



E-Commerce Education in China: Driving Forces, Status, and Strategies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With an explosive growth of e-businesses worldwide, e-commerce in China is booming, leading to the development of e-commerce education. This paper is intended to investigate whether the education system in China accords well with the market demand and the status of e-commerce programs in China in order to seek strategies for China to cope with the challenges of global e-commerce empowered by fast updated information technologies. First, we construct a four-layer conceptual model to describe the relevant factors influencing e-commerce and e-commerce education. We then present the status of China's e-commerce education in different educational categories. Although we find that current problems in China's e-commerce education can be resorted in quantity and quality aspects, it generally is on the right track. Finally, we propose several main strategies for promoting the development of e-commerce education, in which the education system reformation is top priority and in which the government will play a critical role.

Keywords: e-commerce strategy; education; conceptual model; cultural differences

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of e-commerce imposes an increasing demand for professionals who possess the knowledge of conducting businesses in this fast-evolving electronic marketplace (Brin, 1999). In order to cope with the ever-increasing demand in e-commerce education in the last decade, the education system has undergone a structural evolution in many countries. Taking the U.S. as an example, by February 2001, 15 schools offered master programs in e-business related majors, 39 schools issued master's degrees with a concentra-

tion in e-business, 17 schools had certificate programs in e-commerce, and seven schools furnished undergraduate programs in e-business (Krovi & Vijayaraman, 2001). In fact, e-commerce courses or the courses covering issues in e-commerce are common in colleges in the U.S. and Europe.

E-commerce education also has developed rapidly in China during the recent years, owing to the booming e-businesses with an explosively growing participant population connected by constantly expanding Internet capacity. By July 2003, the number of Internet users in China reached

68 million, ranked as the second largest in the world next to the U.S. (UNCTAD, 2002). The popularization of the Internet in China, which is reinforced by the ubiquitous wireless network, provides huge e-commerce opportunities for China as well as the world. To further promote e-commerce, China has drawn an ambitious e-commerce education plan for its 1.3 billion people. Since 2000, various e-commerce programs have been established in many Chinese universities.¹

According to a citation in *People's Daily* (2003), the official Chinese medium, there will be more than 2,000,000 e-commerce related positions to be filled in the next 10 years, while currently there are only about 100,000 staff members working in e-businesses. Specifically, the impacts of e-commerce on the education in China are not only in the aggregate demand for e-commerce professionals, but also in the content of the educational programs. Underpinned by Internet technology, e-commerce has actually made the marketplace more globally accessible. This, in turn, stimulates the need for the education of e-commerce in all areas of business administration information systems and technology, management, marketing, finance, organizational design, and so forth with the increasing requests for the knowledge of different political, economic, and cultural systems (Hromadka, 2000).

Currently, China's education system is confronted with increasing pressures from internationalized e-businesses. Consequently, issues arise: could the current education system and e-commerce programs accord well with what schools have committed? What are the key strategies for coping with the challenges from global e-commerce empowered by fast updated information technologies? This paper is intended to tackle these two questions based

on the investigation of the factors driving e-commerce education in China. The organization of this paper is as follows: section 2 discusses the driving forces of e-commerce education in China; section 3 presents an overall picture of China's e-commerce education; section 4 analyzes the internal problems; finally, a number of strategic suggestions are proposed in section 5 as the concluding remarks.

DRIVING FORCES OF E-COMMERCE EDUCATION IN CHINA

E-Commerce Education Research

So far, e-commerce education research has been mostly case-oriented and commonly stressed curriculum design. A typical curriculum proposal for the graduate program in e-commerce is based on an e-commerce reference model composed of business level, customer-behavior level, and IT-resource level (Menascé, 2000). In general, e-commerce education is the extension of existing programs by adding extra courses. For example, Jenkins (2000) proposed that four courses with e-commerce concentration were needed in the program (two required courses and two electives), whereas Cloete (2002) suggested that the course settings should conform to the nation's development. Therefore, it is understandable that e-commerce has been a specific program in many universities in China and provides curricula at different levels (Yang, 2003).

In comparison, relatively less research has been conducted regarding the impacts of social, economic and cultural factors on the curriculum of e-commerce. Words on the driving forces of e-commerce

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