



## Regular article

# The relationships between distance factors and international collaborative research outcomes: A bibliometric examination



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## ABSTRACT

Increasingly, scholars have been conducting team-based research with multinational collaborators to carry out internationally relevant studies, generate global impact, and promote academic exchanges. In this paper, we examine how four types of distance, i.e., geographic, political, cultural, and economic, relate to the output of international research collaborations. We analyze a bibliometric data set derived from four leading marketing journals spanning the 2001–2016 time frame. Among other insights, our results show that in the context of international collaborative research efforts, co-authors from countries with wider economic distances and narrower political distances have published fewer articles and received fewer citations compared to those from countries with narrower economic distances and wider political distances.

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## 1. Introduction

Steadily increasing international collaboration among scholars has already become an important trend throughout academia (Ellis & Zhan, 2011; Gazni, 2015; Jeong, Choi, & Kim, 2013; Jonsen et al., 2013; Leydesdorff & Wagner, 2008; Ou, Varriale, & Tsui, 2012; Sun, Wei, & Zhang, 2017; Wagner & Leydesdorff, 2005). International collaboration refers to the situation where collaborators listed as co-authors in research papers work or study in different countries. While few authors published their work outside their immediate regions up until about a decade ago (Czinkota, 2000), today's leading journals commonly promote international academic collaboration in terms of both research themes and authorship. Several studies in major business disciplines have thoroughly documented the international trend of research collaboration: Jonsen et al. (2013), Ou et al. (2012), and Peterson (2001) in management; Gazni (2015) in economics; Chan, Fung, and Leung (2008), and Cantwell, Piepenbrink, Shukla, and Vo (2016) in international business; and Maloni, Carter, and Kaufmann (2012) in supply chain management and logistics.

The diversity of authorship of scientific publications has been highly valued by most scholarly journals (Cantwell et al., 2016; Frazier, 2011; Gazni, 2015; Hauser, 2006; Stremersch & Verhoef, 2005) as well as by academic communities (Chan, Fung, & Leung, 2006; Chan et al., 2008; Maloni et al., 2012). Ellis and Zhan (2011) note that most business journal editors intend to increase their publication of quality international collaborative research. For example, editors of marketing journals appear to highly value internationally collaborative studies (Frazier, 2011; Hauser, 2006; Stremersch & Verhoef, 2005),

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and acknowledge that non-U.S. scholars' collaboration has been steadily growing, but still occupy a limited proportion of the academic articles published. For instance, [Ou et al. \(2012\)](#), among others, argue that scholars from different countries definitely benefit from collaborative teams that feature highly complementary resources. As such, it would be important to examine key drivers of collaborative research across national boundaries.

Many prior studies have attempted to delineate various types of determinants affecting scholars' choices of collaborators and their collaborative research outcomes. These determinants can be largely summarized into four factors, notably geographic ([Hoekman, Frenken, & Tijssen, 2010](#); [Katz, 1994](#); [Maisonobe, Eckert, Grossetti, Jégou, & Milard, 2016](#); [Ponds, Van Oort, & Frenken, 2007](#)), economic ([Choi, 2012](#); [Hoekman et al., 2010](#)), cultural ([Beaver & Rosen, 1978, 1979a, 1979b](#); [Stokes & Hartley, 1989](#)), and political ([He, 2009](#); [Sonnenwald, 2007](#)) factors. Prior studies, however, have failed to systematically and comprehensively examine the relationships between the key identified factors and international collaborative research outcomes ([Jones, Wuchty, & Uzzi, 2008](#)). The majority of prior studies have either investigated international research collaboration based on one or two of the four distance factors, or have focused on a particular region or country, rather than on a broadly defined international scale.

To fill this research gap, we adopt a distance perspective associated with the four aforementioned factors. In the present study, we seek to address the following essential research question: Has international collaborative research already become prevalent in the marketing discipline? What factors would create significant relationships with the research outcomes of international collaborative research teams? By analyzing a set of sixteen-year publication authorship data obtained from four leading journals in the marketing field, we intend to prove that publications in journals are increasingly made up of internationally collaborative research articles. More importantly, we examine whether the four distance factors have significant associations with the research outcomes of international collaborative teams. In this study, we adopt the number and citation-count of scholarly publications as a proxy indicator to assess academicians' research outcomes ([Katz & Martin, 1997](#); [Maisonobe et al., 2016](#)), and examine articles published in the four journals, which are commonly considered as top-tier and cutting-edge scholarly journals in the field of marketing.

## 2. International collaboration

Academic collaboration is widely viewed as an important enabler for research output improvement, in terms of both research productivity and impact ([Kwiek, 2015](#); [Pravdič & Oluić-Vuković, 1986](#)). Many scholars have frequently engaged in collaborative research studies with their peers to effectively produce quality academic articles, so that they can meet their high promotion and tenure standards ([Jonsen et al., 2013](#)). Consequently, evidence shows that, over the past three decades, the number of multi-authored articles has been rapidly increasing ([Gazni, 2015](#); [Katz & Hicks, 1995](#); [Katz & Martin, 1997](#); [Wuchty, Jones, & Uzzi, 2007](#)).

[Katz and Martin \(1997\)](#) note that collaboration is an important mechanism for advancing scientific knowledge. Further, [Katz and Martin \(1997\)](#) and [Wuchty et al. \(2007\)](#) present the following key benefits of academic collaboration: sharing and transferring knowledge and skills, stimulating ideas, building wider scientific networks, and gaining greater research impact. Moreover, academic research achievement is also enhanced by the division of labor within collaboration teams ([Cronin, Shaw, & La Barre, 2003](#)). These benefits tend to enable a group of scholars to produce more voluminous research output with higher quality than lone researchers ([Bridgstock, 1991](#); [Lindsey, 1980](#); [Persson, Glänzel, & Danell, 2004](#); [Wuchty et al., 2007](#)).

Among the various forms of collaboration, international collaboration has been increasingly popular. More and more scholars choose to collaborate with others who affiliate in different countries. In addition to the universal benefits of academic collaboration, the internationalization of research teams may enable scholars to gain three additional unique benefits. First, international collaboration is likely to gain better access to international data ([Jonsen et al., 2013](#)), which facilitates research projects designed to address globally relevant issues. In today's globalized world with newly emerging powers, it is much more meaningful and academically significant to conduct cross-country studies, and these multi-national research studies enhance the generalizability of theories ([Hyman & Yang, 2001](#); [Yang, Wang, & Su, 2006](#)). Second, multi-national collaborators, who have different cultural and educational backgrounds, tend to stimulate new ideas ([Ellis & Zhan, 2011](#); [Thomas, Tienari, Davies, & Merilainen, 2009](#)) and develop new approaches to theoretical or practical problems ([Peterson, 2001](#)). Team members with diverse backgrounds also help to reduce the unfavorable elements of ethnocentricity and national idiosyncrasy when compiling and conducting research ([Søderberg & Vaara, 2003](#)). Finally, international collaboration is most likely to expand global research connections, and promote the international visibility and impact of the research ([Ellis & Zhan, 2011](#); [Kwiek, 2015](#)).

In sum, international collaborative research is often believed to be more impactful and of higher quality than research co-authored by only local scholars ([Jeong et al., 2013](#); [Katz & Hicks, 1997](#); [Kwiek, 2015](#)). [Kwiek \(2015\)](#) examines cross-border collaborations in eleven European countries and finds that international collaboration enhances paper acceptance rates and academic recognition. Similarly, [Jeong et al. \(2013\)](#) note that authors who are engaged in international collaboration often belong to the "academic excellence" group and demonstrate a higher individual motivation. Thus, although there are some challenges that scholars may have to face in their collaboration with other international scholars ([Salmi, 2010](#)), such as communication barriers and conflicts of opinions, time and space restrictions, and certain negative aspects of information use ([Dahlin, Weingart, & Hinds, 2005](#)), international research collaborations have been rapidly growing in recent years.

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