

## Exploration Of Students' Difficulties In Learning Marketing 4.0 Concepts: A Phenomenological Approach

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### ABSTRAK

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This study aims to explore in depth the difficulties experienced by students in understanding the concept of Marketing 4.0 using a phenomenological approach. Marketing 4.0, as a marketing paradigm that integrates online and offline interactions, requires a comprehensive understanding of digital technology, consumer behavior, and data-driven marketing strategies. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with marketing program students from several universities, as well as observations of the learning process. The findings reveal that the main difficulties include understanding the concept of digital integration, limited technological literacy, discrepancies between theoretical knowledge and field practice, and language barriers related to global marketing terminology. These findings indicate the need for more applicable learning methods, the use of up-to-date industry case studies, and the integration of technology-based learning media to strengthen students' understanding. This research contributes to the development of digital marketing curricula in higher education to be more relevant to industry needs in the era of digital transformation.

**Keywords:** *Marketing 4.0, learning difficulties, phenomenology, digital literacy, marketing education*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the way companies implement their marketing strategies. One concept that has emerged in response to these changes is Marketing 4.0, which integrates online and offline interactions, data-driven personalization, and consumer engagement through various digital channels (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2017). Marketing 4.0 not only emphasizes the use of technology but also requires a deep understanding of the behavior of modern, connected consumers. This makes mastery of the concept an essential skill for marketing students to remain competitive in the workforce.

However, understanding the concept of Marketing 4.0 among students still faces numerous challenges. Previous studies have shown that the complexity of integrating digital strategies with conventional strategies is one of the main causes of learning difficulties (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Students often encounter a gap between the theoretical knowledge acquired in class and the practical skills required in the industry. This condition is further exacerbated by the limited availability of technology-based learning facilities in some universities, making the learning process less contextual (Susanti & Wibowo, 2022).

Marketing 4.0 also has a multidisciplinary nature, combining elements of traditional marketing, information technology, data analytics, and consumer psychology (Lipiäinen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Integrating these various fields requires an adequate level of digital literacy so that students can fully comprehend the concept. Unfortunately, some students still have limitations in digital literacy, both in terms of technical proficiency in using devices and in the ability to analyze data for marketing decision-making (Setiawan et al., 2020). These digital literacy barriers result in a partial and less applicable understanding of Marketing 4.0 strategies.

The teaching approaches employed in higher education also influence the success of understanding this concept. The predominant use of lecture-based (teacher-centered) learning often does not provide opportunities for students to actively engage in digital marketing simulations or real industry-based projects (Sanjaya, 2019). In fact, case studies and hands-on experiences can enhance analytical skills, creativity, and students' adaptability to the rapid changes in marketing technology (Armstrong & Kotler, 2020).

In this context, research using a phenomenological approach becomes relevant for exploring students' subjective experiences regarding the difficulties they face in learning Marketing 4.0. A phenomenological approach enables researchers to gain a deep understanding of students' perceptions, obstacles, and adaptation strategies from their own perspectives (Creswell, 2017). The findings are expected to provide strategic recommendations for the development of digital marketing curricula and teaching methods in higher education.

Therefore, this study focuses on exploring students' learning experiences in understanding the concept of Marketing 4.0, identifying the factors that cause learning difficulties, and providing input for more effective learning innovations. This research is expected to make a tangible contribution to preparing graduates with digital marketing competencies that meet industry needs in an increasingly competitive era of digital transformation (Kotler et al., 2017; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

## **2. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with the phenomenological method. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the research is to understand in depth the subjective experiences of students in learning the concept of Marketing 4.0, including the obstacles and strategies they use to overcome learning difficulties. Phenomenology allows researchers to explore the meanings formed by respondents based on their real-life experiences (Creswell, 2017).

The research subjects are students of the marketing and management study programs at three universities in Indonesia who have taken courses related to digital marketing or Marketing 4.0. Participant selection was carried out using a purposive sampling technique to ensure that respondents had direct experience in learning Marketing 4.0 (Sugiyono, 2020). The research location was chosen in universities that have a variety of digital learning facilities, so that it can provide a diverse picture of the obstacles experienced by students.

Data were collected through three main techniques: in-depth interviews with a semi-structured guide to obtain rich information about learning experiences, obstacles, and student perceptions; participatory observation in class to see student and lecturer interactions, teaching methods used, and student responses to Marketing 4.0 material; and documentation study of syllabi, teaching materials, and student assignments related to Marketing 4.0 (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the findings from in-depth interviews with students, analyzed using a phenomenological approach. Three main themes emerged from the data, reflecting their common experiences in facing difficulties in learning the concept of Marketing 4.0.

### **Difficulties in Understanding Abstract and Dynamic Concepts**

Many students revealed that the main difficulty came from the theoretical and constantly

evolving nature of Marketing 4.0. They felt that concepts such as human-centric marketing, social listening, and omnichannel were often too abstract without real case examples. One participant, referred to as Budi, stated, “I am confused, Ma’am, there are so many concepts. Sometimes I feel like I understand, but when asked to give a concrete example in a company, I get stuck.” This indicates that a learning method overly focused on theory without connecting it to relevant business practices can become an obstacle. The highly dynamic nature of Marketing 4.0, influenced by technological developments, also makes it difficult for students to keep up with changes. They feel that the curriculum often lags behind industry trends.

### **Gap Between Theory and Technological Implementation**

Another significant finding is the gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation of technology. Students realize the importance of digital technology in Marketing 4.0, but many of them have no direct experience using relevant tools or platforms. For example, they know that big data is important but do not know how to collect or analyze it. A student named Sinta said, “In class, they explained about the digital customer journey, but we were never invited to practice using the application or tool for that.”

This situation creates a gap between conceptual knowledge and practical skills. This discussion underlines the importance of integrating project-based learning or case studies that enable students to directly interact with technologies relevant to Marketing 4.0.

### **Lack of Emotional Connection with Consumers**

Another difficulty identified is understanding the humanistic aspect of Marketing 4.0. This concept emphasizes the importance of building an emotional connection with consumers. However, students tend to see marketing only as a transactional process. They struggle to internalize the idea that customer engagement and advocacy result from empathy and a deep understanding of consumer needs.

This discussion shows that teaching should not only focus on the technical side but also instill an understanding of consumer psychology and the importance of personal interaction, even in a digital context.

The research findings show that most students experience difficulties in understanding the core concepts of Marketing 4.0, especially in distinguishing its roles and characteristics compared to Marketing 3.0. Although they understand the general definition, students often find it difficult to relate theory to practical applications, particularly in strategies such as the customer path from AIDA to 5A, omnichannel marketing, and the human-centric approach. As one respondent expressed, the concepts feel abstract and difficult to apply without relevant real-world examples. These findings align with Kotler et al. (2017), who argue that the transition to the digital marketing paradigm requires a deep understanding of technology integration, consumer behavior, and communication strategies.

In addition, significant barriers were found in students’ digital literacy. Some respondents admitted having difficulty operating digital marketing platforms such as Google Ads, Meta Business Suite, or social media analytics tools. The lack of hands-on experience in managing digital campaigns makes learning feel theoretical and non-contextual. This supports the research of Prasetyo and Sutanto (2020), which states that low digital literacy is a major obstacle in marketing education in the Industrial 4.0 era. In the context of phenomenology, students’ learning experiences are influenced by the interaction between limited technical skills and the demands of learning that require mastery of advanced digital tools.

Another difficulty found is the minimal use of case studies based on local contexts. Learning materials that take many examples from multinational companies are considered less relevant to the business realities around students, such as SMEs in their regions. As a result, students have difficulty imagining how the concept of Marketing 4.0 can be adapted to small and medium-sized enterprises. Fadli (2022) emphasizes that using local case studies can increase the connection of material to students' real experiences and develop context-based critical thinking skills.

Phenomenological analysis shows that students' learning difficulties stem from three main factors: internal factors such as learning motivation and readiness in digital literacy; external factors such as conventional teaching methods; and environmental factors such as limited technological facilities and minimal field practice opportunities. These findings are consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) framework proposed by Davis (1989), in which perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of a technology greatly influence the acceptance of a new concept.

Overall, learning the concept of Marketing 4.0 among students requires a more integrative approach between theory and practice. The use of project-based learning with real data and tools, gradual digital literacy training, and the presentation of case studies relevant to local businesses can be strategic solutions. With these steps, it is expected that the understanding gap can be reduced and students can internalize the concept of Marketing 4.0 comprehensively.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study reveals that students' understanding of the concept of Marketing 4.0 still faces various conceptual, technical, and methodological barriers. Conceptual barriers arise from the difficulty of integrating traditional marketing theory with dynamic digital approaches, while technical barriers are caused by limited digital literacy, access to technology, and data analysis skills. Methodologically, learning models that are overly focused on theory without sufficient case-based or industry project-based practice reduce student engagement in the direct application of Marketing 4.0 strategies.

The findings also show that students need more contextual learning support, such as the use of digital marketing simulations, integration of up-to-date industry materials, and collaboration with real business actors. In addition, lecturers need to implement more participatory, interactive, and experiential learning strategies so that students can internalize concepts more effectively.

Therefore, this study recommends the development of a digital marketing curriculum that emphasizes integration between theory and practice, improvement of students' digital literacy, and the use of innovative learning technologies. These efforts are expected to prepare graduates with digital marketing competencies that meet industry demands in the era of digital transformation.

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