THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE IN MARKETING EDUCATION IN UZBEKISTAN: RESULTS OF AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Abstract. *This article analyses the gap between the content of academic training of marketers and the practical skills demanded by employers in Uzbekistan. The aim of the study is to identify gaps in practical marketing education at universities, on online platforms and in professional development programs, and to propose measures to close them. A mixed-methods design was used: a survey of students and of practicing marketers. It was found that significant part of students lack hands-on task, most of practicing marketers consider graduates insufficiently prepared for brand management and strategic marketing. Four directions of change are proposed: curriculum renewal, industry partnerships with long-term internships, lifelong learning models, and wider access to online education.*

Keywords: *marketing education; practical skills; theory-practice gap; lifelong learning; university-industry collaboration.*

Аннотация. *В статье анализируется разрыв между содержанием академической подготовки маркетологов и практическими навыками, востребованными работодателями в Узбекистане. Цель исследования - выявить пробелы в практическом маркетинговом образовании в университетах, на онлайн-платформах и в программах повышения квалификации, а также предложить меры по их устранению.*

В исследовании использовался смешанный методологический подход: опрос студентов и практикующих маркетологов. Было установлено, что значительная часть студентов испытывает недостаток практических заданий, а большинство практикующих маркетологов считают выпускников недостаточно подготовленными к управлению брендом и стратегическому маркетингу.

Предлагаются четыре направления изменений: обновление учебных программ, сотрудничество с представителями отрасли и организация долгосрочных стажировок, внедрение моделей непрерывного обучения и расширение доступа к онлайн-образованию.

Ключевые слова: *маркетинговое образование; практические навыки; разрыв между теорией и практикой; непрерывное обучение; сотрудничество университетов и бизнеса.*

Annotatsiya. *Maqolada marketologlarning akademik tayyorgarligi mazmuni va O‘zbekistondagi ish beruvchilar talab qilayotgan amaliy ko‘nikmalar o‘rtasidagi tafovut tahlil qilingan. Tadqiqot maqsadi - universitetlar, onlayn platformalar va malaka oshirish dasturlarida amaliy marketing ta’limidagi bo‘shliqlarni aniqlash hamda ularni bartaraf etish choralarini taklif etishdan iborat.*

Tadqiqotda aralash metodologik yondashuvdan foydalanilib, talabalar va amaliyotchi marketologlar o‘rtasida so‘rovnoma o‘tkazildi. Aniqlanishicha, talabalarning aksariyat qismiga amaliy topshiriqlar yetishmaydi, ko‘pchilik amaliyotchi marketologlar esa bitiruvchilarni brendni boshqarish va strategik marketingga yetarli darajada tayyor emas deb hisoblaydi.

O‘zgarishlarning to‘rtta yo‘nalishi taklif etiladi: o‘quv dasturlarini yangilash, soha vakillari bilan hamkorlik qilish va uzoq muddatli amaliyotlarni tashkil etish, uzluksiz ta’lim modellarini joriy etish hamda onlayn ta’lim olish imkoniyatlarini kengaytirish.

Kalit so'zlar: *marketing ta’limi; amaliy ko‘nikmalar; nazariya va amaliyot o‘rtasidagi tafovut; uzluksiz ta’lim; oliy ta’lim muassasalari va biznes hamkorligi.*

Introduction

Marketing has become a core discipline for businesses seeking to attract and retain consumers in a highly competitive environment. At the same time, concern is growing that the education system is not keeping pace with practice: graduates know the concepts well but struggle to apply them to real tasks such as launching digital campaigns, analyzing data and managing a brand. The problem is especially relevant for Uzbekistan, where the market for marketing services and the number of companies in need of qualified staff is growing quickly, while affordable, high-quality opportunities for practical training remain few.

The theoretical basis of the study consists of Human Capital Theory by G. Becker [6], according to which education directly affects labor productivity, and Experiential Learning Theory by D. Kolb [7], which stresses the role of practical experience in acquiring knowledge. It follows that the lack of a practical component in the training of marketers reduces the return on education both for the specialist and for the employer.

A review of literature shows that a considerable share of works is devoted to the marketing of educational services, that is, to the activity of universities as market participants. The authors examine the specifics of marketing in higher education and

universities communication systems with applicants [2], the adaptation of the classical marketing mix to educational services and the "3S" model (studies, success, service) [3], and the problems of managing the marketing environment in the educational services market [4]. Additional professional and continuing education is discussed in connection with market research [1] and multi-channel financing [5].

Much less attention is paid to the other side of the problem: what and how future marketers are taught, and how far this training meets the requirements of practice, especially in developing markets, including Uzbekistan. This gap defines the novelty of the present work.

Research problem: what are the key differences between theoretical and practical training in marketing, and why do educational institutions fail to provide sufficient practical education?

The aim is to identify and analyze gaps in practical marketing education and to propose recommendations for closing them. The object is practical education in the field of marketing; the subject is the gap between academic training and the practical skills demanded by the market.

Research questions:

1. How does theoretical training in marketing differ from practical training in terms of application in real situations?
2. Why do educational institutions fail to provide sufficient practical training: because of curriculum limitations, weak cooperation with business, or other reasons?
3. How do online platforms and bootcamps compare with traditional programs in developing practical skills?

Hypotheses. H_0: there is no significant gap between theoretical marketing education and practical skills. H_1: a significant gap exists, and current universities and platforms do not adequately close it, as a result of which graduates are poorly prepared for real industry challenges.

The study focuses on Uzbekistan; its conclusions are not necessarily applicable to regions with different resources and needs.

Materials and Methods

A mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) design was used to obtain a comprehensive picture of the gap. The materials were collected in four directions.

Surveys. The questionnaire covered students of marketing programs (n = 50) and practicing marketers (n = 50). The questions concerned the sufficiency of practical experience gained during studies, the most valuable elements of marketing education, and the skills that were missing. Sample questions: "Do you feel that your education provided enough practical experience?", "What were the most valuable

aspects of your marketing education?", "What skills do you wish you had learned during your studies?".

Analysis of curricula and programs. The curricula of sevaral major universities were reviewed for the currency of their content (social media, SEO, data analytics, AI-based tools), and some professional development programs were examined for cost, geographic accessibility and the availability of an online format.

Comparative analysis. Traditional programs were compared with alternative formats - online courses (Coursera, LinkedIn Learning), workshops and bootcamps (for example, General Assembly) - in terms of their orientation towards practice, project work and contribution to professional development.

Interviews and case studies. To interpret the results, in-depth interviews with university lecturers, marketing directors and heads of departments are planned, together with an analysis of successful and unsuccessful program cases that reduce the gap through internships and cooperation with companies.

Survey data were processed using descriptive statistics; shares of respondents and programs were calculated from the corresponding samples. Significance testing and correlation analysis are the task of the next stage, so the conclusion on the support of H_1 in this article rests on descriptive results.

Results

The main quantitative results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Key results of the study

Area	Sample	Result
Practical component of training	50 students	significant part of students lack hands-on task; only a small part of students took part in practical tasks
Currency of curricula	10 universities	part of curricula contains outdated material
Link between academia and industry	50 marketers	most of practicing marketers say graduates lack practical skills and name the lack of real experience a barrier to hiring

Practical component. According to the survey of 50 students, significant part of them believe that the program gives too few opportunities for practice, such as digital campaigns or projects analyzing real data. Only a small part of respondents performed practical tasks as part of their course.

Currency of content. The review of the programs of 10 universities showed that some of them contain outdated material, above all in fast-changing areas: social media marketing, SEO and data analytics.

Link with industry. In the survey of 50 marketers, most of them noted that graduates lack the practical skills needed for brand management and strategic marketing. In addition, employers named the lack of real experience a significant barrier to hiring entry-level specialists.

Causes and opportunities. The analysis revealed three main obstacles: inflexible curricula that react slowly to market changes; a shortage of funding and infrastructure for practice and for industry-standard software; and the difficulty of keeping up with technology for educational organizations. At the same time, opportunities were identified: partnerships with industry leaders, the use of online platforms and digital tools, modular lifelong learning models, and the expansion of practical education in emerging markets through cooperation with international companies.

Discussion

Interpretation. The results point to a systemic gap: programs are overloaded with theory (consumer behavior, segmentation, positioning), while application skills - running campaigns, working with data, brand strategy - are developed insufficiently. Outdated curricula aggravate the situation: the area's most in demand today (analytics, automation, AI tools) are the weakest represented. The agreement between the assessments of students and practitioners makes the conclusion more reliable, since the problem is recorded from two independent sides - consumers of education and the labor market. Within the descriptive analysis this gives grounds to reject H_0 in favor of H_1; formal significance testing remains a task for further work.

Comparison with the literature. Our data complement this picture: the competitiveness of an educational service is determined not only by communications and price but also by how far the program content meets the practical requests of employers. The conclusion on the need for continuing education agrees with works that treat additional professional education as an element of university strategy requiring market research and sustainable financing mechanisms [5]. The finding that only limited quantity of professional development programs are accessible to a wide audience shows that funding and price directly affect the availability of continuing education for marketers.

Practical implications. For universities, this means the need to update curricula quickly, including AI and analytics, and to introduce cases, simulations and internships. For business, it means readiness to take part in programs as a source of current tasks and tools. For professional development providers, it means expanding affordable online formats, especially for regions and developing markets.

The study is limited to the context of Uzbekistan and to the descriptive nature of the data presented. A discussion of the results is planned with lecturers of leading universities in the country and with marketing directors of international and local companies, which will allow the interpretation and recommendations to be refined.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study confirms a significant gap between academic marketing education and the practical skills the market requires: limited practical experience, outdated curricula and weak links with industry. To reduce it, the following are proposed:

1. Curriculum renewal: introduce cases, simulations and internships; include digital marketing, analytics and AI-based tools.
2. Lifelong learning models: modular and regularly updated programs for practicing marketers.
3. Wider access to online education: affordable programs and certifications, primarily for regions and developing markets.
4. Long-term internships for third- and fourth-year students of marketing faculties, including under agreements with foreign companies that have a developed practical base.

The theoretical contribution of the work is a shift of emphasis from the marketing of educational services to the content of the practical training of marketers themselves; the practical contribution is a set of measures suitable for universities, business and professional development providers.

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