



A brief commentary on the past, present and future trajectory of the *Journal of World Business*



Michael G. Harvey^{a,b,*}, Miriam Moeller^c

^a University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA

^b Bond University, Gold Coast, Australia

^c University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia

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ABSTRACT

In this brief commentary, we reflect on 50 years of the *Journal of World Business* and its predecessor, *Columbia Journal of World Business*. Commenting from our roles as authors, editorial board members, reviewers and advocates for the journal, we chronicle important trends in JWB's editorial emphasis and publication record, trends that are reflective of broader changes in the global business environment and the field of International Business. We derive a series of themes that have ebbed and flowed during the period, and reflect on these patterns and their implications for IB scholarship. We conclude by deriving insights from past contributions that can shed light on future directions in the international business field.

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Fifty years is not a great deal of time in the overall scheme of things. But, in the context of an academic field of inquiry, time takes on new meaning particularly when compared to the life of academic journals. *The Columbia Journal of World Business* (aka the *Journal of World Business* {JWB}) is one such *Journal*. The *Journal* was a part of the genesis of the field of world business, 50 years ago. In subsequent 50 years, the *Journal* has chronicled the emergence of an entire field of academic inquiry. It would therefore seem prudent to examine the trends that have been identified over this 50 year time epoch through examining the articles published in the *JWB* during the life of the *Journal*. In addition, by examining the past contributions of researchers, the future directions in the field of world business might also emerge.

It is not the intent of this paper to compare ratings of the *JWB* to other journals in the field of international business (e.g. *Management International Review*, *Journal of International Business Studies* and the like). The *JWB* has consistently been ranked in the top three international business journals and at times higher depending on the region and applied journal ranking system. Each of the ranking systems used by researchers has their critics and limitations. Therefore, without a standard universally accepted methodology, to compare rankings, it would seem to be a fruitless endeavour. The goal of the paper is to examine the thematic direction(s) found in

the *JWB* over the last 50 years as well as where the *Journal* may head in the future.

A census of the articles published in the *JWB* over the last 50 years has been compiled to provide the foundation for identifying the past trends in the *Journal* as well as possible harbingers for predicting future research directions in the field of world business. The articles are grouped into seven themes, those being: **Theme I** on Strategic Management (i.e. formulation and implementation of goals by management based on consideration of resources and internal/external environment); **Theme II** on International Management (i.e. practice of managing business operations in more than one country), Leadership (i.e. process that results in social influence) and Human Resource Management (i.e. function of maximizing employee performance); **Theme III** on Ethics (i.e. an understanding of what is considered to be "right" and "wrong" conduct); **Theme IV** on Global Environmental Issues and Sustainability (i.e. endurance of systems and processes); **Theme V** on International, Multinational, and Global Marketing (i.e. understanding and targeting customers across borders); **Theme VI** on International/Multinational/Global Business (i.e. commercial transactions across borders); and **Theme VII** on 'Other' (i.e. Finance, Economics, Geography and Demographic-related topics). Each of these categories of research will now be examined in the context of each decade since the inception of the *Journal*. Although the nexus of research patterns across decades is visibly varied, it is suggested that some research patterns are heavily influenced by the direction and purpose of the leading editor or editorial team. It is therefore challenging, but we strive to put forth a set of

* Corresponding author at: University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA.

Tel.: +1 520 626 4187.

E-mail address: harveyem@email.arizona.edu (M.G. Harvey).

predictions for future *JWB* research that concerns pertinent world business issues.

1. Overview *JWB* research statistics

To the best of our knowledge, we have identified all publications between 1965 (in augural issue) and 2014 (final issue for the year). This includes *Special Issue* publications, but excludes notes from the Editors, reader comments, and notes from the President of Columbia University. It could be argued that these have the potential to skew our statistics and analysis of contributions and impact. With this in mind, across five decades we observed 2297 articles (2469 articles including those that were originally excluded as per above) that were published across our seven pre-determined themes. This means that 49 volumes with an average of 4.3 issues per volume and an average of 10.9 articles per issue were published. The next paragraphs will detail the statistics and editorships of articles across the past five decades. Fig. 1 assists in plotting these trends.

1.1. Decade 1 (1965–1974)

In the decade spanning from the launch of the *Journal* to 1974, we observe a combined grand total of 642 publications across all pre-identified themes. Articles belonging to the ‘Other’ theme category dominate with 271 articles published within this decade, illustrating the breath of topics continued to be covered over the 50 years. The second highest number of articles belongs to the International/Global Business theme which accounts for 176 publications, followed by 126 publications about International Management, Leadership, and Human Resource Management (HRM), 27 publications about International/Global Marketing, 20 publications concerning Environmental and Sustainability issues, 19 publications about Strategic Management, followed by Ethics with 3 publications.

The first decade saw three editorial teams: Founder and Editor Professor Courtney Brown’s 9-year tenure (1965–1973) followed by Paul J. McNulty and Mary Anne Devanna (1974, Volume 9, Issue 1) and Mary Anne Devanna and Dennis L. Verhagen (1974, Volume

9, Issues 2–4). With Professor Brown, Dean Emeritus of Columbia University’s Graduate School, at the helm of the journal for nearly 9 years, he was able to kick-start the journal into a direction that is displayed within the dominance of its themes.

1.2. Decade 2 (1975–1984)

In this decade, we observe a combined grand total of 485 publications across all pre-identified themes. The transition from the first to the second decade saw similar trends as the first with 234 publications revolving around ‘Other’. Compared to this, and in descending order, International Management, Leadership and HRM saw 81 publications, followed by 61 publications about International/Global Business, 55 publications about International/Global Marketing, 29 publications about Strategic Management, 20 publications about Environmental and Sustainability Issues, and 5 publications on the topic of Ethics.

Editorial positions during this time belonged to Sidney M. Robbins and Mary Anne Devanna (1975, Volume 10, Issues 1–4; 1976, Volume 11, Issue 1), Maurice Wilkinson and Mary Anna Devanna (1976, Volume 11, Issue 2–4; 1977–1981; 1982, Volume 17, Issue 1), Professor John Burton, Dean at Columbia Business School (1982, Volume 17, Issue 2–4; 1983, Volume 18, Issue 1–4; 1984, Volume 19, Issue 1–3), and Mary Anne Devanna in sole editorial leadership (1984, Volume 19, Issue 4).

1.3. Decade 3 (1985–1994)

This decade sees a combined grand total of 461 publications across all pre-identified themes. Breaking it down, the decade observes another lead taken by the ‘Other’ theme with 211 publications. In descending order, this number of publications is followed by 71 publications on the topic of International/Global Business, 58 publications about International Management, Leadership and HRM, 44 publications concerning Strategic Management, 40 publications related to International/Global Marketing, 35 publications addressing the Environmental and Sustainability Issues, and 2 publications on the topic of Ethics. Editors during this time period include Mary Anne Devanna (1984–1992). Editors’ name was

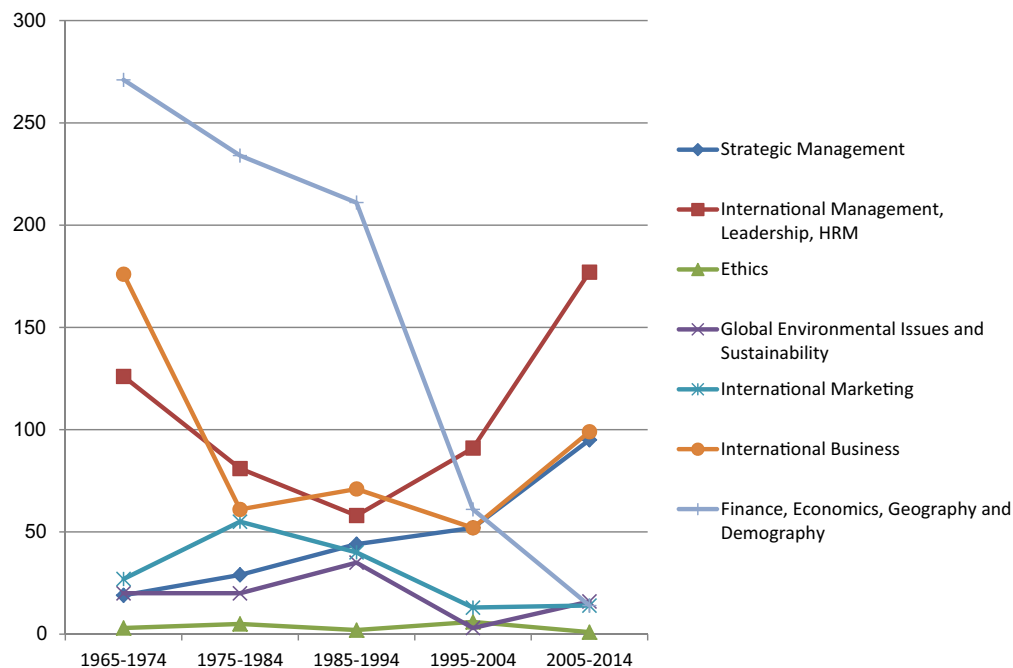


Fig. 1. Overview of *JWB* research theme trends, 1965–2014.

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