

The Storyshaper: Profiling Employability Skills of Strategic Communication and Branding Professionals

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Abstract

This study examines the employability profiling of strategic communicators, focusing on identifying the key hard, soft, transversal, and communicative skills that are essential for success in today's job market. As organizations increasingly rely on strategic communication to shape their public image and internal cohesion, the demand for professionals with diverse skill sets continues to rise. Using a mixed-methods approach, this research analyzed survey data from industry leaders, hiring managers, and communication professionals across various sectors to define a comprehensive skill profile for employability in strategic communication roles. Findings highlight the critical importance of both technical expertise and interpersonal abilities. Hard skills such as data analytics, content creation, and digital communication were identified as indispensable for strategic communicators, while soft skills like emotional intelligence, leadership, and adaptability emerged as equally vital. Additionally, transversal skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, and cross-functional collaboration, are essential for professionals aiming to navigate the dynamic and multidisciplinary nature of modern communication strategies.

The study provides valuable insights into the evolving skill requirements for strategic communicators, offering a framework for individuals and organizations to enhance employability through targeted skill development.

Keywords

Brand Management, Employability Skills, Job Market, Strategic Communication, Profiling.

Introduction

In an era where communication is central to organizational success, the role of strategic communicators has never been more critical. The growing reliance on effective

communication strategies, or “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission” (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 3), to build and sustain relationships with both internal and external audiences has elevated these professionals to positions of strategic importance within organizations. What makes communication “strategic” is how communication efforts are designed to influence specific audience attitudes, behaviors, or perceptions to align with and advance organisational objectives (Paul, 2011). Thus, no longer viewed merely as public relations or media specialists, strategic communicators now operate at the intersection of brand management, reputation safeguarding, and stakeholder engagement, positioning them as key players in organizational leadership and decision-making.

A major force behind this shift is the rapid digitalization of media, which has transformed how organizations interact with their audiences (Hesmondhalgh, 2019). Digital platforms—social media, blogs, podcasts, and online news outlets—have not only democratized access to information but also created a more direct and dynamic communication environment. With these changes, audiences have become more engaged and expect real-time responses from organizations. As noted by Smith and Cox-Smith (2021), the digital age has reshaped the way organizations communicate, requiring faster, more authentic responses to an ever-evolving audience. Strategic communicators must now be adept at managing multiple digital channels and addressing the demands of more vocal and informed stakeholders. Additionally, societal expectations around transparency, corporate social responsibility, and ethical behavior are reshaping the landscape of organizational communication. Consumers and stakeholders increasingly hold organizations accountable for their actions, and communicators are on the frontlines of addressing these expectations (Verk et al., 2021). In this context, strategic communication is no longer a passive function focused solely on media relations or marketing; it has evolved into a critical driver of reputation management, trust-building, and competitive advantage (Brogan and Smith, 2020). Not by chance, according to Grunig et al. (2006), reputation is built on consistent, transparent communication with stakeholders, and communicators are the architects of this trust.

Theoretical Background

Given the heightened role of communication in organizational strategy, the skill sets required of strategic communicators have expanded significantly. It is no longer enough to excel in traditional communication tasks, such as drafting press releases or managing media relations (Christensen et al., 2011). Today’s strategic communicators must possess a range of technical skills that reflect the digitalization of the industry. These include proficiency in data analytics to measure communication effectiveness, familiarity with content management systems, and a strong understanding of digital marketing and social media algorithms (Smaldone et al., 2022). Nevertheless, technical expertise alone is insufficient to navigate the complexities of modern communication. Interpersonal agility, or the ability to adapt and collaborate in diverse environments, has become equally essential (Mazzei et al., 2019). Strategic communicators are often tasked with managing multifaceted communication campaigns that span departments, regions, and even cultures (Paul, 2011). This requires strong teamwork skills, emotional

intelligence, and the ability to lead through influence (Lehner, 2020). Leadership is now a crucial component of a communicator's role, as they are frequently called upon to advise executives, manage crises, and make high-stake decisions that impact the organization's reputation (Darics, 2020; Madlock, 2008). In addition to interpersonal skills, strategic communicators must be agile in their approach to problem-solving. The fast pace of digital communication means that issues can arise quickly and spread widely, leaving little time for deliberation. Communicators must be able to think on their feet, respond rapidly, and develop creative solutions to complex challenges (Boylan and Turner, 2017). The ability to manage a crisis in real-time, while maintaining the integrity of the brand's message, is one of the most valuable skills a strategic communicator can possess (Coombs, 2013). The evolving role of strategic communicators reflects the broader changes occurring in the global communication landscape. What was once a narrowly defined role focused on media relations and public perception has now become a multifaceted discipline that requires a broad range of skills. Communicators are not just responsible for crafting messages but for ensuring that these messages align with the organization's values, resonate with stakeholders, and ultimately support the organization's long-term strategic goals (Hallahan et al., 2007). As organizations continue to adapt to the digital age and societal changes, the demand for strategic communicators with a combination of technical expertise and interpersonal agility will only increase. These professionals are now seen as essential to organizational success, acting as the guardians of reputation and trust in a world where communication is not just about what is said but how it is heard and perceived (Doorley and Garcia, 2015). This expansion of their role and the corresponding skill sets needed signals the strategic importance of communication in shaping the future of organizations.

Methods

This study analyzed 27,863 job postings to profile the employability skills crucial for strategic communicators. Data was collected via web scraping from job boards and career websites using keywords such as "strategic communicator," "public relations," and "corporate communication." Each job posting provided 39 variables, including required skills, qualifications, experience, and industry sector, resulting in 1,086,657 data points. Data analysis was conducted using Python and R, leveraging text mining and machine learning techniques. The text mining process involved three phases: pre-processing, which cleaned the text by removing stop words, punctuation, and normalizing the text through lowercasing and lemmatization; lexical processing, where keywords were identified and standardized to ensure consistency (Smaldone et al., 2022). Probabilistic topic modeling, specifically Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), was employed to uncover key skill trends, identifying thematic areas such as digital media, leadership, and cross-functional collaboration as emerging priorities in the job market. Partial correlation analysis was performed to explore relationships between hard, soft, transversal, and communicative skills, revealing how these skill sets interact and influence employability in the strategic communication field. To forecast future skills demand, machine learning models, including Support Vector Machines (SVM) and Monte Carlo Markov Chains (MCMC), were applied. These models predicted

upcoming trends in skill requirements, providing actionable insights for both professionals and employers. Visualizations of the skill profiles were generated using scorecards and heatmaps, presenting the most sought-after competencies for strategic communicators in a clear, accessible format.

Results

The results from the analysis of the strategic communication and branding sector were obtained by examining a subset of job postings related to these fields. A tokenized Document-Term Matrix (DTM) was built, and sparsity was reduced to 78%. The most frequent terminological combinations identified in the corpus were "social media" (n=2,949), "years of experience" (n=2,801), "project management" (n=2,750), "communication skills" (n=2,740), and "learning ability" (n=2,691). Topic modeling revealed four thematic areas, which provided insight into the core competencies required in strategic communication roles. Further analysis uncovered the key correlations between skills within the dataset, identifying patterns and connections that shaped the skill sets needed for success in strategic communication and branding roles. Centrality measures showed that the most influential skills in the dataset were "project management" (8.3%), "communication skills" (8%), "learning ability" (2.3%), "best practices" (1.6%), and "written communication" (0.3%). The skills with the closest associations were "learning ability" (18%), "communication skills" (16.5%), "brand management" (16.2%), "internal-external communication" (14.7%), and "written communication" (1.5%). Finally, the application of MCMC with the Maximum A Posteriori (MAP) estimation method provided a forecast for the skill demand in strategic communication, simulating a potential job interview scenario. This forecast identified the most critical competencies and skill interactions likely to be evaluated during the hiring process for professionals in this industry.

Discussion, Implications & Conclusion

Results of this study provide valuable insights into the employability skills required for strategic communication and branding professionals, highlighting the increasing importance of a balanced combination of hard, soft, and transversal skills. The frequent occurrence of terms like "social media," "communication skills," and "project management" underscores the centrality of digital literacy, effective communication, and leadership in today's job market. The clustering of skills into thematic areas further emphasizes the need for professionals who can navigate both technical and interpersonal demands in the strategic communication field. One of the key findings is the strong correlation between "learning ability" and "communication skills," which suggests that adaptability and continuous learning are essential for success in dynamic environments. This reinforces the importance of lifelong learning and the ability to evolve with technological advancements, a critical factor for maintaining employability in an increasingly digitalized sector. Additionally, the centrality measures highlight that traditional skills like "written communication" remain relevant, but they must be complemented by newer competencies such as "project management" and "internal-external communication." The implications for both practitioners and educators are significant. Strategic communication professionals need to develop a hybrid skill set

that blends technical knowledge with strong leadership, collaboration, and adaptability. Employers should prioritize these attributes when hiring, while academic and training programs must adapt to equip future communicators with the competencies required in this evolving landscape. In conclusion, the study's analysis of job postings reveals the changing nature of strategic communication roles and the diverse skill sets needed to succeed. By identifying key trends and competencies, this research offers actionable insights for both professionals looking to enhance their career prospects and organizations aiming to hire top talent. The demand for a mix of technical expertise and soft skills will likely continue to shape the field in the coming years. Looking ahead, research should examine the strategies that enable strategic communicators to maintain their relevance and adaptability in an ever-changing digital landscape. Investigations into the career trajectories of high-performing professionals could shed light on the long-term skill refinement process. Additionally, cross-cultural comparisons could uncover how global trends and societal expectations shape the evolving skill profiles for strategic communicators worldwide. These insights will be crucial for both aspiring professionals and the institutions responsible for their preparation.

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