

AN ANALYSIS OF E-BUSINESS RESEARCH TOPICS

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Abstract

Due to its interdisciplinary nature and its pace in penetrating into various facets of everyday activities, e-business has become an increasingly popular topic over the last two decades. While early 1990s e-business research grounded in ICT (information communication technology) theories covered topics such as, internal systems capabilities, adoption, and technology investments' impact on success, the new millennium with the dot.com crash, witnessed a flux of interest in performance management, value creation and strategy formulation. Related intellectual capital literature grew, accompanied by technology mergers and acquisitions underscoring the need for valuing "digital capital". This entire technological craze in adopting to change is necessitating the adoption of a futuristic vision on part of professionals and academicians. This paper attempts to offer a roadmap for interdisciplinary scholars by providing insight of what has been studied so far in e-business research, what topics face extinction due to technological advancement and what the future beholds for us in this realm. Its distinctiveness lies in its use of an integrated methodology combining broad literature review (spanning through the almost two decade-long lifetime of e-business literature between the years 1995-2013) and content analysis of 41 global e-business events organized by prominent academic and professional institutions in 2013. The trilingual (Turkish, English and German) keyword search process used in reaching current event information and the translation of such into English, may spearhead future studies of this kind. To the best of the knowledge at hand, this study is the first to provide a comprehensive literature review of past e-business research from a generalist perspective and utilize practitioners' event as a tool for forecasting future research topics.

Keywords: E-Business, E-Commerce, E-Business Research Topics, Emerging Topics in E-Business

1 INTRODUCTION AND AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study rests on the premise that e-business research, more so than any other topic in business literature, is facing the challenge of renewing itself at the flying speed of the internet. Digital agility, flexibility in adopting to change coupled with a futuristic vision are presenting themselves as vitally necessary skills, not only for professionals, but also, for academicians. The difficulties that academic studies face due to the dynamic and quickly exhaustive nature of e-business topics are not new the research world. Some obstacles to high-quality e-commerce research are still valid today like the rapid change characterizing the distortion of terminology and data. Drew (2002) expands these examples underscoring the lack of familiarity with e-commerce technologies by many management scholars and the lack of established instruments and research approaches. This paper attempts to offer a roadmap for interdisciplinary scholars by providing insight of what has been studied so far in e-business research, what topics face extinction due to technological advancement and what the future beholds for us in this realm. Its distinctiveness lies in its use of an integrative methodology combining broad literature review (spanning through the almost two decade-long lifetime of e-business literature) and content analysis. The trilingual keyword search process used in reaching current event information and the translation of such into English may spearhead future studies of this kind. Furthermore, to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to provide a comprehensive literature review of past e-business research from a generalist perspective.

2 METHODOLOGY

An in-depth literature review of 55 journals published between the years 1995 and 2013 has been undertaken from which 300 studies have been selected. The selection criteria of these studies have primarily been keyword searches such as "e-commerce, e-business, and internet". Furthermore the agendas of most recent conferences surrounding the "e" - theme have been analyzed.

Table 1 below presents a list of the journals passing these selection criteria and their respective VHB-JOURQUAL2 ("VHB-Score") ranking scores:

Table 1. List of Selected Journals

	Name of Journal	VHB - Score
1	Academy of Management Journal	(A+)
2	Business Horizons	(E)
3	Computers in Human Behavior	(none)
4	Computers in Industry	(D)
5	Decision Support Systems	(B)
6	Electronic Commerce Research and Applications	(C)
7	E-Business Research	(none)
8	Electronic Markets	(C)
9	Electronic Notes in Theoretical Computer Science	(none)
10	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	(A)
11	EuroMed Journal of Business	(none)
12	European Journal of Marketing	(C)
13	European Management Journal	(C)
14	Expert Systems with Applications	(none)
15	Government Information Quarterly	(none)
16	Harvard Business Review	(D)
17	Information & Management	(none)
18	Information Management & Computer Security	(none)
19	Information Systems Journal	(B)
20	International Journal of Business Performance Management	(D)
21	International Journal of E-Business Research	(none)
22	International Journal of E-Entrepreneurship and Innovation	(none)
23	International Journal of Human-Computer Studies	(none)
24	International Journal of Information Management	(C)
25	International Journal of Network Management	(none)
26	International Journal of Operations & Production Management	(none)
27	International J. of Productivity and Performance Management	(D)
28	Internet Research	(none)
29	Investment Management and Financial Innovations	(none)
30	Journal of Air Transport Management	(none)
31	Journal of American Academy of Business	(none)
32	Journal of Business Research	(B)
33	Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication	(none)
34	Journal of Interactive Marketing	(none)
35	Journal of Internet Commerce	(none)
36	Journal of Management	(none)
37	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	(C)
38	Journal of Systems and Software	(none)
39	Journal of Technology Management in China	(none)
40	Latin American Business Review	(none)
41	Long Range Planning	(B)
42	New Media & Society	(none)
43	Online Information Review	(none)
44	Performance Evaluation	(none)
45	Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences	(none)
46	Production and Operations Management	(A)
47	Research Policy	(A)
48	Small Business Economics	(C)
49	Strategic Management Journal	(none)
50	Technological Forecasting and Social Change	(B)
51	Technology in Society	(none)

52	The Journal of Strategic Information Systems	(none)
53	Theoretical Issues in Ergonomics Science	(none)
54	Tourism Management Perspectives	(none)
55	Tourism Management Perspectives	(none)

The bulk of journals from which the keyword searches returned matching articles, either have a low score or are not ranked at all. This implies that themes related to e-business are not addressed as much in higher ranking journals as they are presented in others. For instance, a keyword (e-business, e-commerce) search in the A-rated journal, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, returned no relevant results. Similarly, the keyword search “internet” in the same journal, returned three relevant results, only two (Kuratko & Mathews, 2004), (Drori, Honig, & Shaeffer, 2009) of which contained the words “internet firm” in their title and can’t be categorized as generalist papers in the realm of our present study. Similarly, the A+ rated *Academy of Management Journal*, contained no article with e-commerce or e-business in its title. The *International Journal of E-Business Research*, a journal, like its title suggests, geared towards research in this specific domain, also lacks a comprehensive literature review.

Drew (2002), in an effort to establish a research agenda, lists 10 significant research issues studied thus far. His list was put together through the investigation of literature spanning the years 1995 to 2002 and the author’s own professional and personal experiences. As a result, the author determines the surprising lack of studies on governance and corporate social responsibility in e-business. Drew also points out that e-business models should be studied from a more holistic point of view and pinpoints the necessity to study leadership characteristics required to manage in hypercompetitive and fast environments. Ngai & Wat (2002), simply in search for a definition and domain of e-commerce, present a literature review of 275 journal articles that have appeared in nine journals during 1993-1999. Their classification criteria consist of four relatively broad categories: application areas, technological issues, support and implementation. The authors remark that e-commerce research is sure to increase, that new methods or standards addressing problems related to public policy, taxation, regulation and privacy should be developed and emphasizes the lack of papers describing technical e-commerce standards. Rowley (2006) gathers a review of conceptual perspectives on the role and nature of e-service and the e-service experience, which in essence, is about the commercial aspect of e-business as we understand it today. The author gives an extensive account of quality dimensions mentioned in previous related literature. However, this study is concentrated more around the retail aspect of the “e”. Sukumar, Edgar & Grant (2011), in their empirical paper investigating e-business risks of UK SMEs, give a comprehensive summary of e-business risk related literature. However, this paper does not classify as a generalist e-business review either. Lambert (2002) reviews the e-commerce literature to determine the meaning of the term “business model” and presents various definitions of the e-business model. Similarly, this study is not comparable to the present one in its nature and scope. Adolphs & Winkelmann (2010) review 42 articles published during 2000-2008, on the topics e-commerce product personalization and website personalization. The authors identify three categories of personalization e-commerce research; implementation, theoretical foundations and user centric aspects. Rather than categorization per se, their research focuses on “the methodology of retrieving relevant literature in personalization e-commerce”. The methodological approach where the authors use the journal rankings database VHB-JOURQUAL 2.1 is what sets the Adolphs and Winkelmann study apart from the other literature reviews in this domain. Meckel et. al.(2004), provide a taxonomy describing e-business adoption and the use of business and e-business strategies of SMEs and suggest that SMEs need careful planning prior to e-business adoption. Gupta, Koulamas, & Kyparisis (2009) review diverse research material during 1992-2008 related to e-business and in the particular area of production and operations management. The absence of specialist journals in e-business is addressed by Lee, Hwang, & Kim (2007), who examine the trend towards multidisciplinary authorship and research methods in electronic commerce. Wang & Chen (2010), on the other hand, in their review encompassing the years 1999-2008, classify published e-commerce articles in relation to academic fields. According to the authors, engineering research is the major contributor of articles in this field, whereas business and management studies amount to merely 13%.

Table 2 provides a classification of previous e-business/ e-commerce related studies grouped according to their main subject:

Table 2. Classification of Past Studies

I. E-Business Strategy or E-Business Website	(Weltevreden & Boschma, 2008), (Spillan, Parnell, & Virzi, 2011), (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2009), (Stace, Holtham, & Courtney, 2004), (Acharya, Kagan, Lingam, & Gray, 2008), (Harison & Boonstra, 2008), (Straub, Hoffman, Weber, & Steinfield, 2002), (Palmer, 2002), (Stefani &
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Performance and Measurement / E-Metrics	Xenos, 2009), (Ghandour, Benwell, & Deans, 2010), (Bremser & Chung, 2006), (Michopoulou & Buhalis, 2008), (Barua, Konana, Whinston, & Yin, 2001), (Hoffman & Novak, 1996), (Phippen, Sheppard, & Furnell, 2004), (Calero, Ruiz, & Piattini, 2005), (Barua et al., 2001), (Mehta & Sivadas, 1995), (Straub & Watson, 2001)
II. Strategy – Organizational Change - Adoption	(Rayport & Sviokla, 1995), (Porter, 2001), (Hambrick & Fredrickson, 2001), (Wang & Lin, 2009), (Ghilic-Micu & Mircea, 2007), (Jelassi & Enders, 2005), (Ha & Forgionne, 2009), (Mohammadian, Pursultani, & Akhgar, 2010), (Hu, Wan, Ye, & Liu, 2012), (Huang & Benyoucef, 2012), (Chu & Smithson, 2007), (Li & Xie, 2012), (Min & Wolfenbarger, 2005)
III. Success/ Criteria/ Capabilities	(Volery & Lord, 2000), (Sung, 2006), (Ramanathan, 2010), (Eikebrokk & Olsen, 2007), (Sebora, Lee, & Sukasame, 2008), (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2009), (Zhu, 2004), (Ding & Li, 2010), (Wu & Liu, 2010), (Pandya & Dholakia, 2005), (Kuo, Yen, & Chen, 2011), (Korgaonkar & O’Leary, 2006)
IV. IS & Success/ Value Generation/ Performance	(Wang, 2008), (Licker, 2001), (Delone & Mclean, 2003), (Petter, Delone, & Mclean, 2008), (Chang, Chang, Ho, Yen, & Chiang, 2011), (Brown & Jayakody, 2009), (Liu & Arnett, 2000), (D’Ambra & Rice, 2001), (Hall et al., 2008), (Soto-Acosta & Meroño-Cerdan, 2008), (Zhu et al., 2004), (Wheeler, Colbert, & Freeman, 2003), (Marr, Schiuma, & Neely, 2002), (Oppong, Yen, & Merhout, 2005), (Helms et al., 2008), (Holsapple & Singh, 2000), (Zwass, 2010)
V. Website Success & Quality	(Madeja & Schoder, 2002), (Schaupp, Fan, & Belanger, 2006), (Hernández, Jiménez, & Martín, 2009), (Thorleuchter & Van den Poel, 2012), (Lee & Kozar, 2006), (Lee & Kozar, 2012), (Rocha, 2012), (González & Palacios, 2004), (Loiacono, Chen, & Goodhue, 2002), (Chen, Hsu, & Lin, 2010), (Ji-shun, 2010), (Liao, Proctor, & Salvendy, 2009), (Smith, 2008), (López & Ruiz, 2011), (Torrente et al., 2013), (Chen et al., 2010), (Schubert & Leimstoll, 2001), (Ji-shun, 2010), (Lazarinis, 2007)
VI. E- Business Models	(Amit & Zott, 2001), (Zott, Amit, & Massa, 2011), (Amit & Zott, 2012), (Teece, 2010), (Zhang, Williams, & Polychronakis, 2012), (Chen, 2003), (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2002), (Sharma & Gutiérrez, 2010), (Ghezzi, Balocco, & Rangone, 2010), (Sun, et al., Lambert, 2002)
VII. Trust & Success	(Srinivasan, 2004), (Urban, Amyx, & Lorenzon, 2009), (Velmurugan, 2009), (Zhang et al., 2011), (Reichheld & Schefter, 2000), (Yoo, Sanders, & Moon, 2013)
VIII. Innovation	(Lin & Hsia, 2011), (Zhao, 2006), (Hasan & Harris, 2009), (Soto-Acosta, Loukis, Colomo-Palacios, & Lytras, 2010), (Lin & Hsia, 2011), (Kauffman, Srivastava, & Vayghan, 2012), (Zwass, 2003)
IX. Globalization, Stock Market, Intellectual Capital	(Wagdy, 2002), (Park & Mezas, 2005), (Namvar, Gholamian, & Khakabi, 2009), (Gholamian et al., 2010), (Tapscott, et al., 2000)

While these are more IT and technology-oriented papers there are only a few focusing on the stock market, internationalization and intellectual capital. Similarly, there is no empirical work on the valuation of digital capital. In light of this literature review it can be concluded that since Drew’s study (2002) there is no published paper providing a summary and classification of past studies related to e-business research from a generalist perspective. Apart from the present literature review, a content analysis of the agendas of 41 global e-business events organized by prominent academic and professional institutions in 2013, featured the hot topics of the year. Two popular search engines (Google and Yandex) were chosen and keywords¹ in three languages (Turkish, English and German) were used to search for announcements of upcoming (2013/2014) academic and professional conferences/ summits/ seminars and fairs. Keywords were

¹ In English (International E-Business Conference, e-business conference 2013, e-commerce conference 2013, e-commerce summit, Digital Business Conference 2013), in German (E-Business Konferenz), in Turkish (E-Ticaret 2013/ Dijital Zirve –Konferans- seminer-etkinlik)

generated at the author's discretion. Related content displayed in local language was translated into English by a certified translator. The rationale of choosing these particular languages was as follows: According to a recent study conducted by Deloitte and Touche comprising of top 200 online retailers and 8 European countries, Turkey was ranked as top performer in fulfillment (place orders, manage orders, payments, shipping details, shipping and fulfillment, customer service) and extended capabilities (personalization and recommendations, multi-channel, globalization, mobile commerce, social media integration, rich content. Germany, after France, ranked second on the storefront dimension (user management, catalog, product search, user experience, shopping cart). (R. Van den Hoef, 2012). English, as universal language and English-speaking countries with UK and the US paving the way for innovations in e-commerce, was the obvious first choice. Some keyword searches in Turkish and German resulted in content generated directly in English.

3 RESULTS

It is evident that the lack of research in governance and ethics issues in past research, that Drew (2002) discovered ten years ago, still holds true today. This study also substantiates the argument by Athanassakos (2007), who asserts that there are very few studies on corporate valuation of e-businesses. Also, the finance literature does not contain much notable research on the stock market's response to e-business mergers and the technology crash, except for a couple of studies (Park & Mezias, 2005). Another interesting but neglected area, is that of intellectual capital in the e-business context. Although Tapscott et al. (2000) coined the term "digital capital" in the year 2000, its first use in an empirical study has been five years later in reference to employment websites (Liu & Chen, 2005). The subsequent year an empirical study has been conducted on digital capital indicators in the Taiwanese Banking sector (Chang, 2006). Another Taiwanese study related to the value creation potential of intellectual capital in the digital capital industry has been published only recently (Hsiung & Wang, 2012). To the author's best knowledge, the only study related directly to e-business models and intellectual (or digital) capital is a conference proceeding published by (Gholamian et al., 2010). Table 3 provides a condensed overview of emerging trends "T" and still popular themes "ST".

Table 3. Condensed Overview of Emerging Trends "T" and Still Popular Themes "ST"

T1	The Internet of Things "IoT"	ST1	Consolidation / Investments
T2	E-Collaboration	ST2	Conversion rate optimization (CRO)
T3	Responsive Design, User Experience	ST3	SEO, Google Adwords, Social Search
T4	Multichannel Digital Marketing	ST4	Business Model Evolution
T5	Content Marketing, Emotional Marketing	ST5	Social media – social networking
T6	Real-Time Personalization	ST6	Regulation and Taxation
T7	Internationalization & Global Retail	ST7	Intellectual Property and Innovation
T8	Analytics & Web Mining	ST8	Big Data
T9	Applications	ST9	Security, Trust & Protection
T10	Careers in E-business	ST10	Green and Environmental E-Business

4 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The digital revolution with all its novelties and challenges, will force researchers to re-evaluate their respective past studies. For instance, the very popular sub-topic of e-business strategy; "e-business models" will now need to be updated to encompass seamless integration of multi-channels. Papers on "critical success factors" and "key drivers in e-commerce" call for re-investigation in light of the social network explosion. The performance and e-metrics literature will be deemed incomplete without development of methodologies for measuring the power and impact of social commerce. The growing abundance of big data and how to best analyze and utilize it remains a key question across disciplines. In the human resources and career development domain, next to search engine marketers, content creators, advertising specialists, social media experts and digital marketers, the demand for social site engineers is rising. Website quality literature, still a very hot topic, will be expanded to encompass topics such as continuous optimization techniques, content management, responsive design and seamless integration of devices. E-business strategy and company performance will be parceled out ("attribution measurement") to differentiate correctly between the sources of streams of revenue from organizational, web, digital, mobile, social, company, and product-based strategies. The semantic web and web mining topics popular since the mid-2000s (Stumme et. al., 2006), remain popular. WEB 2.0-intensive literature will soon be replaced with research in the Web

3.0 domain, where researchers will tackle the task of how to know what the consumer thinks, wants and feels. Along the same lines, curated shopping will be extended with emotion triggering features to establish closer bonds with the customer. On the theoretical side, e-business still lacks its own theoretical framework. The resource and knowledge based views serving as major theoretical explanation to many research papers in the e-business and IT realm will need to be supplemented with new approaches using features of social psychology and consumer behavior theories to explain the ultimate power of the “prosumer”.

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