gawroński 2010).

Taking into account the 155 study paths studied in the first cycle studies, the most frequent competency seems to be the one related to the communication strategy. It appears as a key element in 179 subjects conducted in the studied studies, which is a much higher result than the number of subjects related to other competences. Detailed information in this regard is presented in Chart 4.

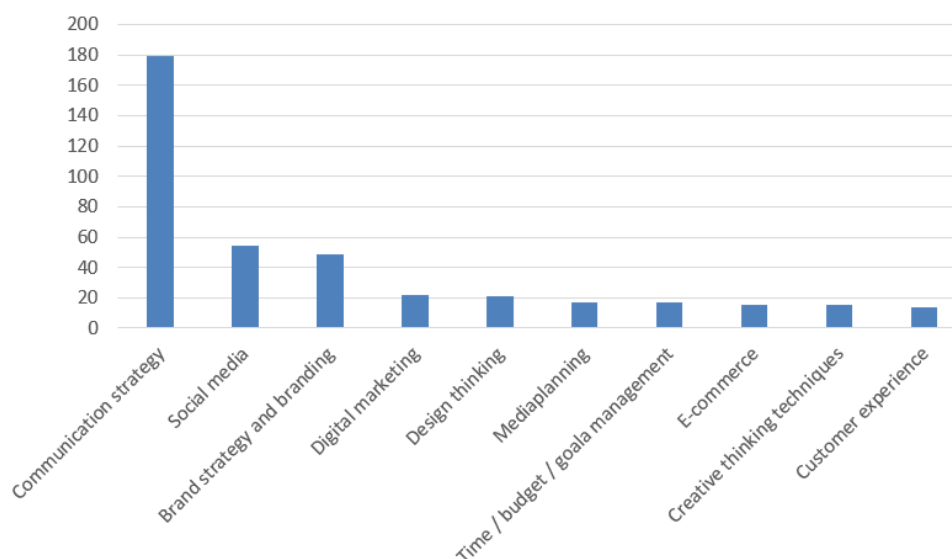


Chart 4. Competences of the future in first-cycle study programs (expressed in the number of subjects)

Own source.

The list of subjects containing the key competences of the future within the second-cycle study programs is completely different. It is natural, as these are supplementary studies, intended to both consolidate and expand the competences acquired by graduates of first-cycle studies, as well as introduce new, more advanced ones, which are, in a way, a consequence of the earlier stage of education. The key competences of the future, appearing in the largest number of subjects, are brand strategy and branding. However, the list presented in Chart 5 includes additional competences, which are not

present in the first-cycle studies to a large extent. This may mean their greater refinement compared to other competences and the need to implement the previous “foundation” with other elements of knowledge, skills and social competences.

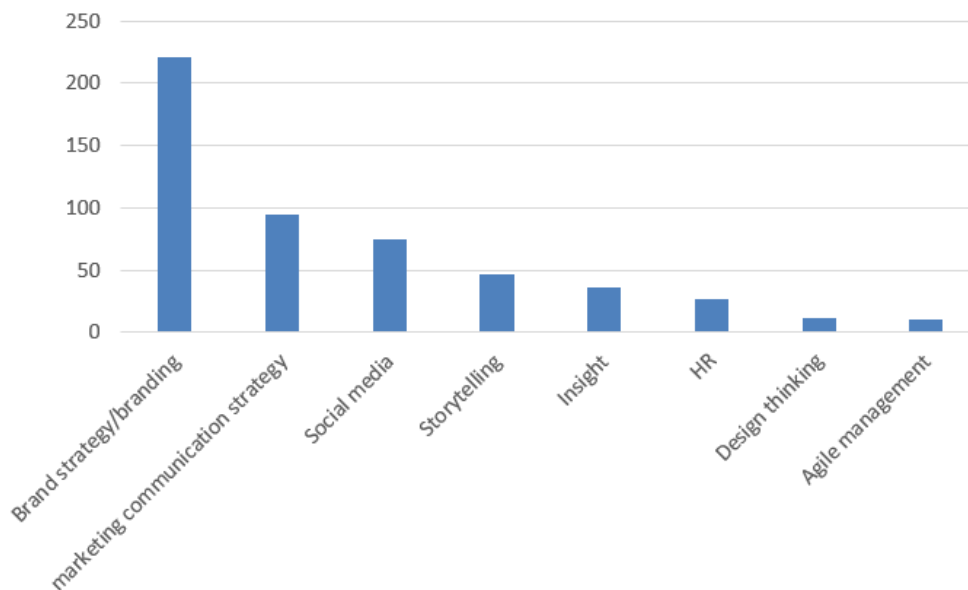


Chart 5. Competences of the future in second-cycle study programs (expressed in the number of subjects)
Own source

The presence of future competences in education plans and programs was verified on the basis of two factors. First, the name of the subject was taken into account, as it clearly indicated the relationship with competence. In case of any doubts, the entries in the subject cards or syllabuses available on the websites or in the university information systems were additionally taken into account.

A specific verification of the actual presence of competences in educational programs, felt by students, was the study aimed at indicating by the surveyed students those competences that they consider important in their future professional life. In the proposed cafeteria of responses, they received a set of those competences of the future, which were defined in this way by the Polish Sectoral Council. The five most frequently mentioned thematic competences in the area of marketing communication include those relating to new trends in marketing communication (content marketing, mobile marketing, influencer marketing) as well as competences relating to social media. The three competency areas least desirable by students should be described as “hard”, difficult and “numerical”, which are not always easy to achieve by students of social sciences and humanities. Detailed data on the most important and least desirable competences by students are presented in Chart 6.

These competences are important to me:

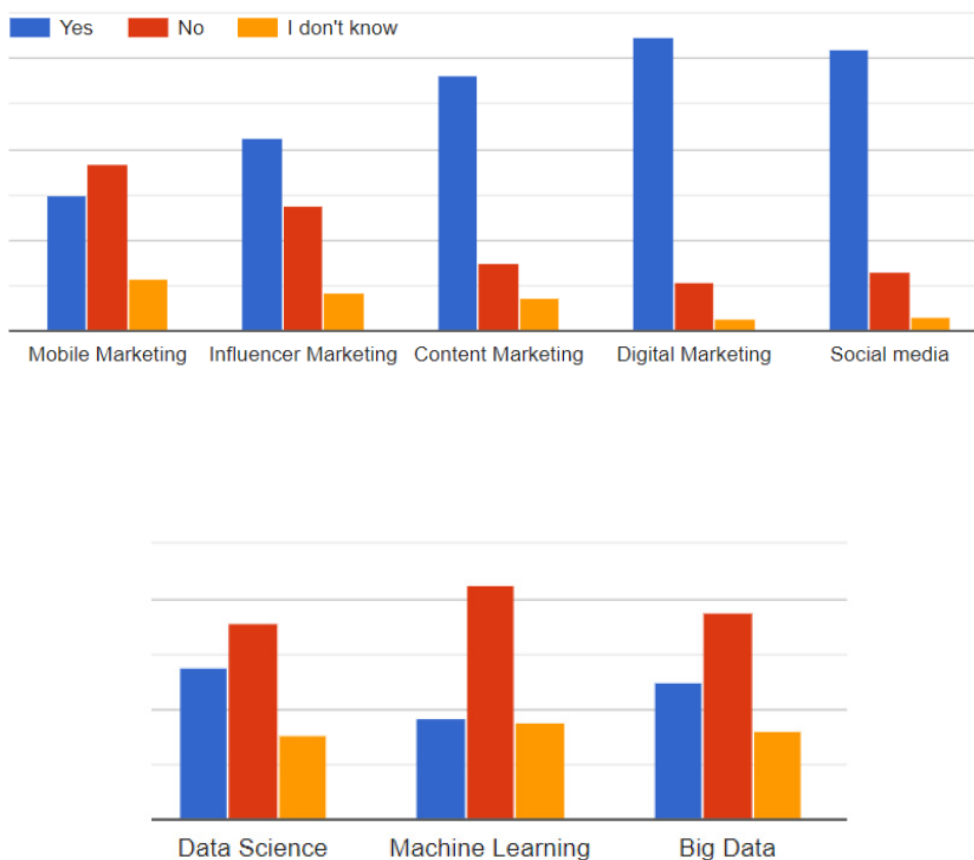


Chart 6. The most important and least important competences according to the surveyed students (N = 588)
Own source

The surveyed students were also asked what forms of education in the field of communication competences, relating to marketing communication they valued the most. In this respect, without any surprises, the most practical ones were indicated most often. Half of the respondents value the classes carried out by practitioners the highest, which gives the possibility of translating the theoretical determinants of the issues discussed into practical tasks and case studies. Classes simulating real practical tasks performed during studies are equally highly appreciated. Such highly simulated forms of education were rated the highest by students from Poland and the Czech Republic. A slightly less popular form of acquiring competences are internships in enterprises, although this form of activity was indicated by 45.5% of respondents.

The surveyed students rate the usefulness of their studies relatively high. Almost 80% of them assess it either high (60.2%) or very high (19.4%). It turns out, however, that this professional usefulness does not require at the same time practical forms of education, because regardless of high ratings for the usefulness of the studies, the assessment of their practicality is lower. Two thirds of the surveyed students assess this aspect either high (45.9%) or very high (20.4%). A detailed distribution of responses in this respect is presented in Charts 7 and 8.

How do you rate the professional usefulness of education as a part of your studies?

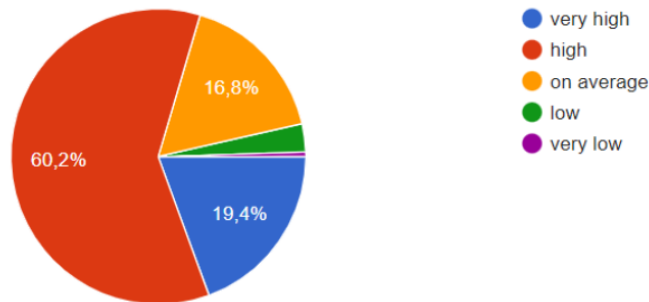


Chart 7. Assessment of the professional usefulness of studies (N = 588)
Own source

How do you rate the practical dimension of education as a part of your studies?

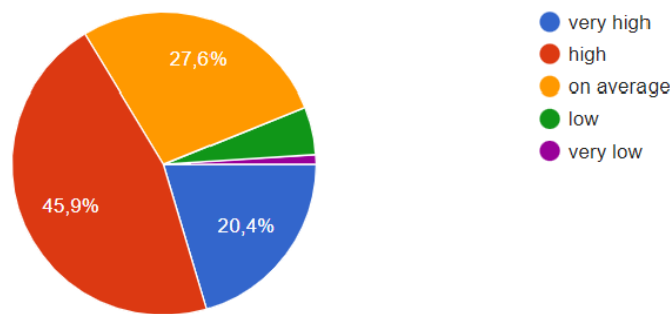


Chart 8. Assessment of the practical dimension of studies (N = 588)
Own source

The competences of the future relating to the area of marketing communication have been subject to standardization for some time. Dimaq seems to be the most popular among several international certificates in this area. It is an international digital marketing qualification standard that has existed since 2015. It defines the necessary level of knowledge and qualifications of specialists in the field of digital marketing, allows for its comparison and evaluation. The DIMAQ methodology was developed by experts appointed by IAB Polska under the substantive supervision of the IAB Polska Industry Competence Council. The standard is recommended by IAB Europe and is available in 9 European countries: Poland, Greece, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Cyprus. The certificate, in line with the assumptions of the European Qualifications Framework, is available at two levels: Basic and Professional. In order to obtain it, one needs to pass an exam that tests the cross-sectional knowledge of 12 areas of e-marketing. Due to the dynamically developing industry, the validity of the certificate is limited to 2 years and is subject to the recertification procedure. Due to the fact that out of 4 countries in which the "Media and Communication in Education and Science" study was carried out, only two (Poland and Slovakia) could certify Dimaq - the knowledge of this standard among students of marketing communication is low. 18.4% of respondents declared that they know this certificate, and almost one in ten declared their willingness to obtain it in the future.

Summary

Taking into account the conclusions from the study of employers' market expectations, the content of plans and curricula of universities in Poland, experiences in education in the field of marketing communication of universities participating in the research program and the opinions of students, several key conclusions can be observed. There is a correspondence between the expectations of employers, students and the offer of Polish universities, but only in the area of marketing communication strategy and brand strategy. The educational plans of Polish universities are not adapted to the market realities, as too few courses are focused on key competences for the industry. Students expect education in areas close to the expectations of employers - similar competences are treated as important. Competences in the field of marketing communication are international in nature, as there are no significant differences between the expectations of students from among the four surveyed countries. This is most likely due to the global nature of marketing communication, the presence of global brands, as well as the global consequences of mediatisation of social life. The surveyed students expect even greater practicality of education, which universities offer only to a limited extent, and employers should provide significant support for the formal education system in this regard. The information from academics and employers shows that filling the competency gap in the area of marketing communication takes place in the labour market or in the phase of postgraduate education.

The presented conclusions are reflected in the observations of the Sectoral Council for Competences of the Marketing Communication Sector, expressed in the second edition of the research on the expectations of the labour market towards the competences of the future. They clearly show that both universities and employers in the marketing communication industry expect mainly the development of the most popular field of cooperation so far, that is, the system of student internships. Moreover, business expects from the cooperation acquiring employees with higher qualifications, i.e. better prepared graduates. At the same time, enterprises from the marketing communication sector are moderately interested in the possibility of influencing the curricula and adapting them to their needs. They would rather expect the universities themselves to put more emphasis on the development of communication and collaboration skills among students. Business also calls for the need to develop creativity, innovation and cognitive flexibility at universities as their importance is growing in a world increasingly dominated by algorithms.

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