

Review Article

The Role of E-Marketing in Improving the Ranking of Higher Education Institutions (An Applied Study on Syrian Universities)

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Abstract - This research aimed to determine the position of Syrian Universities in the world rankings and determine the role of e-marketing in improving the ranking of Syrian universities, in light of the Standards of world ranking systems and their reflection on the elements of the e-marketing mix. The research followed to reach those goals the descriptive approach. Data was collected from world rankings sites and a sample of 396 respondents who have distributed a questionnaire. In the results, we found out the great decline in the ranking of Syrian universities, due to the lack of basic e-marketing mix elements on the websites of these universities on the Internet, and their lack of interest in the most important and central criterion within these world rankings is the standard of scientific research. Therefore, the most prominent proposals were going to translate scientific research of faculty members and students into English and its continuous publication and pay attention to websites' design and security for Syrian universities and the services and information.

Keywords - E-Marketing, E-Marketing Mix, World Universities Rankings, Webometrics, Websites.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the great development that humanity is witnessing, interest in higher education is increasing. With a large number of universities globally, competition among these institutions has become more intense, not only to attract students but also to honor distinguished faculty members worldwide. Accordingly, the need for establishing academic bodies that specialize in monitoring and controlling the quality and excellence of universities has appeared. Moreover, the idea of World rankings of universities, as a modern concept, began—especially at the beginning of the last century. The emergence of this trend necessarily led to an interest in marketing these universities to show each university's advantages and improve its ranking Worldly. Indeed, the electronic marketing of universities represents the

initial stage of increasing a university's productivity levels. It is also the starting point of devising modern and diverse methods for promoting a university's activities and services. Therefore, the idea of ranking is considered the most important mechanism that is capable of maximizing the value of university services to its beneficiaries. Accordingly, this research focused on studying electronic marketing and its role in improving the World ranking of Syrian universities.

After an exploratory tour conducted by the researcher to examine the websites of Syrian universities on the Internet, and after assessing the results of the most prominent World university rankings, the researcher found that Syrian universities only appear on the Webometrics ranking among all World rankings. Interviewing a number of students and university officials revealed a unanimous agreement on the important role that the university website plays on the Internet. In addition, these interviews confirmed the existence of many problems in the websites of Syrian universities regarding design and content. Furthermore, the frequent disruptions of these sites during the browsing process, and the great decline in the rankings of Syrian universities, regionally and internationally have led to the formulation of the following research questions:

- What is the role that e-marketing plays in improving the university rankings?
- What is the relative importance of the e-marketing mix elements in improving the universities' rankings?
- What are the most prominent World rankings for higher education institutions?
- What are the standards upon which these rankings are based?
- What is the position of Syrian universities within these rankings?
- What are the main reasons for the decline of Syrian universities within these ranking systems?



A. Importance of Research and Its Objectives

E-marketing is one of the contemporary variables that has garnered increased interest in recent times, especially in higher education. The importance of e-marketing for university services is the result of its role in enhancing educational services and improving the ranking of higher education institutions worldwide. This process is particularly effective if it is properly managed, and its stages are applied with care.

The practical importance of this research lies: in its concentration on highlighting the elements of the e-marketing mix available on the websites of Syrian universities. Reviewing the World rankings of the websites of Syrian universities, and comparing them with the sites of other Arab and international counterparts, helps with finding defects that impact the improvement of the websites of Syrian universities Worldly. Accordingly, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- We are determining the current reality of Syrian universities in world rankings.
- We are determining the elements of the e-marketing mix available on the websites of Syrian universities.
- We are determining the weaknesses and defects in the electronic marketing mix elements for Syrian universities' websites.
- They are determining the most prominent World rankings and their standards.
- Proposing solutions to improve the World ranking of Syrian universities

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study's view is that electronic marketing for higher education institutions has become an inevitable necessity, given successive technological development. In addition, the study posits that electronic marketing for higher education institutions is essential since it is the sixth stage of the intellectual development of marketing. This observation is particularly significant, given the fact that e-marketing is an integral part of the World communication network, the Internet, which is one of the most important technological developments in the current era; this technological dynamic of e-marketing has a direct impact on the customer, the marketer, and the markets (Ramas, 2017). The e-marketing of educational services is one of the most important gates of enhancing a university's value—especially in offering marketers all aspects of marketing activities related to academic services. Indeed, such dynamics encompass conducting marketing research studies, electronically establishing strategic planning for university services, designing websites, pricing, and distribution. E-marketing also includes promoting university-related services, forming and supporting relationships with beneficiaries electronically, and meeting a university's marketing objectives (Hussein et al., 2019).

Consequently, the interest in marketing university-related educational services has become necessary for the continuation and the survival of educational institutions in all of their specialties and fields. This is the case because of the importance of e-marketing in meeting customers' expectations, achieving institutional goals, and increasing the competitiveness of higher educational institutions in the current academic environment (Al-Ruby, 2018). As a result of this competitive environment, most universities that aim to improve their image and reputation seek to adopt the standards set by the most reputable international universities' ranking standards. These ranking standards have become the benchmark that indicates the quality of scientific research conducted at these universities. Therefore, in recent years, an increasing number of countries worldwide have adopted national plans and allocated significant budgets to improve the rankings of their universities Worldly (Tariq, 2020).

A. Search Terms and Procedural Definitions

The current research contains a set of terms and keywords; they were methodically chosen and reviewed to meet the needs of this study:

a) E-Marketing

Kotler and Armstrong (2006) defined e-marketing as a collective body of efforts and activities to market products and build relationships with customers on the Internet. E-marketing, as a general concept, indicates that it is marketing that uses any of the available electronic means—including television, radio, and electronic road signs. The term e-marketing, which widely circulates in the economic literature, refers, according to (Ghadeer 2017), to Internet-based marketing because this network is the latest and most advanced digital platform. More recently, universities have shifted from being isolated academic organizations to actual businesses that compete for common groups of clients, so their websites have become pivotal to market these universities and their services (Weideman, 2013).

b) Websites

A website is defined: as a group of interconnected pages, texts, images, and video clips that operate according to a coherent and interactive structure, which aims to display and describe information about a party or an organization in a manner that is not limited by time or place, and through a unique address that distinguishes it from the rest of the sites on the Internet (Qazan and Fatima, 2016). Assuming that universities constitute a brand of educational marketing, a university's website appears as an important part of this marketing process (Aggarwal and Singla, 2017). This study posits that a university's website is a group of files that occupy a space that a university has reserved within a server (usually affiliated with the university) to create an integrated content that contains information, offers activities, and provides services to the university's audience: administrators, professors, and students (Riyab and Quddy, 2016; Liu et al., 2014).

c) World Universities Rankings

"World rankings are a tool for comparing multidimensional academic and—mainly—research work undertaken at universities in recent years" (Giannakouloupoulos et al., 2019, P 3). Especially at the scientific and literary levels. Such comparisons factor on the Internet as sources that offer large amounts of documents, such as statistics and questionnaires distributed to scholars, professors, experts, and other criteria. It is also defined as a minimum level of educational research conducted at a university—a criterion by which the specialized international organizations assess and rank universities (Abbas, 2020). This study defines the World ranking of universities as lists of higher education organizations arranged in descending order. According to standards and criteria established by specialized academic centres, this order evaluates these organizations—centres that factor in the minimum scientific and electronic conditions required for these organizations to be productive and successful. These academic centres are also responsible for ranking higher learning institutions and sharing these rankings through the issuance of annual reports.

d) Electronic Marketing Mix

According to the development of marketing processes, research, and the expert opinions of thinkers and researchers, the marketing mix has gone through a number of stages. The elements of the e-marketing mix constitute the third stage of this process; Researchers in the field of electronic marketing, including Abu Fara (2007); Sabbagh (2016); and Ghadeer (2017), agree that the elements of the electronic marketing mix can be expressed as follows:

Site Design: Website design is one of the most important elements of the electronic marketing mix. It is the true default phase of the marketing process, including the outlet for distribution, packaging, and contracting. Furthermore, the site's design is of great importance in terms of the utilization of technical software and formalities because they play a role in attracting users and managing marketing activities. The following qualities characterize the website design:

- The transitioning from a real-world environment of physical buildings, squares, and offices to a virtual environment that consists of computer hardware and software (Hardware & Software).
- The utilization of multimedia technologies that portray and duplicate the physical environment, given that services are provided entirely through a virtual setting.
- The emergence of virtual reality technologies—technologies that artificially render reality through the effective use of images, graphics, and sound. Conferences, meetings, discussions, the mentoring of sales representatives, and researchers' engagements take place through different networks across different continents around the world.

Providing security: Providing security is related to the confidentiality of the data exchanged with the users. In addition, security pertains to protecting the site, making it immune to virus attacks, hacking threats, and illegal activities. In addition, security ensures and maintains the efficiency and reliability of websites.

Product: This element is the essence of the marketing process, and by extension, the basis of all the elements of the marketing mix. A product sold over the Internet has a set of characteristics related to how the product is displayed (brand, information, and value) and the mechanism for obtaining it. A university presence on the Internet is a prime example of distance education, promoting learning and delivering instruction exclusively through electronic means.

Virtual Communities: The virtual community is equivalent to a traditional society, except that it is solely available on the Internet. It is characterized by breadth, comprehensiveness, and diversity of parties. A virtual community also tends to be free from traditional societies' prejudices in terms of gender and region because it allows the participants to overcome the temporal and geographical disparities. Besides, it offers the participants a wide range of recreational, social, political, economic, and academic topics that foster an atmosphere of shared interests, professional dialogues, and friendly discussions. Doing so engenders an atmosphere of understanding of many issues among members. Ultimately, virtual communities create an environment suitable for marketers to promote their services smoothly and effectively. Digital marketing has affected service providers because it has replaced them with hardware equipment and software. In other words, there is no longer a need for human service providers. As for service recipients, their contact with service providers has become through virtual platforms, which reduce the possibilities of direct personal confrontations, delays in responses, or discrepancies in the quality of services.

Customer Service: The topic of user service aims to preserve existing customers and win new ones. The university's website is an example of an *electronic service*, so communicating with clients and responding to their requests in full is now done via networks in real-time. Specifically, service delivery is done through various technological platforms instead of having direct personal contacts with human providers. However, it is important to emphasize that this shift from one party to another or the replacement of one element by another is not a simple one because the nature of the electronic service elements is fundamentally different from the traditional service. The electronic service gives customers control through tools, such as self-service. In addition, the electronic service environment is completely different than the traditional one.

Price: The electronic marketing process gives the organization great flexibility in pricing its products and gaining additional profits. Indeed, the university's website can include a bulletin about the prices of services provided by the university in all of its specializations. This quality allows users to compare prices and choose products accordingly.

Promotion: It is one of the most influential elements of the marketing mix in electronic marketing to the point that its name has changed to become direct marketing. Direct marketing, here, refers to all activities that generate communication and responses with current and potential customers. In using direct marketing, the university promotes products through a number of means, including the following ones: Promotion via email, which is also called direct mail advertising. Promotion via Banner. Promotion through search engines. This process has two main types: The natural and optimal display of the site through search engines and payment method for every entry or click (Pay-Per-view).

Distribution or Place: The university's website represents an intangible service: The deliveries are done electronically over the Internet using passwords, downloads, or emails. The site design plays the biggest role during the distribution process.

Privacy: It is related to the user's privacy in general, including the user's data and information. The university's website must protect the privacy of its users.

Personalization: This means identifying the users' experiences on the website and customizing them. This process takes into account all of the activity patterns of the users. It also includes a set of data and information obtained from the users—information that can be used to meet the users' needs with high accuracy. This dynamic offers the appropriate services that ensure customer satisfaction by remaining attuned to the users' needs.

Finally, we can say that all of the elements of the electronic marketing mix can be employed in the design of the university's website (Zaaza, 2009; Schimmel et al., 2012; Zaid and Bakhti, 2013; Astani, 2013; Al-Banna, 2016; Rayab and Qaddi, 2016; Mashqiq, 2018; Ismail and Ghadeer, 2018). This outcome leads us to conceptualize the main hypothesis of the research:

H0: There is no significant effect of the website on the ranking of Syrian universities in the world ranking systems at a level of significance ($0.05 \geq \alpha$), resulting in the emergence of the following sub-hypotheses:

The first sub-hypothesis:

H01: The websites of Syrian universities on the Internet are characterized by a programmatic and visual design that qualifies them to obtain advanced arrangements by World ranking systems.

The second sub-hypothesis:

H02: Syrian universities' websites provide services that qualify them to obtain advanced arrangements by World ranking systems.

The third sub-hypothesis:

H03: Syrian universities' websites provide safety and privacy standards for their users

B. The Most prominent World University Rankings

The World arrangements and standards for universities are a relatively recent experience. They appeared at the beginning of the third millennium. Still, they have spread widely in academic circles in recent years—seeking to arrange universities and research centres around the world objectively and impartially. Universities and higher education organizations worldwide anticipate the release of ranking reports every year because such rankings largely reflect the level of scientific progress in the countries that host these institutions. (Al-Naqeeb, et al., 2018) There are many university classification systems. Below are a few examples of these systems, along with the criteria followed in each one:

a) Shanghai Ranking

The Shanghai Jiao Tong University sponsors this system for World Rankings, known as the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU). This university has a prestigious academic reputation for measuring the difference between Chinese universities and other universities with distinguished academic statuses. Up to 500 universities worldwide are ranked based on this system's most prominent criteria for their quality of education. The system takes into consideration the number of graduates who have received awards and accolades (10%); the quality of the faculty, including professors who received Nobel prizes and honours (20%); and researchers who are the most cited in 21 scientific disciplines (20%). The research output standard includes scientific articles published in Nature and Science journals (20%), articles in the SCIE Extended Scientific Publication Manual, and the SSCI Social Sciences Publication Manual (20%). This ranking system also considers the standard per capita of the organization's academic performance (10%).

One of the most prominent features of the Shanghai classification system is consistency, according to many studies. Indeed, its standards are purely academic, and all of its indicators are publically measured and verified by third parties. However, one of the most prominent criticisms that this system receives is that the classification standards are random. The percentage of the Nobel Prize (30%) only enhances the individual, not the collective achievements of faculty and students. Another criticism is the fact that this system only makes specific universities head this classification. In addition, one observation claims that this system shows bias towards research organizations that are distinguished in the field of natural sciences—discarding universities that focus on other scientific disciplines.

(Márquez, 2011; Marginson, 2013; Hazelkorn, 2013; Qasimia and Trabelsi, 2013; Hawala and Matwali, 2014; García and Rodríguez, 2015; Mahmoud, 2015; Al-Siddiqi, 2015; Barakat, 2016; Dahan and Bouatrous, 2017; Abdelkader, 2017; Kurniasih et al., 2018; Zabar and Nasser, 2018; Badawi and Mustafa, 2018; Maymoun, 2019; Saleh, 2020; Fauzi et al., 2020).

b) Times Ranking

This ranking system is sponsored by *The Times Higher Education*—a publication supported by the British Times Higher Education Organization. The organization ranks the top 200 universities worldwide, and among the most prominent criteria of this system is the fact that university education and the surrounding environment constitute 30% of the overall analysis. Another aspect this system focuses on is the production and the reputation of scientific research, which also constitute 30% of its overall analysis. Furthermore, the impact of scientific research on the university constitutes about 32.5% of the overall assessment that this system generates. The international presence at the university for both faculty and students stands at 5%, while innovation and financial return from interaction with the industry have a 2.5% figure. Each of these basic criteria contains other detailed aspects, such as the number of doctoral degrees awarded by the university annually, the ratio of PhD to B.A. graduates, the ratio of published research papers to the number of faculty members.

This classification takes into account, to some extent, the main functions of the university in its classification methodology for universities. It pays great attention to scientific research by 62.5%, followed by education and the learning environment by 35%. In comparison, the university's role in the serving industry is limited to 2.5% in the assessment and ranking process. The most prominent criticism of *The Times'* classification system is that there are many questions over the methodology used to limit the number of published articles and the awarded certificates. In addition, some universities have temporarily employed graduates to raise the percentage of graduates who have secured gainful employment to raise the institutions' classification levels (Own et al., 2017).

c) QS Ranking

This ranking system is sponsored by Quacquarelli Symonds Limited (QS), a London-based non-profit organization. This organization ranks the top 800 universities in the world. Among its most prominent criteria are the opinions of professors and academic experts (30%); the opinions of employers (20%); the average number of publications per faculty member (10%); the average number of academic citations per scientific paper (10%); the number of candidates who hold doctoral degrees (10%); the student-to-faculty ratio (10%); and the institutional online visibility and presence (10%). One of the advantages of this

classification is the implementation of a questionnaire that collects academic experts' opinions. Indeed, this system is considered one of the largest mechanisms to identify academics' opinions, whether in terms of their numbers at an academic institution or their respective fields. According to previous studies, the QS system is unparalleled in measuring expert views within academic circles.

However, like other ranking systems, the QS system has its own set of criticisms. Because of the multiple QS classification indicators, universities with similar or close scores often exhibit low correlations. In addition, small changes in an indicator could lead to drastic changes in a university's location on the ranking scales. (Mahmoud and Saleh, 2019)

d) Webometrics Ranking

Since 2004, this classification system has been periodically issued every six months by CSIC's Cybermetrics Lab (CCHS), which is an academic centre affiliated with the Spanish National Research Council and the Ministry of Education. It is one of the most popular and comprehensive academic classifications of universities. The classification includes about 30 thousand universities, assessed based on their presence on the Internet. Among its most prominent criteria is size, which measures the size of the pages of a university's website (5%). Another criterion is the number of rich files, where the number of files of various types provided by the university's website is calculated (10%). The system also encompasses the search criterion. This criterion compiles and calculates the number of electronically published research studies, along with a list of reports about the researchers who produced them (35%). Finally, the system has the criterion of data traffic, which tracks and assesses the number of times that a university's website is visited from an off-campus location (50%).

According to Kunosić et al. (2019), the Webometrics classification represents a World ranking due to the large size of universities that this classification system ranks per year. The ranking occurs twice a year, constituting a great feature that is lacking in the rest of the World ranking systems—systems that are limited to a specific number of universities. Furthermore, the Webometrics classification takes into account universities in developing countries that do not possess the capabilities, expertise and resources of developed countries Worldly. Thus, this system provides an important opportunity for developing countries to evaluate their universities compared to major international institutions of higher learning. One of the most prominent criticisms of the Webometrics ranking is that it is limited to a narrow aspect of the university ranking: electronic publishing

(Osunade and Ogundele, 2012; Bashorun, 2013; Tafaraji et al., 2014; Ghorbani et al., 2017; Wahyuningrum and Pandiya, 2017; Jati and Dominic, 2017; Yaqouta and Soliman, 2017; Al-Tom, 2018; Dastani and Sadr 2019).

All previous classifications are also blamed for their linguistic bias to the English language. Referring to the importance of World arrangements for universities, it was stated in a study by (Hilal, 2019), that international arrangements for universities are the most reliable methods for measuring the competitive ability of universities. These classification systems seek to arrange universities and research centres around the world objectively. From this lens, the Syrian government seeks to improve the quality and accreditation of its programs; colleges and units; and their marketing strategies. Currently, Syrian universities are facing great challenges to have a suitable position in the world ranking systems of universities. Based on the classifications above and information, one can see that the electronic publishing standard is a basic and a common criterion adopted in these classifications. (Abdulaziz, 2015). This fact leads us to develop a concept around the fourth sub-hypothesis: **H04:** The websites of Syrian universities have a scientific publishing level that qualifies them to obtain advanced arrangements by World ranking systems.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLING

A. The framework of the research community and the research sample

The framework of the research community: The best (10) websites for Syrian universities have been selected, because they meet the minimum scientific standards, according to the World Webometrics, which ranks Syrian universities out of 37 government-funded universities that appear in this classification.

Research Community and Sample:

Firstly, regarding the analytical study, all ten sites identified within the framework of the research community were taken by monitoring their cyber activity and evaluating them according to the indicators adopted in the research.

Secondly, regarding the field of study, the size of a random sample was chosen from the clients of the ten sites above, while considering each university's class and the size of the sample chosen to be commensurate with the number of the clients of that university's site. These clients include professors, students, or employees. Table 1, as shown below, demonstrates this idea.

As for the selection of random samples in each layer, the primary investigator in this study relied on Google. It was distributed by communicating with the student union pages of each university, along with directly communicating with clients from universities located on the Syrian coast.

The researcher drew the sample according to the laws of probability, and the researcher indicated that the research community is very large and constantly increasing. Therefore, the law of random error of proportion was relied upon to determine the size of the research sample as follows:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{E^2} = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2} \approx 384.$$

The standard value of Z, corresponding to the 5% significance level, is 1.96, and the product pq is the largest possible when p = q = 0.5. At a 5% accuracy level, the required sample size is 384, which represents the minimum required items that represent the population.

B. Study Tool

In this study, the researcher relied on two tools. The first one was the data published on the Webometrics classification website (the only classification in which the Syrian universities appear) to determine the ranking of the Syrian universities in Syria, the Arab World, and internationally.

As for the second tool, after knowing the basic criteria adopted by the classification of Webometrics, the researcher designed a digital questionnaire to collect the primary data necessary for the research. Its design was based on the measures used in previous research. It is also in line with the current research topic and its theoretical framework. Finally, the five-year Likert scale was used to measure the meaning of the expressions used in the questionnaire, as follows: Strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), strongly agree (5). The researcher distributed 500 questionnaires to the selected sample of participants. The researcher received 420 answers, —396 of which were accepted.

In the tables below, we show the results of the first tool: The ranking of Syrian, Arab, and international universities, according to the second edition of 2020 and the latest version of the Webometrics classification:

Table (1): The ranking of Syrian universities worldly and in the Arab world in the July 2020 issue:

	University	World Rank	Arab Rank	Presence	Impact	Openness	Excellence
1	Damascus	3578	132	869	8474	3057	3753
2	Tishreen	4613	200	1169	12468	3069	4528
3	Aleppo	4877	212	4975	13852	3800	4284
4	AlBaath	6655	268	5263	12698	3525	5902
5	Higher Institute of Applied Sciences and Technology	6672	269	12822	7945	4967	6147
6	Virtual University	9434	312	955	10943	5286	6626
7	Arab International in Damascus	9692	317	5483	13778	3505	6626
8	Syrian Private (International Private School for Science and Technology)	10305	322	574	15386	3860	6626
9	French Institute for the Near East, Damascus	10514	329	14631	8386	5819	6626
10	kalamoon	11661	349	19110	14178	4233	6626

Source: <http://www.webometrics.info> 3 Am 29/10/2020.

Table (1) shows that Damascus University tops the local ranking of Syrian universities, followed by Tishreen University and Aleppo University. However, it ranks (130) in the Arab World and (3578) Worldly, and these results show a significant decline in the ranking of Syrian universities at the Arab and international levels. This trend explains why Damascus University did not appear in the rest of the international ranking systems of universities.

For comparison, Table (2) shows the ranking of the Top Ten Arab Universities in the world.

Table 2. The ranking of the Top Ten Arab Universities in the world according to the second edition of the Webometrics ranking for 2020

	University	World Rank	Presence	Impact	Openness	Excellence
1	King Saud	409	633	1056	443	216
2	King Abdulaziz	434	577	1976	579	95
3	King Abdullah of Science & Technology	478	1894	1234	246	289
4	Cairo	656	1003	1431	662	506
5	American of Beirut	724	859	1151	477	815
6	King Fahd of Petroleum & Minerals	820	2825	2213	607	602
7	Qatar	858	435	2900	564	644
8	Alexandria	981	2036	2588	813	838
9	Jordan	1009	153	2034	717	1216
10	United Arab Emirates	1091	3060	2613	651	1006

Source: <http://www.webometrics.info> 3 Am 29/10/2020.

The results of Table (2) show that Saudi universities top the ranking of Arab universities in the Arab World, as they rank less than (500) Worldly, which are relatively good ranks that qualify them to appear in many classification systems, such as the famous Shanghai ranking model and other systems. For more information, and for a more detailed comparison, Table (3) shows the ranking of the world's top ten universities.

Table 3. The ranking of the top ten World universities according to the Webometrics Second Edition ranking for 2020:

University	World Rank	Presence	Impact	Openness	Excellence
Harvard	1	1	2	1	1
Stanford	2	5	3	2	3
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	3	2	1	4	10
California Berkeley	4	20	4	3	18
Washington	5	27	5	66	9
Michigan	6	13	9	10	8
Oxford	7	25	13	9	5
(2) Johns Hopkins	8	397	22	33	2
Columbia New York	9	69	8	6	14
Cornell	10	8	6	15	26

Source: <http://www.webometrics.info> 3 Am 29/10/2020.

We notice from the table (3) that Harvard University ranks first Worldly, followed by Stanford University, then the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. All of them are American universities pt Regular font. Author name must be in 11 pt Regular font. Author affiliation must be in 10 pt Italic. The email address must be in 9 pt Courier Regular font.

C. Statistical test using SPSS

a) Stability: The results of the questionnaire were re-coded to SPSS version 20 and analyzed according to Alfa Cronbach coefficient. To determine whether the value of the parameter is acceptable to the requirements of search, the paragraphs of the questionnaire must be consistent with values equal to or greater than 0.6 (Sekaran, 2010). Table (4) shows the value of the Stability coefficient.

b) Reliability: After the literary review of the studies related to the research variables (E-Marketing & World Rankings), the series of other studies on websites, and field interviews, the researcher consulted academic experts in marketing and management at Tishreen University in Lattakia. Based on their directives, phrases in the questionnaire were formulated and modified to achieve the suitability required to measure the research variables.

Table 4. Stability coefficient of the questionnaire

Item Names	The Number of Statements	Alfa Cronbach Value
Website design element	20	0.93
Services element	9	0.95
Safety element	3	0.94
Scientific publication standard	11	0.89
Full statements	43	0.96

Source: Prepared based on the result of the statistical study.

It is noted from Table (4) that the values of the alpha-Cronbach reliability factor for the questionnaire were all accepted, ranging from (0.89-0.93), which is a high stability rate acceptable for conducting the study.

c) Descriptive Statistics:

There are many statistical indicators concerned with the statistical description, and this study included arithmetic means and standard deviations. The results were as follows:

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics

Item	N	Mean	STD. Deviation
Website design element	20	2.9110	0.63594
Services element	9	2.1484	0.77389
Safety element	3	2.5185	0.62435
Scientific publication standard	11	2.2627	0.68362

Source: Prepared based on the result of the statistical study.

It is noted from Table (5) that the highest value for the arithmetic means is that of the design dimension, and it is equal to 2.9. The value is not in agreement with the five Likert scales, and the lowest value for the arithmetic mean for the dimension of services. It is equal to 2.14, and the value corresponds to not agreeing on the five Likert scales. The highest standard deviation value was for the dimension of services, equal to 0.77. Thus, the opinions of the participants about the dimension of services differed widely more than the opinions about the rest of the variables. The lowest value of the standard deviation was for the safety dimension, which was equal to 0.62. Therefore, the opinions of the participants about the safety variable exhibited a lower rate of disagreement compared to the rest of the variables.

d) Testing Hypothesis:

After the researcher calculated the average responses of the survey participants for each aspect of the study, the researcher tested the existence of a fundamental difference between the calculated average and the average neutrality in the used Likert scale, which is (3), to demonstrate the possibility of using it as an indicator for comparison. The t-test was relied on for one sample, and the results appeared, as mentioned in the following tables:

Table 6. Student T-test for one sample for the site design element

One-Sample T-test						
Test Value = 3						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
M1	-2.785-	396	.006	-.8902-	-.1518	-.0262-

Source: Prepared based on the result of the statistical study.

Table 7. Student T-test for one sample of the services element

One-Sample T-test						
Test Value = 3						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differences	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
M2	-21.895-	396	.000	-.85157-	-.9280-	-.7751-

Source: Prepared based on the result of the statistical study.

Table 8. Student T-test for one sample for the safety component

One-Sample T-test						
Test Value = 3						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differences	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
M3	-9.446-	396	.000	-.48148-	-.5817-	-.3813-

Source: Prepared based on the result of the statistical study.

Table 9. Student T-test for one sample for scientific publication standard

One-Sample T-test						
Test Value = 3						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differences	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
M4	-19.060-	396	.000	-.73730-	-.8134-	-.6612-

Source: Prepared based on the result of the statistical study.

By observing the results of the previous tables, we find that the value of the significance probability (sig) is equal to (0.000), which is less than the level of significance / $\alpha = 0.05$ /, which means that there are fundamental differences between the average of the answers and the average of neutrality, which enables us to adopt the average of neutrality (3) to compare the levels of consent and the lack thereof.

e) Hypothesis test results

Main hypothesis H₀: There is no significant impact of the websites on the ranking of Syrian universities in the world ranking systems at a level of significance ($0.05 \geq \alpha$), so the following sub-hypotheses are branched from the main one:

The first sub-hypothesis H₀₁: Syrian universities' websites are characterized by a programmatic and a visual design that makes them qualified to obtain higher ranks by the world ranking systems.

Since the calculated average value for this dimension is (2.9110), which is smaller than the average of neutrality (3), the sampled survey respondents tend to disagree with the statements that show quality in the programming and visual design of Syrian universities' websites on the Internet. Therefore, we reject the first sub-hypothesis. We accept the alternative hypothesis that there are no good design elements for the websites of Syrian universities on the Internet.

The second sub-hypothesis H₀₂: Syrian universities' websites provide services that make them qualified to obtain high ranks by the world ranking systems.

Since the average value for this dimension is (2.1484), which is smaller than the average of neutrality (3), the sampled survey respondents tend to disagree with the statements that show quality in the services provided on the Syrian universities' websites on the Internet. Therefore, we reject the second sub-hypothesis. We accept the alternative hypothesis that the websites of Syrian universities on the Internet do not have good services.

Third sub-hypothesis H₀₃: Syrian universities' websites provide safety and privacy standards for their users.

Since the value of the average calculated for this dimension is (2.5185), which is smaller than the average of neutrality (3), the sampled survey respondents tend to disagree with the statements that show the availability of security in the websites of Syrian universities on the Internet. Therefore, we reject the third sub-hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis that says that there are no safety elements in the websites of Syrian universities on the Internet.

The fourth sub-hypothesis H₀₄: The websites of the Syrian universities have a scientific publishing level that makes them qualified to have higher rankings by the world ranking systems.

Since the value of the average calculated for this dimension is (2.2627), which is smaller than the average of neutrality (3), the sampled survey respondents tend to disagree with the statements that show the existence of a good case of scientific publishing on the websites of Syrian

universities on the Internet. Therefore, we reject the fourth sub-hypothesis. We accept the alternative hypothesis that there is no good level of scientific publication on the websites of Syrian universities on the Internet.

IV. CONCLUSION, APPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

The results of the study can be summarized as follows:

- The late ranking of Syrian universities' websites shows a weakness in the website *design* component as one of the elements of the e-marketing mix. This is due to the formal and programmatic weakness in the website design. This constitutes the most prominent factor that has the largest relative weight on the Syrian universities' positions in the World rankings.
- The late ranking of the Syrian universities' websites shows a weakness in the *security* component as one of the elements of the e-marketing mix. This is through the occurrence of continuous and long interruptions on the site resulting from security breaches that lead to the loss of any data that have been uploaded to the site. Consequently, it is ranked second in terms of the factors that result in delays in arranging these sites.
- The late ranking of Syrian universities' websites shows weaknesses in the *user service* component as one of the elements of the e-marketing mix. This is because the website services are limited to presenting decisions and some information. In addition, there is a lack of meaningful interactions between the site and users, which limits the customers' satisfaction and cooperation between the site and its visitors, leading to the loss of feedback as a basic tool that helps in developing the site and raising its ranking. This element represents the third place in terms of the relative weight that contributes to the delay in arranging these sites.
- The late ranking of Syrian universities' websites shows a weakness in the *promotion* component as one of the elements of the electronic marketing mix. This weakness is the results of the lack of interest in this aspect, on the one hand, and the lack of links that reach the site, on the other hand. This element has the fourth rank in terms of the relative weight that contributes to the delay in the ranking of these sites.
- The late ranking of Syrian universities' websites shows a weakness in the *virtual community* component as one of the elements of the electronic marketing mix. This is due to the great shortcomings in relying on this element, despite its great importance. This element is ranked fifth in terms of the relative weight that contributes to the late ranking of these sites.
- The criterion of scientific research and publication is the most important criteria adopted by most of the previous classification systems, and it has the largest relative weight. The results of the statistical study showed that there is a major deficiency in the scientific publishing

component. It is also very important to pay attention to utilizing the English language in publishing research.

- Syrian universities only appear in the Webometrics ranking, as it is the most comprehensive design, and it encompasses the largest possible number of universities. This dynamic reflects the great deterioration in the ranking of Syrian universities compared to international and Arab universities.
- It has many international classifications, such as the Shanghai Classification, and *The Times Magazine*—standards that are currently difficult to meet at Syrian universities in light of the ongoing crisis in the country.
- E-marketing plays a major role in improving university rankings. After reviewing the criteria for the Webometrics classification (the only classification in which Syrian universities appear), it becomes clear that evaluating websites according to this classification is not a purely technical evaluation. Rather, it carries an appreciation for the university's effort to attract talented and skilled members of society: Waves of students, researchers, academic experts, and other intellectuals. This evaluation does not reflect the reality of the educational performance of a university. In other words, the universities that obtain advanced positions in this classification system do not necessarily indicate that they are classified in such a way by their distinguished academic performance. Rather, they can market for themselves through a strong and distinguished website.

B. Recommendations

Based on the results of the theoretical discussion of the previous studies, and based on the results of the hypothesis test, the study supports the following recommendations:

- Syrian universities can improve their ranking on Webometrics currently through the optimal use of the elements of the electronic marketing mix— especially the interest in website design, safety, and quality of services for their websites. Syrian universities can manage the content within their sites in a way that ensures improving their appearances within the ranking systems.
- Syrian universities should focus on conducting scientific research and producing high-quality external publications to raise the ranking of Syrian universities. In addition, they should create an account on Google Scholar for researchers and faculty members in Syrian universities, identified by their names and the names of their institutions, so that researchers' quotes are counted in the institutions' classification because quotations are constituted important criteria in university ranking mechanisms.

C. Future Research

An important factor that has been overlooked and can be remedied by future research is website quality. This element may have effects on the relationship between e-marketing and World rankings.

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