

Progress and promise: the last decade of international marketing research

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Abstract

In light of the rapid growth of international marketing studies, we thought it timely to investigate recent patterns and developments in the literature. We performed a content analysis of nearly 600 articles published from 1990 to 2000 in the leading academic journals. It became clear that major progress has been made in terms of a broadened research agenda and greater technical rigor. However, opportunities were identified to address overlooked research topics, increase cross-national collaboration, strengthen the complexity and comprehensiveness of theories, as well as diversify research methods beyond surveys. Based on these findings, we outlined several directions for advancement of international marketing knowledge.

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Globalization has been a powerful trend. International trade grew from 6% to 12% annually over the last few decades; foreign direct investment rose from US\$42 billion to US\$430 billion between 1984 and 1997; and daily foreign currency transactions doubled over the last several years to a record US\$1.5 trillion. In response to the increase in cross-border commerce, researchers are conducting more studies on the complex enterprise of marketing goods and services in a range of countries and economic–political–cultural conditions. From 1976 to 1982, just 112 empirical international marketing studies were published, whereas 230 appeared in the years between 1983 and 1990 (Albaum and Peterson, 1984; Aulakh and Kotabe, 1993).

Given that the last comprehensive reviews of this burgeoning literature were completed some time ago (Aulakh and Kotabe, 1993; Li and Cavusgil, 1995), it appears timely to examine the current state of international marketing research. More specifically, several questions are worth exploring: What issues are scholars attending to or neglecting and how have these changed recently? Are researchers, like their managerial counterparts, globalizing, conducting

studies in a range of geographies and engaging in cross-cultural collaboration? What major theoretical and methodological developments have occurred in the field? And finally, what do all these suggest about ways to advance international marketing knowledge?

The purpose of this study is threefold: (1) describe research streams and authorship patterns in international marketing research published in the most recent decade, 1990–2000; (2) identify theoretical and methodological developments in that literature; and (3) propose future directions for the domain in light of these findings. The paper is sequentially organized according to these aims. We begin with a definition of international marketing and description of the study methodology; proceed to findings on research streams, authorship patterns, and theoretical and methodological developments; and end with a discussion of implications for the future of international marketing research.

1. Definition and methodology

In their well-cited literature review, Albaum and Peterson (1984) provided the following definition of international marketing: “marketing activities relevant to products or services that directly or indirectly cross national borders” (p. 162). This definition offers the benefit of being succinct and highlights a distinction of international marketing from

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marketing in general, namely, its cross-national nature. However, not only managerial or firm behaviors as implied by the phrase “marketing activities” are of interest in international marketing, but also buyer characteristics and responses, whether in the industrial or consumer sector. Hence, we expanded [Albaum and Peterson's \(1984\)](#) definition for use in our study as follows: “marketing activities directed primarily toward buyers and relevant to products or services that directly or indirectly cross national borders.”

The study methodology was content analysis, an approach considered appropriate for and frequently applied in literature reviews (see [Boddewyn, 1981](#); [Clark, 1990](#); [Sekaran, 1983](#)). The content analysis began with circumscribing the literature domain. Since the primary thrust of this study was to understand developments in and patterns of scholarly research, the most suitable publications were deemed to be academically rather than managerially oriented. Additionally, it was preferable to select outlets widely regarded as publishing studies of the highest caliber.

To identify these outlets, we first turned to the most recent evaluations of marketing, international marketing, and international business journals. [Hult et al. \(1997\)](#) surveyed approximately 1000 marketing faculty for their opinions about the importance and prestige of more than 60 marketing publications. A small group of scholarly journals received the highest scores: *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Research*, *Journal of Consumer Research*, *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Marketing Science*, and the *Journal of Business Research*. [Dubois and Reeb \(2000\)](#) evaluated international business and international marketing journals based on citation analysis and a questionnaire to international business academicians. The top outlets in terms of quality and impact were determined to be the *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Management International Review*, and *International Marketing Review*, with the first considerably outscoring all others.

To augment these lists, we performed a citation analysis of marketing, international business and international marketing periodicals using the Institute for Scientific Information database. The most often cited journals closely mirrored the results found by [Hult et al. \(1997\)](#) and [Dubois and Reeb \(2000\)](#). A notable exception was the appearance of the *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, which ranked first in immediacy and fifth in impact. The 11 journals listed above comprised our literature set. Both U.S.- and non-U.S.-based journals were included, consistent with the international scope of this study. Given practical constraints, the set was not intended to be complete and exhaustive but representative of the field's leading research.

Our next step was to identify all international marketing articles that appeared in these outlets from 1990 to 2000. The 10-year period was chosen to provide an adequate timeframe to discern meaningful patterns and obtain a sample of published work since the last literature reviews were completed. Because traversing borders is the distinc-

Table 1
Articles by journals

Journal titles	Number and percent of articles
International business journals	459 (65%)
<i>International Marketing Review (IMR)</i>	289 (49%)
<i>Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)</i>	60 (10%)
<i>Management International Review (MIR)</i>	35 (6%)
Marketing journals	128 (35%)
<i>International Journal of Research in Marketing (IJRM)</i>	44 (8%)
<i>Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science (JAMS)</i>	24 (4%)
<i>Journal of Business Research (JBR)</i>	78 (13%)
<i>Journal of Consumer Research (JCR)</i>	17 (3%)
<i>Journal of Marketing (JM)</i>	26 (4%)
<i>Journal of Marketing Research (JMR)</i>	7 (1%)
<i>Journal of Retailing (JR)</i>	6 (1%)
<i>Marketing Science (MS)</i>	4 (1%)
Total	587 (100%)

tion of international marketing per the [Albaum and Peterson \(1984\)](#) definition, an article had to have a cross-national emphasis to be included. The result of the identification process was 587 articles, which we then content analyzed. Both conceptual and empirical pieces were incorporated in order to represent the full range of research, unlike in some prior reviews. [Table 1](#) shows the journals and distribution of articles. Interestingly, while more of the journals selected were published in the United States, paralleling other reviews of the top international marketing and business research outlets (e.g., [Jobber and Simon, 1998](#); [Morrison and Inkpen, 1991](#); [Bakir et al., 2000](#)), a slight majority of the articles appeared in print outside the United States. This indicated the sample of articles represented a fair balance between U.S. and non-U.S. publications.

2. Research streams

International marketing research has been classified in a variety of ways. For this study, we took [Albaum and Peterson's \(1984\)](#) classification due to its adherence to the international marketing definition given earlier, then adapted it to reflect major streams of research that have emerged since then. Using this revised classification, we categorized each study under the topic most reflective of its primary focus, the typical approach in international marketing literature reviews ([Albaum and Peterson, 1984](#); [Aulakh and Kotabe, 1993](#); [Li and Cavusgil, 1995](#)). [Table 2](#) shows the distribution of articles by topic.

Among the primary classifications (boldface in [Table 2](#)), marketing organization and strategy (26% of all articles) and buyer behavior (23%) comprised the primary areas of research, followed by entry/operational mode (17%), marketing mix issues (15%), and market characteristics (12%). Within marketing organizations and strategy, each of the subcategories—marketing management and organization

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