

Competencies and Digital Marketing Skills - Thailand Case

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Abstract: - Technology evolution and digital convergence result in competencies and skills gaps among communicators in Thailand. It changes human ecosystems and the way of communications. Since media landscapes have been transformed, the demand of new competencies and skills sets among public relations practitioners have to be shifted. Thus, new competencies and skills needs have been studied focusing on middle managements who are in risk of being lost in the game. The semi-structure interview and discussion questions were used to explore top managements' opinions towards middle managements as well as exploring insights of middle managements about their confidence in digital knowledge. The research objectives are to find out the existing skills gaps and formulate the effective solutions to bridge the gaps. There are 20 interviewees, 6 top management executives from communication agencies, media and entertainment firms, and a public organisation. And 14 middle-management employees from various industries such as real estate, event organiser, public relations agencies (both international and local), film production, and a digital TV station. Four major competencies and skills gaps were found in this study.

Key-Words: Digital Marketing, Digital Communications, Public Relations, Skills Gaps, Technical Skills

1 Introduction

The Communications industry is a dynamic changing industrial sector which engages in content design, production and distribution in order to create awareness and communicate with target audiences. ("Communications Industry". Dictionary of American History. 2003). The communication strategies always change the mainstream of media (Bruce, S. 2015) which nowadays is transformed by technology revolution and of course, the future of communications industry will continue to be shaped by media innovations ("Communications Industry". Dictionary of American History. 2003).

The emerging technology has not merely transformed the media landscape but also consumer behaviours and business models (Day 2 0 1 1 ; LeeFlang, Verhoef, Dahlström, & Freundt, 2014), especially in the marketing and communications industries.

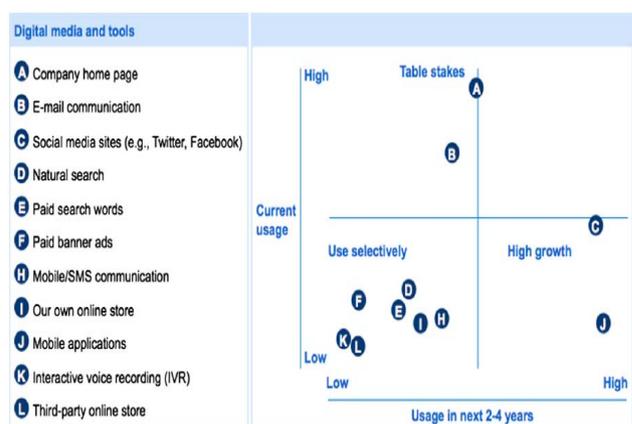


Figure 1: Current usage & future usage matrix of digital marketing tools [1].

The shift to social media has been greeted by practitioners and becomes a new paradigm of practices (Miller & Lammas 2010; Mangold & Faults 2009; Meerman Scott 2011; Archer, 2012). The need to change public relations (PR) and corporate communications has been supported by a recent global

study on Creativity in PR by The Holmes Report 2014. It concluded that PR was influencing trends to deliver creative work such as storytelling (87%), visual communication (49%), brand transparency (49%), and social good (45%). Moreover, the research found that companies and practitioners felt over-control in the message delivered by the impact of social media (Galbraith, J. The 5 C's of Communication Trends for 2015. In www.wpp.com). Social media plays significant role for brand reputation since words can spread rapidly and consumers tend to believe in friends, commentators, bloggers, and other influencers rather than companies (UNDER THE INFLUENCE: CONSUMER TRUST IN ADVERTISING 2013, September 9. In www.nielsen.com; Archer, 2012). This over-control easily leads into crisis communications and needs expertise to manage. The point is a big brand easily gains more damage than a small one. However, no companies want to take that risk, thus marketers tend to move their money towards PR and away from other disciplines (Ingham, 2015). In order to succeed in this digital economy where the Millennials are the most influential generation and lead societies, companies and practitioners need to flex to the channels they use most in order to control the crisis management (Galbraith, The 5 C's of Communication Trends for 2015. In www.wpp.com) and digital marketing becomes a linkage of interactions between consumers and marketers which leads to deeper relationships and brand engagement (Parsons, Zeisser, & Waitman, 1998).

In addition, digital landscape and media transformation create a need for businesses to move faster, resulting in the need for practitioners to understand their brands and their consumers more than ever before (Brown, 2014). The intra -department is a new trend of industry where the business moves from having separate marketing, advertising, and PR departments into just a 'Branding' department (Brown, 2014). A New public relations will be more likely marketing (Skerik, S 2015) and shift beyond the scope of communications into a part of every area of business such as from sales to customer service and from product development to human resources (Waddington, 2014. CIPR Report). PESO (paid, earned, shared, owned) media are included in the new PR scheme (Skerik, 2015) and revolutionise PR practices from traditional media to cross-media especially online platform.

The framework of PESO model (Figure 1.2) is developed by Gini Dietrich who is a leading voice in PR industry and also an author of Spin Sucks (www.spinsucks.com). She said, "If you aren't using the PESO model for your communications work, and measuring the meaningful metrics that help an organisation grow, you will not have a job in 10 years." (Dietrich, 2015. Why Your PR Team Should Embrace the PESO Model. Open Forum Blog, posted on January 30, 2015). As seen, PR practitioners were forced to adapt to a new, rapid pace of irrelevance because of a fuzzy advancement in the public relations industry. Future PR is requires both a new way of thinking and new, diverse skill sets (Iliff, 2014) such as SEO, SEM, Blog and other technical skills which nowadays become key challenges among practitioners in communications industries (Grupp, 2009; Royle, & Laing, 2014).

To be successful in communication, businesses need individuals who are strong in both business knowledge and technical skills in order to integrate those perspectives into strategies. A key success factor was getting a senior-level veteran of the business to head the unit (Parsons, Zeisser, & Waitman, 1998). However, the problem still occurred since many senior practitioners are lacked of technical skills or experience to actually do their job by integrating that knowledge as a holistic strategic plan (Bruce, 2015).

This revolution creates demand of new skill sets among marketing and practitioners. Finding the right people is a major challenge whereas a million jobs occur around Big Data in 2015 and only a third of these new jobs is filled (Gartner, "Gartner Says Big Data Creates Big Jobs: 4.4 Million IT Jobs Globally to Support Big Data By 2015", October 2012; Spitzer, Barbara. et al. 2013). Significantly, the shortage of digital skills in the current marketplace is now unprecedented. There are not many employees who can integrate both strategic business knowledge with existing traditional marketing communication approaches and align with new digital technical skills. (Levy & Birkner, 2011). A lack of skill-needed employees to cope with new communication challenges becomes a significant problem of public relations. (Fitch, 2009).

To bridge the gaps, we need to explore the actual skills gaps among practitioners and what will be needed as top priority skills for future competent practitioners.

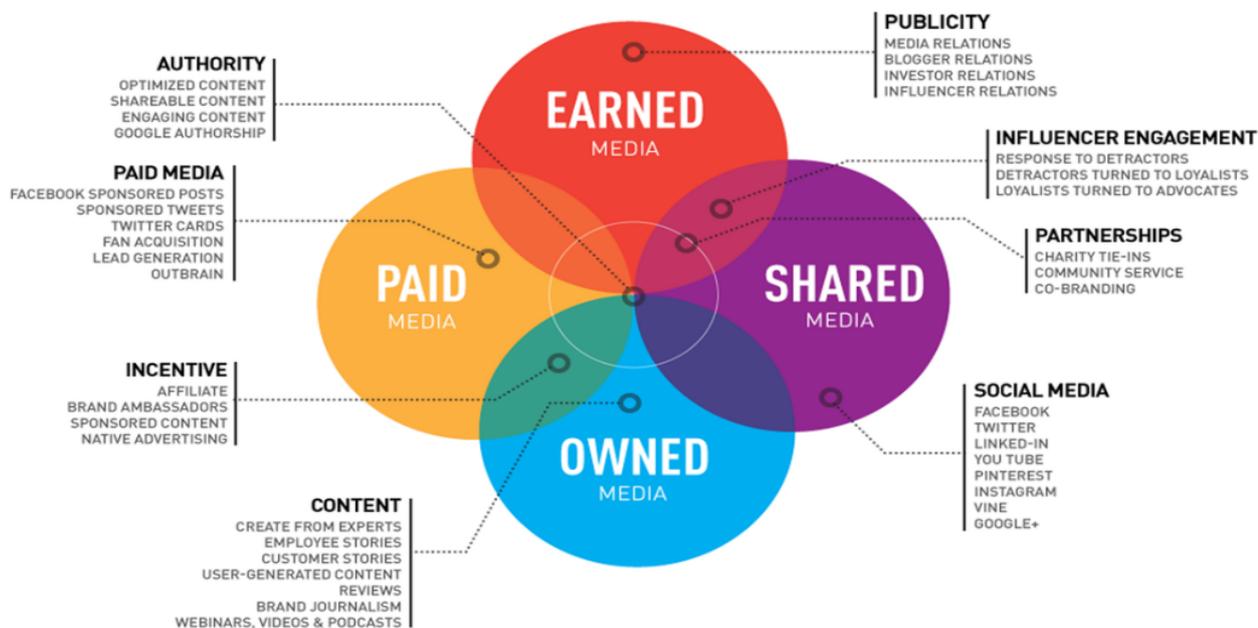


Figure 2: Adopting the PESO Model Source:Gini Dietrich, Spin Sucks 2015. Retrieved August 23, 2015

2. Literature Review

2.1 Background

The dramatic change in technologies has revolutionised all dimensions of life such as social, economic, political and personal life (The Global Technology Revolution: Summary. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 July 2015). The change threatens business models (Day 2011; Leeﬂang, Verhoef, Dahlström, & Freundt, 2014) and consumer behaviours which are the key drivers of communication strategies. (Kung 2008). Moreover, the evolving technologies offer new opportunities and challenges for industry practitioners, education and academic research (Royle, & Laing, 2014). The impact of digital technologies is now felt not only in the IT department, but across the entire organisation, creating a huge demand for digital skills (Spitzer, Buvat, Morel, & KVJ, 2013) and digital becomes the competitive advantage in both B2C and B2B marketing since internet usage continues to explode across the world (Leeﬂang, Verhoef, Dahlström, & Freundt, 2014).

In 2015, the number of internet users worldwide might surpass 3 billion and will be increasing 6.2% next year to reach 42.4% of the entire world’s population (Figure 3).

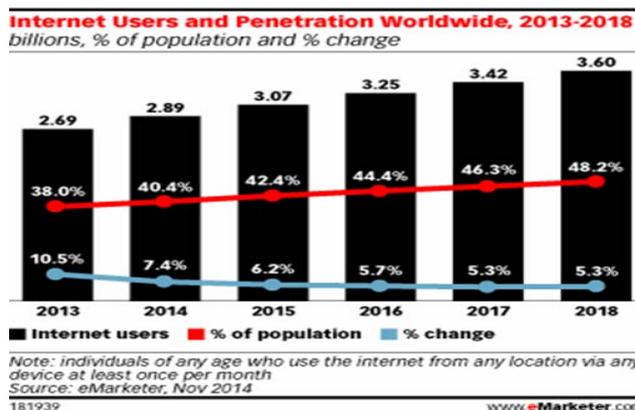


Figure 3: Internet Users and Penetration Worldwide, 2013-2018 Source: eMarketer.com (2014)

2.2 The future of PR

Future PR will be more broaden and look like marketing (Skerik, 2015). In the past, PR firms spent a lot of time dealing with journalists, producers, and editors in order to gain news coverage or “earned media.” At the same time, advertising firms were focused on paid media. Today, it is a fuzzy line (Binder, 2012) because new digital landscapes create the need to move quickly and all PR people need to understand more aspects of their brand than ever before. (Brown, 2014). However, only 22% of heads of communications see the changing digital and social

media landscape as the biggest future challenge even though the nature of digital media has broken down the walls between practitioners and the consumers (Sabreangel, 2014) as indicated in the CIPR State of the Profession 2015 report (Bruce, 2015). The Challenges for communicators are PR and corporate communications are 'behind the curve' on social media and slower to adopt more technologically complicated tools (Grupp, 2009). Area of the problem is laid on many senior practitioners who have expertise in business but mostly lack the expertise or experience in digital skills to actually do their jobs and integrate it properly into public relations strategies. (Bruce, 2015). As social and digital becomes more important, digital marketing is an integrated part of marketing mix as it enables entirely new forms of interactions between consumers and communicators which leading to deeper relationships and greater personalisation of goods and services. (Parsons, Zeisser, & Waitman, 1998). Many clients come to PR agencies for new strategies and finally turning PR agencies to non-PR services, including new digital and social media to gain PESO – paid, earned, shared and owned media. (Bruce, S., 2015). Thus, future PR career trend will be more blurred and included earned media (traditional media and emerging channels), social media and WOM (Worth-of-Mouth), content marketing, reputation management, and integrated marketing (cross-channel communications, and measurement & ROI). (Figure 7). (Skerik, 2015).



Figure 4: PR in 2015: It's a Bigger Job Than Ever
 Source: BUSINESS 2 COMMUNITY (2015).
 Retrieved May 11, 2015.

From a literature review on academic researches, articles, and blogs on future PR careers, clear acknowledge of skills gaps are revealed. Many professions discuss skills needed and what should be done in order to fill the gaps. Royle, & Laing, 2014 reviewed digital marketing skills and found that the skills gaps existed but did not actually indicated what those skills gaps were. Likewise, industry skills gaps with marketing education, many institutions called for an update on marketing fundamental changes. Digital developments are needed to be central of teaching and research in higher education and revolutionised the marketing disciplines at core. (Wymbs, 2011; Royle, & Laing, 2014). Future employees in digital era will need to integrate digital skills with deep functional business knowledge. (Spitzer, Buvat, Morel, & KVJ, 2013). These new competencies and skills needed of integrating digital marketing approaches with established marketing practice becomes the key skills gaps in this century. Skills in maximising social media such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Line, and Blog as well as skills in search engine optimisation (SEO), customer conversion, and mobile applications are mentioned in potential skills needed including the knowledge of digital analytics is crucial needed for evaluation the effectiveness of digital communication approaches. (Royle, & Laing, 2014).

The research on Digital Marketing Skills Gaps conducted by Royle, and Laing, 2014 introduced the Digital Marketer Model (Figure 2.8) to encapsulate the essential skills for digital marketers. It shows that core skills as corporate communication principles (project management, writing skills, and commercial awareness) and productivity will still be a vital foundation skills needed for all Digital marketers altogether with the technological knowledge (SEO, mobile apps, website development, video editing and code writing) and measurement monitoring also essential skills to plug-in.

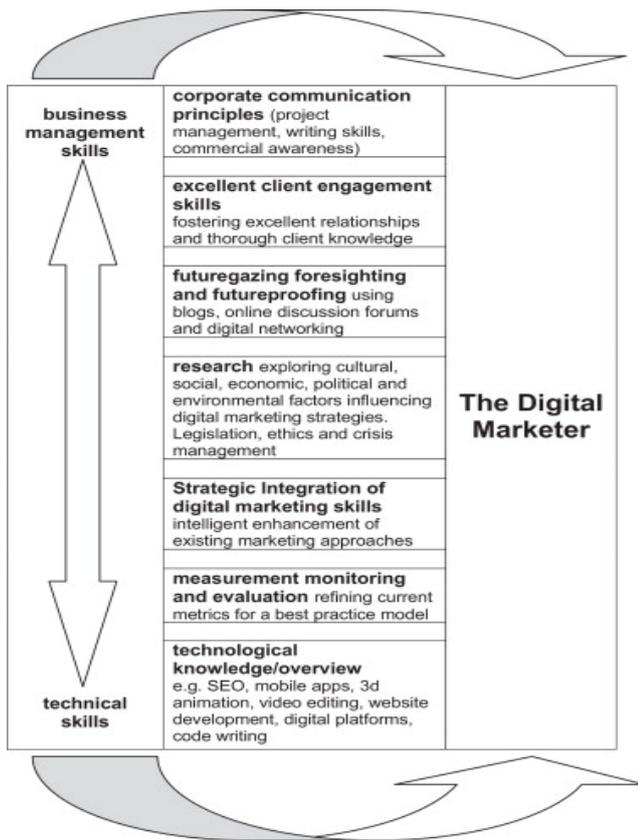


Figure 5: Digital Marketer Model
 Source: International Journal of Information Management, Volume 34, Issue 2, 2014, 65-73.

3. Research Methodology and Framework

The primary research in this Individual Study will be conducted with Qualitative method. Unstructured interviewing with the initial guiding questions will be used to explore the topic broadly, following with the synthesis of verbal data and content analysis to grouping the common findings as well as highlight the interesting idea if raised from the conversation. Topic will be focused on competencies and digital marketing skills needs for public relations in Thailand. Target group is aimed at communicators in middle and management levels approximately 15-20 persons. To understand the real demand and supply of competencies and skill needs in current communications industry as well as the barriers of new skill learning among middle and top management levels in Thailand in order to provide the effective capsule and recommendation to bridge the gaps.

This study has the following limitations:

1. This study was conducted with a small number of interviewees which cannot represent the entire population of PR practitioners in Thailand.
2. The area of study is focused only in Bangkok which cannot represent the majority of competencies and digital marketing skills gaps among PR practitioners in Thailand and may lead to deviation in skill gaps ranking.
3. The research questions are too narrow and focus only in digital marketing skills which are not the only skills they lack. They also need soft skills management, business knowledge, and integration skills as well. The next research should include all those four skills gaps in the methodology and conduct in quantitative research.

From literature review in chapter 2, there are some common skills which future PR practitioners need to upgrade in order to stay on the curve of career paths. This research question and framework aims to figure out what are the top priority skills needed in the next twelve months and what solutions or recommendations are required to bridge the gaps. In this part, the research question and framework is revisited to recognise the research problem and objective.

1. Problem: Technology evolution and digital convergence result in competencies and skills gaps among communicators in Thailand.
2. Objective: To find out the existing skills gaps and recommend the effective solution to bridge the gaps.
3. Question:
 - A: What are the skills gaps among the middle and top management levels in the communications industry?
 - B: What top priority skills are needed to bridge the gaps?
 - C: How to bridge the skills gaps? What the most effective way should be; practice, training or other?
 - D: Barriers and Pitfalls of new skills sets to be upgraded among middle and top management levels practitioners.

4. Framework: Three steps of secondary data analysis. Firstly, collecting secondary data from academic journals together with articles written by credible practitioners. Secondly, do the Open Coding in order to sort out what are the distinct concepts and categories in the data, and then thirdly, reread the open coding data and do the Axial Coding in order to form the bold idea and label each influenced concept into the concrete idea for further studying.

Five steps of primary data will be implemented, starting with the initial questionnaire for the interview and discussion. Then, the verbal conversations will be written as paragraphs before using grounded theory (GT) methodology to synthesis the data. Again, Open coding and Axial coding will be repeated and restructured according to the result of the data collecting and concluded (rather than finalise) with a model or recommendation for best practices among middle level and management level practitioners in the context of Thailand.

The Non-Probability Sampling is selected as the Purposive Sampling with the snow-ball method in this study. The interviewees will be divided into two levels 1) the top managements level, to find out the depth of skills they require among their staffs and 2) the managers or middle managements level, to find out existing skills and missing skills (skills they thought they might lack or skills they need to improve) including how to improve those skills effectively.

Top management to be interviewed includes the C-suites, Managing Director, General Manager and Board of Director of the companies. At the operational level, Head of Communication, Communication Manager, Senior Communication will be interviewed.

Number of interviewees from private business is bigger than from communication agencies. Tench, et al. 2013 reported that 'digital skills also differ according to the area professionals are working in. Professionals working in overall communication, international and public affairs, media relations and marketing communications score lower than professionals working in strategy, internal communication and of course online communication'.

Here, the sample size of 15-20 practitioners will focus on 11 practitioners and 3 executives from private businesses as well as 3 intermediates and 3 executives from communications agencies using the snow-ball method.

4. Results

4.1 Skill gaps result among top management

From Executive viewpoints, there are many practical concerns since digital has emerged and become global mainstream media. No one denies that there is a new paradigm shift from analog to digital practices. Noticeable in the overwhelming of new online media, consumer behaviour trend is shown via their information search journey. End users tend to seek information via online media rather than traditional media (newspaper, magazine, radio, television). A Managing Director of Local PR Agency revealed that new online media in year 2015 has been increased up to 50% in comparison with last year (2014). Inevitably, PR practitioners must shift their roles to work with online media as a key tool to communicate with consumers. The world market is changed from generations i.e. Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z to COMMUNITY. Target group is divided by their preferences, interests, likes, dislikes etc. Content marketing will need PR skills to implement the branded-content in order to sell or create the brand's perception. The more shared and commented content, the more worth brand value it is. Digital marketing skill becomes one of skill needs among communicators because the tactic of brand building needs more a personalised role and digital marketing can push our brand to reach consumers individually. Mass media still plays an important role in terms of credibility and online media increases their significance in terms of impact and efficiency. Key strengths such as fast accessibility and prompt response of online media are very powerful to engage with consumers, thus PR must seize this opportunity to combine digital and traditional media to reinforce brand image among the target group. Another perspective from a new entrepreneur in digital PR agency, she shared that brand building project is gradually decreasing and clients turn PR to work as CRM and Marketing in order to boost sales growth. They do not measure us with news value as previous years, but focus on brand engagement and social impact. Social media becomes a vital tool to engage with customers. Future PR practitioners have to adapt themselves into working similar to an advertising agency and become client's business solution. 'SPEED' is important and we need to improve. When talking about digital marketing, owned media is uppermost in her mind, she said. In the former time all PR spoke with consumers via mass media. Some messages we want to communicate were not reaching

consumers. Online media allows us to create our owned media channel to communicate directly to consumers and of course communication skill is needed to reinforce a positive relationships with all stakeholders. Many people doubt what the future of traditional media will be, to die or transform? The answer she gave is that the traditional media still be important because it is a stamp or credibility. The standard of the news process before publicity is guaranteed the trustworthy is important in the midst of information bombardment which contains both true and fake news.

Digital media has gradually replaced the traditional media. What we had done successfully in the past via traditional media is not working at the present proved by a decreasing number of printed media readers. However, we still have to approach traditional media because consumers still believe in information publicised via newspapers, magazines, and televisions which will feed on the media timeline as well. The Dean of Superstar Institution said that in addition, we have to put in effort to gain earned and shared media on online media because consumers believe their friends and pay attention to what their friends do and share similar to preferences and lifestyle.

Interesting viewpoints were raised by the CEO of a leading publication, he portrayed that the world environment is being changed by digital culture. Many startup businesses open their shops online for 24 hours with no staff and they gain huge revenues compared to many big companies. It is a pitfall for companies who were successful before digital era. The businessmen who are not aware of culture and environment changes will fall behind the curve and might go out of business. Digital environment and digital culture are top priorities to study and apply to business. An official website is still being used to prove our trustworthy and credibility even though not many people accesses it. We must understand consumer daily life journey, know their touch points, preferences, lifestyle, place they go, and community they belong to.

In next century, MICE people will be able to attend a meeting, seminar or convention via hologram technology. Future media will be more interactive and real time broadcasting or streaming and digital will become the mainstream of economy, said by Vice President of MICE Public Organisation.

With this trend changes, new competencies and skills sets must be filled. All of top management in this study mentioned that digital marketing, strategic thinking, and analytical thinking are skills they want to see in middle management. However, none of them deny upgrading themselves in digital marketing in order to synergise

all media platforms as key business operation strategies for their own businesses. From interviewing, practitioners in communications agencies seem to have a fewer skills gap than practitioners in organisations. Most skills gaps are digital marketing, integrated online-offline strategy, media mix planning, content management, consumer journey, and financial management. For practitioners who work in organisations also deficient in media landscape knowledge, consumer interests and preferences, consumer contact points, content development, and technical skill & knowledge. Most digital technical skills are provided by young employees who lack strategic communications and writing skills. Middle management employees who have strategic communication skills also lack digital technical skills.

'Internal PR's have assigned to create contents for website and social media additional from conventional PR tasks. The problem is their mind-sets which stick to old school style of news writing. They write in long sentences and very formal. For new school gen, they write in short sentences and communicate with visuals which are more effectiveness'. Dean of Superstar Institution said.

'Weak point of current PR is no knowledge in digital media nature. They cannot catch consumer interests and do not know how to communicate with consumers, which contents consumers prefer and which channels target group consume. Speed is another point to improve. Majority of PR in Thailand both internal PR and outsourcing PR agencies still work as old school PR. They keen on contact with traditional news media but not with online media and communities. Thus, we will outsource only PR jobs which need attention from traditional media i.e. press conference, group interview, press tour. However, these services we use tend to decrease time by time. Outsource PR should develop themselves to be business solution if not client will set up own online team and reduce budget or even cut budget for traditional PR'. CEO of a leading publication said.

'In the MICE public organisation, we separate PR from digital team because the nature of work is different. PR duties involve all news and media network both local and international. Digital team oversees on online marketing which work together with outsourcing digital agency. In my opinion, PR team should improve on 1) marketing knowledge 2) think outside box 3) strategic thinking 4) business development knowledge 4) branding and reputation management 5) Global Trends'. Vice President of MICE Public Organisation said.

Top management see PRs need to up skill themselves in Social media management as the first priority skill needs, following by Creativity and Innovation in marketing programs and Digital Advertising consecutively. Cross-channel marketing and Content Marketing have equal scores and ranked fourth. Brand Building and Public Relations also have equal scores and ranked number eighth. Priority skills needs for PRs ranking from top management viewpoints:

- 1st Social Media Marketing
- 2nd Creativity and Innovation in marketing programs
- 3rd Digital Advertising
- 4th Cross-channel marketing / Content Marketing
- 5th Customer Response Management
- 6th Media Mix Planning
- 7th Personalization and Targeting
- 8th Brand Building / Public Relations
- 9th Marketing Measurement
- 10th Event
- 11th E-Commerce

Social media in Thailand is a way of life as endorsed by 2014 statistics from the Digital Advertising Association of Thailand.

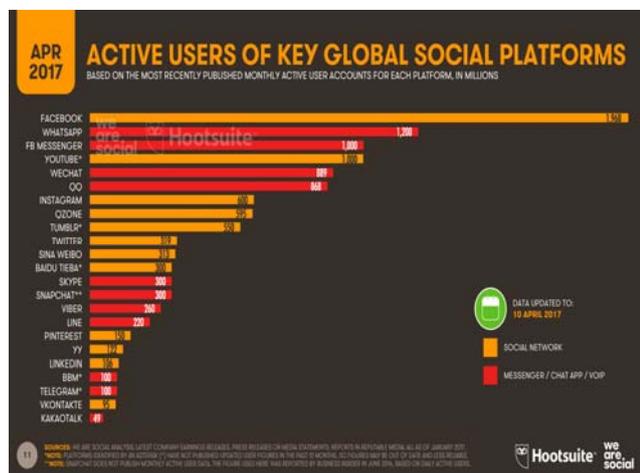


Figure 6: Thailand Likes This: Social media in Thailand

Source: <https://www.slideshare.net/wearesocialsg/digital-in-2016/443>. Retrieved October 7, 2017

Top managements seem to not prefer to learn digital marketing skills. They prefer to hire the specialists to work on those tasks under their business directions rather than sit down and try to learn deep details of

digital marketing technical skills. When we checked the level of digital marketing skills they have, we can see that they are strong in the area of :

- 1. Budgeting and Financial modelling skills
- 2. Customer Service, support and assisted selling
- 3. Planning Integrated and multichannel campaigns
- 4. Social Media marketing.

And weak in the area of

- 1. Coding & Development
- 2. SEO (Search Engine Optimisation)
- 3. Mobile marketing

Digital disruption affects human ecosystem and consumer behaviour. A large number of giant companies are shutting down because of new business start-ups in digital economy, also many media are transforming from analog to digital. Since public relations has to work with the media, then PR practices must definitely be changed. A new paradigm of future PR has been studied in order to recommend how PR can survive in the rapid game changing.

Technology evolution and digital convergence result in competencies and skills gaps among communicators in Thailand, so new competencies and skills needs have been studied focusing on middle managements who are in risk of being behind the game. We use semi-structure interview and discussion questions to explore top managements' opinions towards middle managements as well as exploring insights of middle managements about their confidence in digital knowledge. The research objective is to find out the existing skills gaps and formulate the effective solutions to bridge the gaps.

Secondary and primary sources are used to analyse in this qualitative research. For secondary source, we reviewed academic papers and online articles written by experienced practitioners. For primary source, there are 20 practitioners, 6 top managements and 14 middle managements who work in communication agencies and private companies in Thailand with the research questions as follows:

- A: What are the skills gaps among the middle and management levels in the communications industry?
- B: What top priority skills are needed to bridge the gaps?
- C: How to bridge the skills gaps? What is the most effective way; practice, training or others?
- D: Barriers and Pitfalls of new skills sets to be upgraded among middle and top management levels.

Four major skills gaps were found among PR practitioners in Thailand. These are Technical Knowledge and Skills, Industry & Business Knowledge, Soft Management Skills, and Integration Skills.

Technical knowledge and skills include digital knowledge, digital platforms, technical knowledge, content management, tools & strategies to create online contents, KOL (key online influencers) engagement, digital marketing knowledge and tools such as SEO, SEM, GDN, AdWords, Remarket, Facebook ad, YouTube ad, webinar, live streaming, mobile marketing, web analytics, social media marketing, email marketing, affiliate marketing, etc.

Industry & Business Knowledge includes consumer repertoire, customer journey, financial management, global trends, economic and new technologies, competitors and industry analysis, business opportunities, media landscape knowledge, consumer interests and preferences, consumer contact points, content development, strategic thinking, analytic thinking, customer relations management, brand management, etc.

Soft Management Skills include leadership and relationship management (with reporters, KOL, online media, consumers, coworkers, subordinators, agencies, boss, etc.)

Integration Skills include integrated online-offline strategies, cross-channel and media mix planning, traditional and digital marketing transformation.

Since clients turn PR to work as CRM and Marketing in order to boost sales growth, they do not measure PR with news value as previously anymore, but focus on brand engagement and social impact. A big area of skills gap is technical knowledge and skills. Practitioners who work in communications agencies have less digital marketing skills, online and offline integration strategies, media mix planning, content management, customer journey analysis, and financial management. Practitioners who work in companies also have lack of media landscape knowledge, consumer interests and preferences, consumer contact points, content development, and technical skill & knowledge. Most digital technical skills are provided by young employees who lack strategic communications and writing skills. Middle management employees who have strategic communication skills also lack digital technical skills. However, digital marketing, strategic thinking, and analytical thinking are most essential skills which top managements currently expect to see in middle managements.

Comparison between secondary source (picture 5-1) and primary source (picture 5-2), data shows that Social Media Marketing is the top first skill needs to be filled.

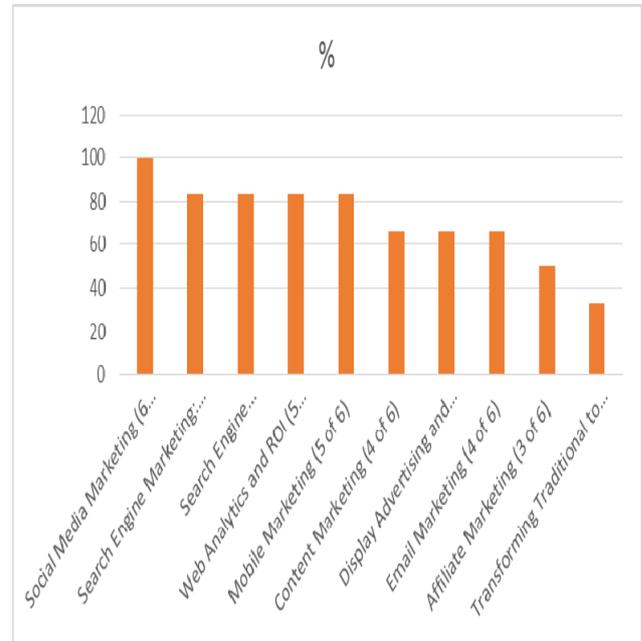


Figure 7: Essential skills needs to be filled (as of October 22, 2015)

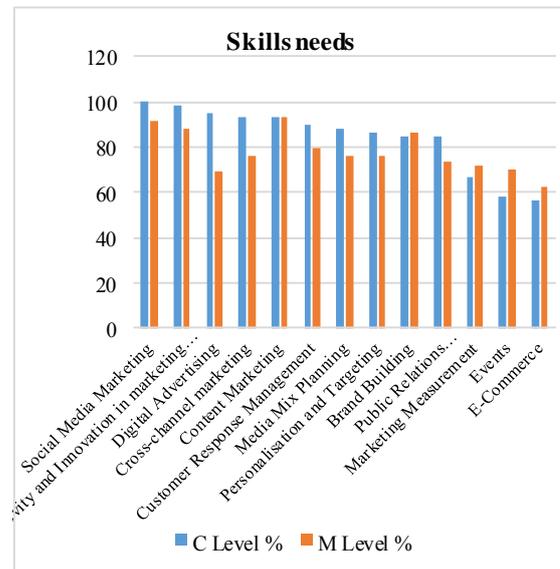


Figure 8: Essential skills needs to be filled from the interviews

The study confirms that the relationship between technical skills and experiences are correlated. The skills gap worsens with experience, the more senior the practitioners; the less likely they are to have technical

and digital skills (Holtz, S. 2015; Bruce, S. 2015). From interviews, top and middle management levels perceived digital marketing skills can be fully met with lecturing in digital conferences and using books. They did not rank technical skill as the first priority skill to fix and thought it is a junior’s jobs.

Data found among top managements mentioned Creativity and innovation in marketing programs, Digital advertising, Cross-channel marketing, Content marketing, and Customer response management were skills they would like to improve. Middle managements also need to improve themselves in Content marketing, Creativity and innovation in marketing programs, Brand building, and Customer response management.

The preferable method to bridge the skills gaps is a *Short intensive course*. Course outline included the modest technology overviews, newest & effectiveness digital marketing tools as well as digital tactics, Big data and customer insights analysis, measurement and ROI, content strategies & brand engagement, platform algorithms, social media marketing, customer journey trends.

The learning atmosphere should be designed as a learning space which every attendants can feel free to share their knowledge and experience. Moreover, an actionable workshop to prove their understanding should be added.

Length of time: For full day course, it should not take more than 2 days but it could be divided into once a week for one month if contents cannot be thought within 2 days.

Key decision to purchase: Course outline and lecturer names.

Interest point: A simulator program for technical skill practice is not presence in any institutions and it is an unmet requirement of the learners.

None of interviewees prefer online training.

communication tools have to be paid in order to learn real practices. To know what digital tools will work with what product or business, they must have a thoroughly knowledge in each tool complexity.

Integration skills also need online platforms to integrate with offline platforms. The holistic marketing plan will not success if it cannot utilise cross-channel and media mix as a strategic plan. Another gap, Industry & Business knowledge, they can learn and find from industry and research portal sites. It needs analytic thinking skill and strategic skill to formulate with digital skill and integration skill. There is no principles established yet. For soft management skill, it needs training from professionals in various mock up situations to test and improve leadership skills. However, this research focus on competencies and digital marketing skills gaps, and the diagram below shows the areas of skills needs for improvement among top management and middle management levels.

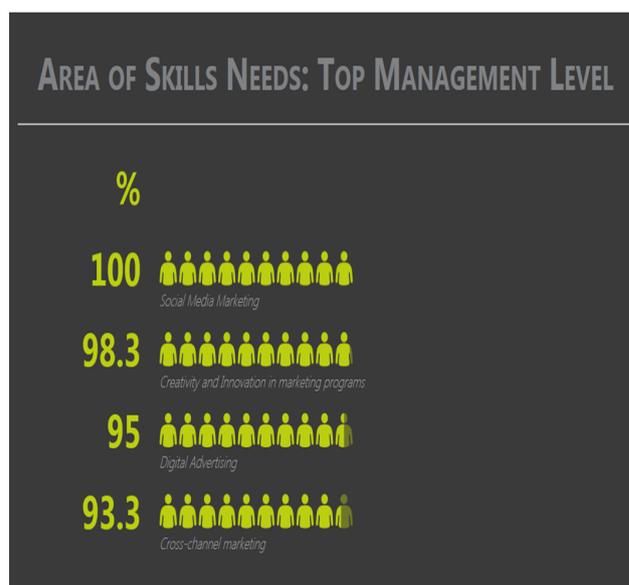


Figure 9: Area of Skills Needs among top management level

5. Discussion and Recommendation

5.1 Area of Training Needs

There are four skills gaps in different degrees between top management and middle management levels. Technical knowledge and skills is the biggest area and the most concerns among those two groups because majority of target consumers live and breathe digital. Big data analytics become a vital tool to analyse customer insights and help marketers to design marketing strategies and segmentation tactics, to initiate creativity campaigns and communication messages. However, most technical skills in digital

Top management officers focus on consumer trends, creativities and business strategies, speed and cost efficiency. Then, skills they need are laid on social media which is the most popular platform among target consumers in order to investigate consumer voices, hot issues, trends, and community cultures. Following with Creativity and innovation in marketing programs, Digital advertising, and Cross-channel marketing, consecutively.

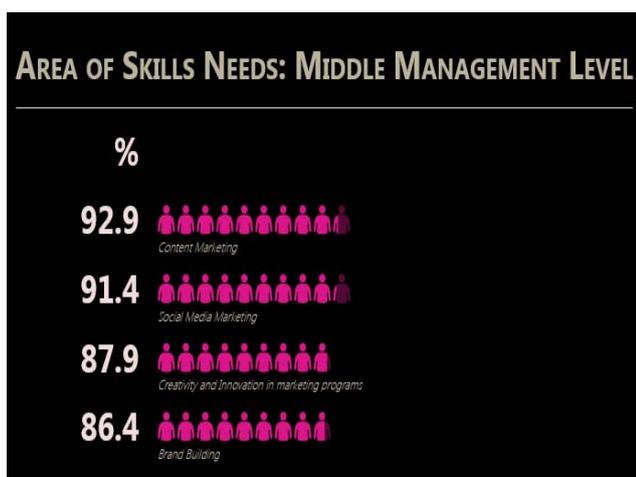


Figure 14: Area of Skills Needs among middle management level

Middle management employees focus on digital marketing knowledge, effective communications methods, consumer insights, and brand reputation. Thus, skills they needs are laid on content marketing, social media marketing, creativity and innovation in marketing program, and Brand building.

6. Conclusion

Even though this research has been trying to identify competencies and digital marketing skills gaps among PR in Thailand, there is still a need to further investigate and reveal needs of PR practitioners in other provinces. The researcher would recommend the following future studies:

1. Conduct research in quantitative research and expand the scope of study to cover all four skills gaps found in this study, also expand the sample sizes of PR practitioners in various industries in major provinces.
2. Apply this research to other institutions to design simulator digital marketing programming for effective workshop and training course.
3. Co-create or partner with global digital companies as Google, Line, Facebook, YouTube in order to verify certification and guarantee the standard of training course.

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