

Ethics in Digital Marketing: Perception of Ethics in adopting Digital Marketing Strategies

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Abstract— This study explores how Moroccan companies perceive ethics in the adoption of digital marketing strategies. Through qualitative analysis, including interviews with professionals across sectors, the study identifies key ethical concerns such as data privacy, transparency, and consumer trust. The findings reveal that while there is general awareness of ethical principles, the formalization and consistent application of these principles in digital marketing strategies are lacking. The study also suggests that cultural and organizational factors heavily influence ethical perceptions in Moroccan companies. It highlights the need for more structured ethical guidelines and regulatory frameworks to support ethical digital marketing practices in Morocco. Future research should consider broader, notably quantitative approaches to validate and expand upon these findings.

Keywords— *Ethics, Digital Marketing, Ethical Marketing, Moroccan companies.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, most of businesses are increasingly relying on the digital sphere to ensure their brand presence and recognition and staying in touch with their clients. Morocco, a country that did not make the exception, according to a study done by Statista, the digital economy has faced significant growth with an internet penetration that reached 84.1%, and social media users have surpassed 23 million users (Statista, 2024). As Moroccan companies process this digital transformation, in parallel the importance of adhering to ethical principles while adopting their digital marketing strategy is also rising. Digital marketing indeed offers multiple opportunities, it also endure issues and ethical challengers, especially when it comes to the consumer's privacy. Researches relative to this topic in the Moroccan context were less explored while much researches and papers were done elsewhere, in addition to the rapidly growing in digital marketing in Morocco, offering an opportunity of developing the topic through the Moroccan companies' perspective through understanding the perception of ethics while developing digital marketing strategies. This study will aim to fill that gap through providing an understanding of the perception of ethics in adopting marketing strategies by Moroccan businesses in the digital era.

Our research problem is the following:

How Moroccan companies perceive Ethics in adopting their Digital Marketing Strategies?

In order to fully answer this research problem, our study will explore the following sub-questions:

- 1- How do we define Ethics as a concept in Digital Marketing?
- 2- What are the marketing strategies in the digital context?
- 3- What are the frameworks and regulations regarding Ethics in digital marketing?

To answer these questions, our study will adopts an interpretivist epistemological approach, which present a suitable frame for understanding the subjective interpretations and social constructs that shape ethical behaviour in digital marketing. Given the complexity and context-specific nature of the research, the study will employ a qualitative research methodology with an abductive mode of reasoning starting with observations from the empirical data and working towards identifying the most plausible explanations for the phenomena observed.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Definition and approaches to ethics:

1. Definition:

According to Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Thesaurus , Ethics as a word can refer to mainly two meanings (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d);

Ethics as a phrase, that means the study of what is morally right and what is not.

Ethics as a noun, that stands for the study of what is morally right or not, the group of principles and beliefs.

2. Approaches to ethics:

Ethics is approached through various aspects, offering different perspectives on how individuals in societies precise what is right and what is not as well as in shaping how moral dilemmas and problems are broached. Duty, virtues, culture, consequences, self-interest, and care represent the main approaches explored in ethics:

Duty-based ethics: Also called Deontological ethics; it discusses the idea that rules and duties are the base for morality. Therefore, any action that follows a sort of rules is ethical no matter what the consequences were. It is often seen as the set of rules, which emphasizes the role of intention as a base for the action (Waller , 2005).

Virtue ethics: This approach of ethics that dates back in the philosophy of Aristotle in his work “Nicomachean Ethics”. It puts the focus on the moral agent instead of the actions or their consequences. Following this approach, character traits like justice and courage are ought to be developed since an ethical behavior is not only about following rules but about developing a right minded character is systematically leading to an ethical action (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E). Also, virtue ethics was indeed developed in modern philosophy, mainly by the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre in his book in 1981 “After Virtue”, in which he criticized modern ethical theories for lacking a coherent moral tradition (MacIntyre, 1981). These modern discussions in virtue ethics have offered a wider exploration to the idea of integrating emotions as well as enhancing the role of the community in framing moral characters (Hursthouse, 1999).

Consequentialism: Consequentialism represents a normative theory in ethics that states that an action is judged moral based on its consequences. According to this approach, the action is morally accepted (right) if it leads to a good result or the best possible one (Smart & Williams, 1973). This approach puts under evaluation the actions through their ability to give a value. This approach was criticized and highly argued since the judgment is based on the outcomes of the actions.

Relativism: This approach of ethics states that ethical standards and judgments are not universal but it depends more on the cultural or the individual perspectives. Therefore, there is no specific universal ethical code that can be applied to all cultures and societies. According to the American anthropologist Benedict, some behaviors are considered acceptable or normal in certain cultures or societies but are unacceptable in others (Benedict, 1934). Ethical relativism states that what is considered morally right or wrong can only be understood in a specific cultural context. The societal norms, traditions, and circumstances play a major role in shaping the ethical standards, which can differ widely from one community to another (Harman, 1975).

Ethical egoism: Ethical egoism is also one of the ethical theories that states that individuals should act based on their own self-interest, and that gives a more rational basis for the action. It is to not that this theory does not promote selfishness in its negative sense, but on the contrary advocates the actions that are aligned with a person's values and goals, assuming that by pursuing the personal well-being, the individual contributes to the overall good (Rand, 1964). When each individuals focuses on their own well-being, it can be beneficial to the whole society (Rachels, 2007).

Care ethics: Or ethics of care, is approach to ethics that highlights the importance of relationships and caring in the decision-making process. It was developed by the philosopher and the psychologist Gilligan Carol. This theory discusses and challenges these ideas the traditional ethical theories that focus on justice and the autonomy, while it emphasizes the relational and contextual considerations (Giligan, 1982). This approach shows the importance of empathy and compassion in guiding the ethical behavior, especially in the context where relationships are important, just like the family or communities (Held, 2006).

B. Overview of digital marketing strategies:

1. Definition and importance:

The term “digital marketing” first appeared in the 1990s while the rapid development of information and communication technologies. It includes the use of digital medias, like the Internet, devices and interactive channels, in order to communicate and exchange with customers (Pride & Ferrel, 2013). It can also be described simply as “reaching marketing goals through digital technologies” (Chaffey, Definitions of E-marketing vs Internet vs Digital marketing, 2013).

Digital marketing present significant opportunities and advantages in addition to traditional marketing; unlike traditional marketing methods which have a delayed and limited **feedback**, digital marketing offers a real-time insights in which performance can be easily followed and adjust the strategy based on the clients feedback. In addition to that, **cost-effectiveness** is also an important key in digital marketing, offering a great opportunity to small businesses and start-ups to develop and create their presence in an optimal way by minimal costs and a maximum of audience reach. **Engagement** is also a key advantage in digital marketing, through encouraging customers to interact and participate in various activities done by the companies. Finally, digital marketing has a more **viral effect** by social media and email marketing; the information is spread more widely and easily.

2. Digital marketing strategies:

A study by Pr. Varma and Mr. Verma (2018) highlights the critical role of a digital marketing plan for companies to establish an effective online presence and achieve their objectives through digital channels and audience interaction. Achieving this requires a well-planned strategy employing various techniques. Key among these are Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for improved website visibility, Search Engine Marketing (SEM) through paid advertising models like PPC, CPC, and CPM, and high-quality content creation via blogs, videos, and social media. Social Media Marketing complements SEM by leveraging platforms for audience engagement, while Viral Marketing acts as digital word-of-mouth for cost-effective promotion, relying on the right messenger, message, and environment. Email Marketing involves sending personalized promotional emails, though it requires careful execution to avoid being perceived as spam. Finally, Web Analytics tools, such as Google Analytics, are crucial for collecting and analyzing website activity data, offering insights that help companies understand their business, improve ROI, and increase profits.

3. Ethical challenges in digital marketing:

Data ethics is a critical challenge in digital marketing, encompassing multiple interconnected concerns discussed by authors and marketers. Privacy issues are very important, as many digital marketing practices involve collecting personal data—such as browsing history and location—without explicit consent, violating regulations like the European Union's GDPR that mandate clear permission prior to data collection; moreover, weak data security can lead to harmful misuse of customer information (European Parliament and Council, 2016; Solove & Schwartz, 2019). Transparency problems also arise with misleading advertising tactics, including clickbait and native advertising that blur the lines between promotional content and genuine information, thus deceiving consumers (Carlson, 2015). Manipulation and the posting of fake reviews further distort consumer perceptions, especially when targeting vulnerable groups like children who may not fully understand advertising intentions; ethically, fake reviews are deceptive and misrepresent real product or service experiences (American Psychological Association, 2004; Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Lastly, discrimination and algorithmic bias pose serious risks, as marketing algorithms can unintentionally exclude or disadvantage certain demographics—for example, studies showing women less targeted in ads for high-paying jobs and exclusion based on race or ethnicity—leading to unfairness and damaged consumer trust (Datta, Tschantz, & Datta, 2015; Speicher et al., 2018). Together, these challenges emphasize the need for companies, including those in Morocco, to embed ethical principles rigorously into their digital marketing strategies to protect consumers and maintain corporate reputation.

4. Ethical guidelines and regulations:

On the international stage, several bodies have codified ethical frameworks to ensure digital marketers uphold honesty and transparency and avoid deceptive tactics. The American Association's Code of Ethics provides four key pillars—an overview, ethics statements, expected behaviors, and reporting procedures—that guide practitioners toward responsible online promotion. The European Unions consumer - protection directives proscribe misleading or confusing marketing communications and mandate clear information to safeguard buyers' decision-making. In the United

States, the Federal Trade Commission enforces rules against false advertising by requiring substantiation for all claims. Beyond these formal regulations, many firms implement self-regulatory policies—tailored internal codes that align corporate values with marketing strategy to reinforce ethical conduct. In Morocco, although no single law addresses “ethical marketing” directly, a network of statutes promotes the same principles: Law 31-08 bans deceptive advertising and guarantees accurate product information; Law 09-08 mandates consumer consent and data-security measures; Law 31-16 prohibits anti-competitive practices; and the HACA Code of Ethics restricts harmful or exploitative audio-visual content—together forming a de facto ethical compass for marketers.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Digital marketing ethics can be understood through several foundational theories and frameworks. **The Ethical Decision Making Model** by Ferrell and Gresham (1985) emphasizes that ethical choices in marketing are influenced by a complex interplay of individual traits, organizational culture, available opportunities, social influences, and the ethical context of situations. This contingency model highlights that ethical behavior is not fixed but depends on various internal and external pressures within an organization. Complementing this, the **Social Contract Theory** (Gough, 1936) frames ethical marketing as an implicit agreement between companies and society, underscoring the necessity for transparency, honesty, and trustworthiness in digital marketing to maintain social legitimacy and protect a company's reputation.

In the Moroccan context, cultural factors significantly shape perceptions of digital marketing ethics, as explained by **Hofstede's six cultural dimensions** (2001). These dimensions—power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint—affect how Moroccan companies develop and implement ethical marketing strategies that resonate with societal values.

After exploring these main theories and frameworks regarding our research topic, in addition to the literature review; we were ought to develop three main research propositions in order to help us frame the topic and develop furthermore the research. These propositions will present a guide for our qualitative research by highlighting themes or even relationships that could emerge from the data-collecting process during the interviews.

The research propositions suggested are the following:

-Research Proposition 1: Moroccan companies have different interpretations of digital marketing ethics, depending on social, cultural and organizational contexts. Studies show that the cultural norms influence the perceptions of ethics and behaviors in business (Hofstede, 2001) (Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006). Therefore, how people think about what is right and wrong in digital marketing can change depending on where they live and what their culture is like. In a place like Morocco, where there are both old traditions and new business ways, companies might have different ideas about what is considered ethical depending on their size, geographical reach and other aspects.

-Research Proposition 2: Moroccan companies face significant challenges in maintaining ethical standards in digital marketing due to competitive pressures and evolving consumer expectations. Researches have showed that the pressure of competition can sometimes lead companies to engage in ethically questionable practices to achieve short-term gains (Ferrell , Fraedrich, & Ferrell, 2018). Moreover, as consumer expectations around privacy and transparency continue to change, it becomes even more challenging for companies to navigate ethical digital marketing. Staying up-to-date with shifting consumer attitudes adds another level of complexity to ensuring marketing practices align with ethical principles (Murphy, Laczniak, & Prothero, 2012). In Moroccan context, as the digital marketing landscape rapidly changes, companies face the challenge of balancing ethical standards with their business goals. This involves navigating consumer expectations around privacy and

transparency while ensuring that their marketing practices align with cultural values and ethical principles. Organizations must adopt strategies that not only meet legal requirements but also foster trust and credibility among consumers in a dynamic market environment (Moore & Hanson, 2017).

-Research Proposition 3: Adopting ethical digital marketing practices positively impacts consumer perceptions and enhances the reputation of Moroccan companies. Positive consumer perception is the ultimate outcome for companies, especially when adapting ethical practices. Being aligned with ethical marketing principles in digital marketing activity enhances and strengthens trust between the company and its customers (Singh, Iglesias, & Batista-Foguet, 2012). In Morocco, where cultural and religious values may lead consumers to prioritize ethical considerations, practicing ethical digital marketing can set companies apart from their competitors. The companies that are seen as ethical are more likely to build sustainable relationships with their customers and achieve a competitive edge through positive word-of-mouth and increased brand loyalty (Creyer & Ross, 1997).

These research propositions, scientifically justified, will provide us a focused framework to the research by offering precise propositions for exploring the perception of ethics in adopting digital marketing in Moroccan context. It examines different aspects and axes in the research.

IV. METHODOLOGY

We adopted the interpretivist posture, in which knowledge is constructed through social interactions and shared understandings. This paradigm holds that reality is not a fixed entity but rather is continuously shaped and reshaped by human perceptions and social practices. As a result, interpretivists employ qualitative research methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, to gain deep insights into how people make sense of their social world (Schwandt, 1994). Therefore, the interpretivist posture in our research will develop better while we adopt an abductive reasoning. Abductive reasoning represents a form of logical reasoning that begins with an observation or set of observations and seeks to find the simplest and most likely explanation.

Our study followed the qualitative approach, that takes the form of semi-directive interviews, structured around an interview guide prepared in advance, in both English and French versions, adapted to the pace of each person interviewed (Claude, 2019). Following this optic, we chose to collect the various statements based on interview guides because of their usefulness in the exploratory phases. The interview guide contained questions through four axes based on the research propositions; the definition of ethics, the elements influencing the ethical digital marketing actions, the consumer perception and attitude, and finally the ethical challenges that they may face adopting ethical digital marketing strategies. The targeted audience was chosen based on their profession; they must be employees the marketing department in Moroccan companies that have a digital presence online. We reached them through networking and social media platforms, mainly LinkedIn. Furthermore, semi-directive interviews were in two main forms; phone calls and in person interviews. We were obliged to opt for the option of phone calls due to the unavailability of some interviewee (paid-leaves). A sample of 11 profiles answered and gave us useful insight to the study, we started the interview with their identity by stating their name, their company's or the company they are currently working in name and information about their digital presence and their adopted digital marketing strategy. In our analysis and profiles presentation, identities will remain anonymous for confidentiality concerns. The interviewees were chosen based on the company's sector, which is related to marketing and requires a digital presence of the company.

It is to note that more people were asked to the interview, but they have chosen not to answer either for confidential worries or for their unavailability. The interviews, once completed, were the object of a translation (for the interviewees who answered in French) and then a transcription of

every literal word said, in order to analyze the grid. Therefore, the grid will be the basis of our analysis; a horizontal analysis was carried out. Taking the form of a thematic analysis in the following section, it allows the description of the data encountered within each theme, and therefore to highlight the most important points. Next comes the vertical analysis, appearing in the analysis table. This involves analyzing the data of the individuals interviewed, one by one. This allows us to discover links between several themes and data collected.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

➤ Word cloud:



Source: Authors

As we can notice, the dominant words and themes were “Marketing”, “Digital”, “Ethical” and “companies”. These words appeared with the highest frequency for the main reason that our research is exploring indeed these terms, and the discussion in the interviews centered on the overall digital marketing and ethics. Appearing also, with a higher frequency, but not as high as the previous words, the words “Privacy”, “Data” and “Consumer” highlights the concerns related to data privacy and protection, which are, following our literature review, main ethical challenges in digital marketing. With less frequency than the previous words, we see the significant presence of “Reputation”, “trust” and “Brand” that demonstrates the focus on the impact of ethical practices on the company’s reputation, by adopting ethical marketing practices; it impacts maintaining a good brand image. Then, the rest of the word with less frequency, such as “Regulations”, “Principles” and “Law”. The thing that might suggest that there is a sort of gap between the legal and regulatory framework and the companies.

- Theme-based analysis:

Digital marketing strategy and code of ethics:

These two first questions about the digital marketing strategy and code of ethics were mainly asked to get to know more the interviewee through insights from his company or the company he works for. Responses to the first question were diverse, but all converged to the digital marketing activities. In which most profiles showed the importance of social media and content marketing, while others (profile n.4 and n.7) pointed up to the use of paid ads and influencer marketing, with a remarking profile n.10 that had his unique approach by developing an internal strategy. As for the second one regarding if the company have the code of ethics, or any sort of document that govern the ethics in digital marketing, majority of companies answered negatively while only three profiles (profile n.4, n.7 and n.10) approved that they follow certain guidelines for their digital marketing strategy.

Definition of ethics:

Through this question, interviewees gave their own interpretation about the concept of ethics, and most definitions given were mainly around principles such as the transparency, fairness and honesty. The only difference remains on how they focused on these principles (as we mentioned earlier, it depends on their own interpretation). Profiles that slightly presented a different aspect of the definition were profile n.7 that defined it in its business context, whereas profile n.11 did not give a direct definition. As for questions about the ethical concerns in digital marketing had numerous answers that differed from a profile to another depending on their business and mainly on their marketing strategy. Noting that profile n.8 declared that there is a lack in the ethical considerations but without giving further details.

Axes constituting ethics in the company:

Answers on questions for this theme were quite similar; they most tend to admit that cultural values, in addition to the religion and law and regulations are key factors that influence the concept of ethics in the Moroccan context. However, when it comes to the regulatory framework we consider that answers are in general were implicit. The thing that might outline a gap between the awareness of the law and regulations and the real alignment with these regulations. On the other hand, it showed that there is a possible for the companies to enhance their operations is by implementing well-defined compliance protocols for ethical practices in digital marketing.

Consumer perception and impact on reputation:

The third axis, showed a lack of feedback was spotted nearly among all the profiles, since their answers were not directly answered, some profiles answered negatively (profile n.1, n.2, n.8 and n.10), meanwhile profiles such as profile n.10, n.11 were quite hopeful about their answers regarding the consumer's perception. As for the impact on the brand reputation, most of the interviewees manifested positive feedback by ensuring that the customer's trust and loyalty are an ultimate goal for their businesses. Although answers were expressed differently but the customer's trust was in the heart of all the answers given.

Challenges and issues:

This last axis highlighted the ethical concerns and challenges companies may or did face while adopting their digital marketing strategy; answers were so various and took in considerations multiple aspects, such as unfair competition (profile n.1), Misleading content (profile n.3), Discrimination (profile n.4), Customer's data (profile n.8), breaking the law and not adhering to ethical standards (profiles n.10 and n.11).

➤ Profile-based analysis:

Profile n.1: Community manager in a company specialized in digital marketing.

According to this profile's answers, the digital marketing strategy in their company focuses on creating a digital presence to drive traffic and convert visitors into customers. They use a mix of digital channels, including social media, search engines, and email marketing. However, they do not have a specific code of ethics in place. Their main concerns revolve around privacy and data security.

Profile n.2: Software engineer in a company specialized in Data intelligence.

This profile emphasizes content creation, social media, and brand recognition by using tools, such as social media, SEO, and online advertising enhance their digital presence. Like Profile 1, they do not have a specific code of ethics, and their primary concerns are privacy and data security.

Profile n.3: A CEO in a digital marketing agency

This third profile focuses on influencer marketing and paid social media campaigns. They leverage influencers and paid ads on platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Pinterest. They do not have a specific code of ethics, and their concerns include privacy, data security, and transparency.

Profile n.4: An entrepreneur in a digital marketing agency

This profile uses a mix of digital channels to enhance their online presence and increase sales. Their tools include social media, SEO, and PPC. They have a code of ethics that emphasizes transparency, privacy, and truthful content. Their main concerns are privacy, data security, and transparency.

Profile n.5: A digital marketer in a digital marketing agency

Profile n.5 focuses on creating engaging content and leveraging social media. They use social media, SEO, and PPC to build a strong digital presence. Inclusivity and non-discrimination are key elements of their ethical approach. Their concerns include privacy, data security, and transparency.

Profile n.6: An entrepreneur in a digital marketing agency

This profile emphasizes content creation and influencer partnerships. They use email marketing and influencers to reach their audience. They do not have a specific code of ethics, and their concerns are privacy, data security, and transparency.

Profile n.7: A software engineer and a founder of a software and services company.

This seventh profile focuses on content creation and digital marketing services. They use email marketing and influencers to engage their audience. They have a code of ethics that emphasizes transparency, privacy, and truthful content. Their main concerns are privacy, data security, and transparency.

Profile n.8: A data collector in a digital marketing agency

This one takes as digital marketing strategies content creation and influencer partnerships. They use email marketing and influencers to drive their marketing efforts. They do not have a specific code of ethics, and their concerns also include privacy, data security, and transparency.

Profile n.9: A CEO in an company in the education sector

Profile n.9 adopt social media marketing as digital marketing strategy, while he use social media, SEO, and PPC to enhance their digital presence. They do not have a specific code of ethics, and their primary concerns are privacy, data security, and transparency.

Profile n.10: A sales account manager in a consulting company

Profile 10 supports employees and focuses on transparent product information. They use social media, SEO, and PPC to reach their audience. They do not have a specific code of ethics, and their concerns include privacy, data security, and transparency.

Profile n.11: A web editor in a communication and digital marketing company

And this final profile targets companies without a digital presence and focuses on paid advertisements. They use social media, SEO, and PPC to acquire more customers and ensure the company's presence in the digital marketing and website creation sector. They have confidentiality charters and collaboration contracts to maintain transparency and ethics. Their main concerns are privacy, data security, and transparency.

➤ Discussion:

The analysis of the interviews in order to understand the perception of ethics in digital marketing strategies among Moroccan companies, through the word cloud, theme-based, and profile-based analysis, have revealed several critical insights. The word cloud highlights the high frequency of key terms like "ethical," "digital," "marketing," "privacy," and "company," indicating a strong emphasis on ethical considerations such as data protection and trust in digital marketing practices. Through this review on the word cloud, we can understand that:

- There is a raised awareness of the ethical principles such as transparency, fairness and trust, in the digital marketing strategies.
- The presence of the words related to privacy and data protection indicates that it represents, indeed, a serious concern for the companies when adopting and developing digital marketing strategies.
- Finally, there is an awareness indeed about the regulatory framework, but it was noticed that there is a gap in the practice, which it may indicated that these regulations represent a sort of struggle or obstacle to these companies.

The theme-based analysis further underscores that while companies commonly prioritize social media to enhance customer engagement and brand reputation, there is a significant variation in their approaches, with some focusing on influencer marketing and paid advertisements and others on more innovative strategies like internal development. This analysis also reveals a disparity in the adoption of formal ethical frameworks, with only a few companies having established codes of ethics, suggesting a gap in the consistent application of ethical standards. Through this horizontal analysis that evaluated the analysis grid by themes (research axes), we were able to consider the following findings;

- Regarding the digital marketing strategy, the companies all have common digital marketing strategies, in which they prioritize the use of social media as their main channels. The thing that allows more engagement with their customers and helps systematically in building a good brand image. However, although these strategies converge to a common one, but the approaches differs from one company to the other. Profiles like n.4 and n.7 tend to opt for influencer marketing and paid ads as an approach to leverage popular trends and hence maximize their reach through targeted campaigns. Profile n.10 however, focuses on the internal development as his unique marketing strategy showing an innovative and more inclusive approach.
- Regarding ethical frameworks and regulations, few companies among these have a formal code of ethics (profiles n.4, n.7 and n.10) in digital marketing. The thing that marks the existence of a potential gap in making ethical standards formal and ensure their consistent application among the digital marketing activities.
- As for interpreting ethics as a notion, we notice that each have given a unique definition that depends of his own interpretation, but all the given definitions focused on principles such as fairness, transparency and honesty.
- We also distinguished that ethical concerns and challenges lacked a bit of specificity, and that could be either an indicator that a lack of deep engagement with the ethical implications of digital marketing practices or a lack of familiarity with emerging ethical challenges.
- As for regulations, answers have indicated also a lack of emphasis on specific regulations or compliance frameworks guiding ethical digital marketing practices. This could point to a gap in awareness of international standards or local regulations that govern digital marketing ethics.
- Finally, the limited consumer feedback was also a remarkable among the answers about the customers' perception. This is a missed opportunity for companies to understand and enhance their reputation based on ethical practices.

The profile-based analysis highlights how different organizational roles influence ethical perceptions and practices, with strategic leaders typically expressing broader ethical concerns compared to those focused on the execution of digital marketing. Across all analyses, privacy, data security, and transparency emerge as primary ethical concerns, yet there is a noticeable gap between awareness and practical compliance with ethical standards and regulatory frameworks. Overall, these findings point to a need for enhanced ethical education, better formalization of ethical guidelines, and a more unified approach to ethical practices in digital marketing among Moroccan companies. Therefore, through this profile-based analysis, we can note these key elements:

- Most companies use a mix of marketing channels that enhance the level of engagement and building a good brand reputation.
- We notice consistent ethical concerns mainly about the privacy and data security, the thing that highlights the awareness of this issue. As well as transparency, that was mentioned by most of the profiles as a big ethical concern.
- Ethics in digital marketing was approached in various ways; starting with companies with ethical codes (profiles n.4, n.7 and n.11) and others lacking a formal ethical framework. Also with their different interpretation of “ethics” as a notion.
- We also noticed that the ethical perception differs depending on the position inside the company; Profiles like entrepreneurs or CEOs (Profiles n.3, n.4, n.6, n.7, and n.9) generally express a broader concern for ethical practices in digital marketing, reflecting a strategic focus on brand reputation and customer trust. Whereas other profiles with roles focused on digital marketing execution, tend to concentrate more on the practical aspects of ethical marketing, such as content creation and social media management.
- And as a final thought, there is a need for an ethical education in this context, many profiles (profiles n.1, n.2, n.3, n.6, n.8, n.9 and n.10) through their answer show a gap in knowledge in ethics in digital marketing.

When we put under comparison the results of our study with the existing literature review, on the perception of ethics in digital marketing, particularly in the context of Moroccan companies, we encounter alignments and some divergences from literature.

- Both the empirical study and the literature have indicated the awareness about the importance of ethical practices in digital marketing among companies. According to our results, Morocco makes no exception in aligning with the trend where businesses adopt ethics as core aspect in their marketing strategies (Drumwright & Murphy , 2009). In addition to that, the focus on social media and content marketing strategies found in the study is consistent with global literature, which highlights these channels as predominant in digital marketing efforts (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Finally, our study found that very few Moroccan companies have frameworks for ethical digital marketing. This matches what the research of Sparks in 2019 have found; many businesses, especially in developing countries, do not have clear ways to handle digital ethics (Sparks, 2019). This gap shows that while companies recognize ethical issues, they often do not take the necessary steps to deal with them.

- On the other side, our study showed divergence from literature in two main aspects; the perception of ethical challenges, while our study shows a lack of detailed responses on specific ethical challenges, the literature emphasizes a growing concern over issues like data privacy, consumer manipulation, and algorithmic biases in digital marketing (Martin & Murphy, 2016). Also, about consumer feedback, the literature have demonstrated how important it is to understand the consumer perception of ethical practices to align it with digital marketing strategies (Latour & Zahra, 1988), our study found that Moroccan companies are not gathering feedback actively.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this empirical study offers valuable insights into how Moroccan companies perceive ethics in their digital marketing strategies, revealing a general awareness of ethical principles but highlighting a clear gap in their formalization and consistent application. While social media and content marketing are central to their practices, issues like privacy, data security, and transparency emerge as key ethical concerns tied to building trust and protecting brand reputation. Methodologically, the study is limited by the potential subjective biases, suggesting future research should broaden the scope and include quantitative methods. Managerially, the findings underscore the urgent need for Moroccan companies to develop formal ethical guidelines and frameworks, alongside enhanced education, to translate ethical awareness into concrete and accountable marketing practices within the local context.

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