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E-marketing education in transition: An analysis of international courses and programs

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ABSTRACT

E-marketing is an expanding and dynamic field that needs a skilled workforce. Educational institutes across the world have responded to this demand by introducing E-marketing courses and, recently, programs. This study aims at greater shared agreement about what E-marketing encompasses through exploring around 120 business school worldwide. In addition, a thorough analysis of the main books used in basic E-marketing or digital marketing courses was conducted to identify the main topics covered in these courses. The study concludes that E-marketing education is going through a transitional period at different levels. Implications regarding the topics and teaching of E-marketing are discussed.

1. Introduction

E-marketing is a multidisciplinary field that draws knowledge from the broader parent areas of business, commerce, information and communications technologies (herein referred to as ICTs). In addition, E-marketing courses are not limited to marketing programs/degrees, they are increasingly being offered as elective or core courses in finance, accounting, operation management and other majors. Therefore, it is important for those who work on curricula development in business and management schools to understand the current status and developments in E-marketing education. A review of the literature shows that there is little agreement among academics about what can be considered within the domain of E-marketing. Such a disagreement, although might sound fruitful from a philosophical perspective, causes confusion among academics particularly those who work on programs design at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Questions faced include:

- Shall we use the title E-marketing, digital marketing, internet marketing or social media marketing?
- What are the main topics covered in E-marketing courses, particularly the introductory ones?
- In general marketing programs, shall lecturers teach issues such as mobile marketing and electronic customer relationship management (ECRM) in dedicated courses or as part of one comprehensive E-marketing course?

Some studies tried to address the above-stated issues in the general E-business context (e.g. Burkey, 2007; Kotb, Roberts, & Stoner, 2013; Fusilier & Durlabhji, 2010; Mehta, Shah, & Morgan, 2005). Few efforts were dedicated to E-marketing, some of

these efforts focused on the increasing importance of E-marketing, particularly social media, and how it can change the traditional marketing major (e.g. Brocato, White, Bartkus, & Brocato, 2015; Wymbs, 2011) while others addressed the E-methods, such as Twitter and Wikis, and how they are used in teaching marketing (e.g. Granitz & Koernig, 2011; Lowe & Laffey, 2011). However, no recent efforts were found to address the questions raised in this study.

The following part of the paper discusses the "e-dilemma" and the transition from E-business to E-marketing; this will be followed by the methodology used to analyze E-marketing courses and programs. The final part presents implications, limitations and future research. It is noteworthy that this study uses the word "course" to describe a unit of teaching, normally individual subject, that typically lasts for one academic term (i.e. E-marketing or marketing management), while "program" refers to the overall offering of courses that leads to academic degree (i.e. Bachelor of Business Administration in E-marketing or MBA in marketing). Also, please note that the terms E-marketing, internet marketing and digital marketing are used interchangeably unless stated otherwise, bearing in mind that "E-marketing" is the classical title and that "digital marketing" is gaining increasing popularity in the academic world, especially in the United States, as will be demonstrated later in the "Methodology and Insights" section.

2. Defining the limits!

For many academics and practitioners, the terms Internet marketing and E-marketing are synonyms; this is mainly because the word E-marketing has effectively started to appear in the popular press and academic journals since the Internet was commercialized in the mid-1990s. E-marketing, is simply, marketing that is accomplished or facilitated via electronic technologies. The "e" part of E-marketing has caused confusion among researchers and instructors because of the lack of agreement on what is electronic and what is not, which can be described as the "e-dilemma". Some researchers limit it to the internet while others include technologies such as electronic point of sale and databases applications. The disagreement is even widening due to the increasingly rapid rate at which electronic information and communication technologies are developing and converging, from WEB1 to WEB4 and from mobile phones to smart phones. In other words, E-marketing enabling technologies have been developing very fast, so it becomes harder to follow or to predict how they might change over years.

To explore what can be described as the "e-dilemma" in more depth, the American Marketing Association (AMA) dictionary was searched for the terms E-marketing, digital marketing and internet marketing in 2015. Surprisingly, they were not found. Instead, the term online marketing existed, it was defined as: "The Internet and E-mail based aspects of a marketing campaign. Can incorporate banner ads, E-mail marketing, search engine optimization, E-commerce and other tools". Another relevant term was direct digital marketing which referred to "a digital marketing method that provides relevant marketing communications that are addressable to a specific individual with an email address, a mobile phone number or a Web browser cookie".

In addition, an analysis of the development of E-marketing definition on Wikipedia was undertaken,[1] it was found that in 2014 the term E-marketing forwarded the browser to the term Internet marketing, which according to Wikipedia is also known as digital marketing, web marketing, online marketing, search marketing. It was defined as "The marketing (generally promotion) of products or services over the Internet". While in 2006, E-marketing had its own page on Wikipedia and was defined as "Achieving marketing objectives through the use of electronic communications technologies such as the Internet, database, and mobile phone". The confusion increases when Wikipedia adds that internet marketing is considered broad in scope because it does not only refer to marketing on the Internet but also includes marketing done via E-mail and wireless media. Digital customer data and ECRM systems are also grouped together under internet marketing.

In 2005, a workshop took place in London to discuss trends in E-marketing education. Part of the discussion in the workshop was dedicated to the definition of the "e". The discussion confirmed the disagreement among marketing instructors about the technologies that enable E-marketing. One extreme suggested that the "e" refers only to the internet because the term E-marketing did not practically exist until the internet was used for commercial purpose. The other opinion was that the "e" includes all electronic information and communication technologies, even landline phone (telemarketing) because this is what the word "electronic" really means. Since then, several efforts were made to bridge the gap. A constructive argument by Strauss and Frost (2014) suggests that different technologies interact to enable E-marketing, this include digital content (e.g. text, data, audio and videos) which are distributed through the internet infrastructure to two-way appliances (e.g. computers, cell phones, tablets, television, and even refrigerators). Interestingly, some industry experts expect the "E" to be dropped from E-business and E-marketing because transactions will be undertaken no other way.

To understand the current status, a review of the recent E-marketing literature was conducted in this study. The review revealed two main observations. First, most scholars (e.g. Strauss & Frost, 2014; Roberts & Zahay, 2013; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012; Dann & Dann, 2011) consider the internet as the main technology that enables E-marketing; this includes, but are not limited to: companies websites (brochureware and commercial), E-mail applications, (search engines, social media platforms … etc.). This could explain why the terms Internet marketing and E-marketing have been used interchangeably by academics and practitioners. Second, most researchers do not limit E-marketing to the internet, but

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[1] Although Wikipedia is not the ideal home to find a solid and well-established definition since its contributors are not conducting primary research, it is valuable in defining what is in and what is out in any specific domain because it brings many minds together to share their collective knowledge.

include other technologies, which basically include: ECRM solutions, databases applications, smart cards, electronic point of sale, location technologies; enterprise resource planning (ERP) solutions, smart home appliances (i.e. television, refrigerators … etc.), and mobile technologies (i.e. smart phones and 4G). However, a comprehensive list of electronic technologies can hardly be developed because these technologies are changing/converging continuously. Also, not all electronic technologies lie within the scope of E-marketing, for example, automation schemes such as robotics are "electronic" but are outside the generally accepted scope of E-marketing. Interestingly, the review revealed few attempts to define E-marketing before the internet became a genuine driving force in marketing. For example, Beilock and Shell (1992 p.64) defined E-marketing as: "Marketing systems that use computer technology in some fashion".

Since E-marketing is part of E-business, a brief overview of the literature that discussed E-business education is important especially given that few efforts have been dedicated to studying E-marketing education.

3. From E-business to E-marketing

E-business emerged as a hot topic in the mid-1990s, academic institutions have responded to that with courses then degrees that addressed the needs of E-business growth. A review of the Marketing Edge website in 2016[2] showed that around 16 E-business related programs, including E-marketing and social media, are offered in American universities at both the postgraduate and undergraduate levels, which suggests that e-business programs are still in early stages when compared to other established business areas (e.g. operation management). In general, debates around E-business education and its future took two lines, one that considers E-business as a new paradigm, requiring the establishment of a separate degree program; the second line of thought is to infuse E-business throughout the traditional business curriculum (Bradbard, Robbins, Riddle, Grigsby, & Stuart, 2002). Another fierce debate within the education community concerns the appropriate balance between a technological emphasis and non-technical coursework. Previous Studies (e.g. Burkey, 2007; Fusilier & Durlabhji, 2010; Li, Yen, & Cheng, 2008) shows that on average there are more non-technical required business modules, than technically-oriented required ones in E-business programs.

Furthermore, the classical educational approach in which instructors discuss the topics specified in a course syllabus in class may raise some concerns due to the nature of E-business. More specifically, the rapidly changing and converging ICTs could make one planned topic/lecture meaningless or out of date if not updated frequently, sometimes on a monthly basis. That is why researchers suggest innovative ways in developing syllabi for E-business courses. For example, Tabor (2005) focused on using team projects in which students consult to small businesses and achieve learning through applying the theory to real life. McBride (2005) argued that dynamics of the "e" world require students to be active developer and deliverer of material role in a group environment, while the role of the instructor is to direct studies and provide support to student.

With regards to who offer E-business courses, it is easy to notice that E-business courses are offered mainly by business/ management schools. But some non-business departments, such as computer information systems, offer general E-business courses, these courses tend to be more technical in nature and focus on issues such as security and web design (Mehta et al. 2005). In addition, E-business courses are gaining increasing importance in departments that might be considered by many as far from the cyberspace. This is confirmed by Kotb et al. (2013) who argue that E-business courses should be included in accounting degrees to reflect changes in the business environment and to increase the employability of graduates.

E-marketing appeared on the surface shortly after E-business courses started to find room in business study plans. In 2001, the author had his first E-marketing teaching experience when he was asked to prepare a syllabus and material for a new course, at that time, called "Electronic Marketing". In these early days, Strauss, Mitchell, and Bennett (1999) identified common course topics and skills based on content analysis of marketing syllabi. Cognitive knowledge-based topics ranged from an introductory course to marketing mix applications in the online environment. Another effort by Mitchell and Strauss (2001) identified practitioner and academic views of the skills and topics important for E-commerce and E-marketing programs, these topic include: Web page and site design, Website marketing, server-side programming and management, telephony and videoconferencing, marketing strategy, macro-environmental issues, and information and networking strategies. Wymbs (2011) suggested that a radical redesign of the marketing curriculum in which the digital is at the centerfold. A recent effort by Brocato et al. (2015) analyzed social media courses in the United States and found large variation particularly in the areas of course title and reading materials. Brocato et al. (2015) further add that social media marketing education is still in its infancy.

To place this in better perspective, it should be noted that other marketing courses (e.g. marketing strategy and integrated marketing communications) tend also to vary a lot among universities (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2006). Nevertheless, we argue that the general structure of the topics that should be covered by E-marketing courses, particularly at the basic level, share a common core that will be explored in the following section.

4. Methodology and insights

A review of the literature was conducted to explore the possible approaches to analyze E-marketing courses and programs. One popular way is to study and compare courses syllabi in several universities (e.g. Crittenden & Crittenden, 2006; Payne,

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[2] Marketing Edge is the American non-profit organization that aims to acquaint professors and college students with the thriving business.

Whitfield, & Flynn, 2009; Wymbs, 2011). A second approach is to analyze the textbooks in specific area of study (e.g. Brown, Rynes, Charlier, & Hosmanek, 2013; Gueldenzoph, 2006; Rezaee, Lambert, & Ken Harmon, 2006). In this study, a decision was made to conduct an exhaustive content analysis of around 25 E-marketing textbooks to determine current cognitive knowledge topics of E-marketing courses. Analyzing the textbooks also allowed comparing how different editions of the same book evolved in terms of main topics and chapter titles. In addition, around 120 business school in different regions of the world were explored to identify what E-marketing courses and programs are offered. Analyzing universities internationally should provide a wider understanding of E-marketing education as it covers developed/hi-tech and developing countries.

With regards to books analysis, an attempt was made to select the established/popular E-marketing books which are offered by international publishers (e.g. Prentice Hall). The analysis focused on the title of the chapters and the topics covered in each of them, it also included the main E-marketing enabling technologies stated in the books. It should be noted that technical and training books were not considered in this analysis (e.g. Web Marketing for Dummies) since these books are rarely used in academia.

The analysis, summarized in Table 1, revealed interesting findings. One topic existed as a major title in all the books; this was E-marketing communication including social media marketing. Other classical topics that were discussed in details in the majority of the books include: E-marketing strategy, online consumer behavior, ECRM, e-product, e-price, search engine optimization, and E-marketing channels. Some of these topics had different names such as the online value (pricing), the online offer (product) … etc. Topics that appeared to a lesser extent include E-marketing environment, E-market strategies (segmentation, targeting, positioning), E-mail marketing; websites style and content. Some important topics/concepts were not found in dedicated chapters, for example, online branding/e-branding were under the product or social media marketing chapters.

The topics shown in Table 1, especially recent books, are recommended for general/introductory E-marketing courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. The extents to which such topics can be included depend mainly on the length and objective of the course. From a chronological perspective, the analysis revealed that the books which were published before the year 2000 focused on issues related to website development, security, and content. Also titles of the chapters, and in many cases the content, can be described as too simplistic or broad. For example, some chapters were dedicated to the diffusion of innovation theory or traditional telemarketing. This can be due to the newness of E-marketing at that time. On the other hand, recent books focus on new developments particularly online communities and E-marketing strategies. It was also interesting to analyze the development of one of the popular E-marketing books that gained a reputation throughout the years, which is "E-marketing" by Strauss and Frost. It was the only book to have more than six editions, which averages at around 2 years for every edition. The first edition of the book was entitled "Marketing on the Internet: Principles of online marketing". As the title suggest, it was dedicated to the internet. Following editions of the book incorporated other technologies and cover, as expected, in more depth issues related to E-marketing strategies.

The analysis also indicated that some topics of E-marketing have their own dedicated books, which suggest that such topics are becoming major subfields of E-marketing. More specifically, social media marketing is gaining popularity among academics as it appears from the number of books that discuss its concepts and practices in details. It was interesting to find out that one of the main publishers of academic textbooks (Pearson HE) has social media marketing as a main subcategory along with direct marketing and integrated marketing communications.

With regards to the second approach, around 120 business schools worldwide were explored in terms of E-marketing courses and programs offered in their curricula at both the postgraduate and undergraduate levels. The areas covered were mainly in developed countries. More specifically, the USA (50 school), Europe and Australia (50 school). Also, around 20 schools in other regions of the world were investigated; mainly China, Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The school selection process took into consideration the ranking/reputation of the school.[3] It is noteworthy that the majority of the business schools in this study particularly in the USA are AACSB accredited while some of the international school are associated with AACSB. In the latter case, they are accredited by national bodies in their respected countries. Also, only schools that offer their programs in English were investigated.

Each school website was checked for the E-marketing courses offered in their curriculum and the title used for these courses. The results showed that the majority of schools (around 70%) offer E-marketing courses in their study plans. The majority of the rest (around 30%), did not dedicate a specific course for E-marketing, however, they still offered more general courses such as E-business or E-commerce, which normally include basic E-marketing topics. The investigation also showed that E-marketing and digital marketing are the most popular titles for the course. More specifically, the title E-marketing is more popular outside the United States, especially in developing countries, but social media marketing is catching up as a title. The results are summarized in Table 2.

Some interesting insights included finding universities that offer more than one E-marketing related course in their undergraduate curriculum, for example, Northern Illinois University offers two E-marketing courses namely: internet marketing and interactive marketing technology. Similarly, Bond University offers Internet and Social Media Marketing course in addition to a course called digital and direct marketing. Some universities combined E-business and E-marketing in one course, for example, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University in china used a long title "E-business systems and E-marketing".

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[3] Websites such as http://www.forbes.com/business-schools/list/ and http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/ was used to ensure that accredited schools in each region are represented in the selection process.

Table 1
Major topics of E-marketing, analysis popular[a] of text books.

Book author/year	E-marketing environment	Online consumer behavior	ECRM	E-marketing strategy	Online communities	Product	Pricing	Distribution	Communications	Social media marketing	Others
E-marketing. Strauss and Frost (2014)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	* Ethical/legal issues * Global E-marketing * E-marketing research
Internet marketing: integrating online and offline strategies. Roberts and Zahay (2013)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	* Social/Regulatory Issues * Direct and Database Foundations * Mobile marketing
Digital marketing: strategy, implementation and practice. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2012)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	* B2B practices
E-marketing: theory and application. Dann and Dann (2011)		*	*	*	*	*one chapter			*	*	* Mobile commerce
Get up to speed with online marketing. Reed (2011)				*	*				*	*	* websites style/content
Understanding digital marketing. Ryan and Jones (2009)					*				*	*	* websites style/content
E-marketing excellence: planning and optimizing your digital marketing. Chaffey and Smith (2008)	*	*		*		*one chapter			*	*	* E-models
E-marketing. Strauss, El-Ansary, and Frost (2006)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	* Ethical/legal issues * E-marketing research * E-markets strategies
Electronic marketing: integrating electronic resources into the marketing process. Reedy and Schullo (2004)		*	*	*		*			*		* Security issues * Ethical/legal issues * E- Market strategies
Digital marketing strategy: text and cases. Urban (2004)	*	*		*		*	*one chapter		*		* E- Market strategies
Electronic marketing: theory and practice for the twenty-first century. O'Connor et al. (2004)		*	*			*	*	*	*		* E-marketing research * Database marketing * E-models
Internet marketing. Cox and Koelzer (2003)	*					*		*	*		* E-market strategist * Email marketing
E-marketing: capitalizing on technology. Kleindl (2001)		*		*	*				*		* Diffusion of innovation * websites style/content * Telemarketing
E-marketing. Collin (2000)						*	*		*		* Database marketing
Marketing on the Internet: principles of online marketing. Strauss and Frost (1999)		*	*	*		*	*one chapter		*		* E-marketing research

*Updated from Shaltoni (2011).

[a] The popularity of the selected textbooks was based on the ratings provided by major online retailers such as amazon.com and the author's teaching and researching experience in the field of E-marketing.

Table 2
Summary of the schools that offer basic E-marketing courses in their study plans and the titles used for these courses.

Business schools[a] by region	Digital marketing %	E-marketing %	Internet marketing %	Total	Other titles
United States	40%	34%	26%	100%	• Social media marketing
Europe (mainly UK) and Australia	33%	40%	27%	100%	• Direct marketing and the internet
China and MENA	10%	60%	30%	100%	• Retailing and ecommerce
					• Online marketing

[a] Only those that offer dedicated E-marketing courses in their study plans.

In addition, few schools offered E-marketing dedicated programs (8 out of the 120 schools investigated). For example, Full Sail University (Internet Marketing, BSc), Ashford University (E-marketing, BA), Bellevue University (Digital Marketing Degree, BSc), Middlesex University (Master in E-marketing and Social Media), Florida Tech University (MBA in Internet Marketing), University of Denver (New media and internet marketing, Master concentration). These programs tend to cover different topics of E-marketing in dedicated courses. The investigation showed that most popular courses in these programs are: social media marketing, mobile marketing, digital marketing communications including E-mail and search marketing, E-commerce, special topics in E-marketing (i.e. legal issues), in addition to the standard marketing and E-business courses (i.e. introduction to marketing and E-business, consumer behavior, marketing research, marketing strategy; E-commerce …. etc). Technical courses were also found in the programs particularly the undergraduate ones, the most popular were introduction to programming and databases, web design and analytic.

Finally, the analysis confirmed that the overwhelming majority of E-marketing programs are offered in marketing or general business administration departments. Few schools followed a different path by establishing dedicated department. For example, Sumaya University in Jordan established E-marketing and social media department. Others decided to offer E-marketing programs as an interdisciplinary major that combines two departments. For example, Western Michigan University has an "E-business marketing" degree that is run by the department of Business Information Systems (BIS) and department of marketing.

5. Implications, limitations and future research

This study aims at better understanding of how E-marketing courses and programs are evolving in academia. The growing number of E-marketing courses, programs and related textbooks demonstrate that E-marketing education is going through a transitional period. From simply focusing on internet technologies to a wide spectrum of converging ICTs. From being an introductory course in general marketing programs, or even part of E-commerce/E-business course, to more than one course or even a complete E-marketing program at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Whether it is called digital marketing, internet marketing or social media marketing, the analysis in this study and the information provided by education-related organizations confirms that E-marketing education is here to stay and grow, most probably using the title "digital marketing". The topics covered by E-marketing courses vary among universities, the main reason is the "e-dilemma" presented earlier in this paper. Nevertheless, the study found that most E-marketing introductory courses share a common structure that focuses on the following topics: E-marketing environment, E-marketing mix particularly communications and social media marketing, E-marketing strategy, and online consumer behavior. Such topics can be designated as electives in business programs/concentrations to provide flexibility for interested students. The same courses can be considered as core in E-marketing and E-business degrees. In addition, it was found that social media marketing is becoming a cornerstone in E-marketing education and will continue to be so in the near future.

The findings of this study should be applied with care primarily because E-marketing is changing rapidly. New "breakthrough technologies" appear on the surface almost on a yearly basis or less, these technologies bring with them new practices and strategies that will continue to change how E-marketing is labeled and delivered to students. It is noteworthy that the methods and techniques used in teaching E-marketing (i.e. using google online marketing challenge to practice AdWords) are beyond the scope of this study. Furthermore, although exhaustive work was made to select textbooks based on their popularity, some relevant books might have been missed due to language differences (not in English) or the inability to get access to the book. Another limitation is related to the focus of the study, which was mainly on general E-marketing topics and not specific courses that can be targeted to postgraduates or undergraduate E-business and marketing degrees (e.g. ECRM or social media marketing). These developing topics will over time require dedicated analysis of content and methods of delivery.

Future research should further investigate the detailed content of E-marketing courses syllabi, rather than main topics in textbooks. This could be done through conducting surveys/interviews of academics/practitioners and content analysis of E-marketing course syllabi in reputable universities worldwide. Future research may also analyze the methods used in teaching E-marketing courses at different levels. Overall, the continuous growth in E-marketing technologies and strategies has created a productive dialog among scholar regarding the developments in business and management education. This effort provides directional clues and insights.

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