

Special Issue on the Future of International Marketing: Trends, Developments, and Directions

There is no doubt about the significance of international market operations to organizational performance. Since the early 1970s, marketing and business scholars have highlighted the vitally important role of firms' volition and ability to initiate internationalization and maintain ongoing foreign market operations. Increasing globalization and enhanced competition worldwide have made international marketing decisions essential for the survival, growth, and profitability of many business organizations. The literature discusses the positive outcomes of international market operations for individual firms, in terms of exploiting attractive growth and profit opportunities overseas, achieving economies of scale, gaining expertise and know-how, and strengthening their competitive positions. It has also been established that engagement of indigenous firms in international operations involves important macroeconomic benefits in the form of productivity, balance-of-trade, employment, and quality-of-life improvements for a national economy.

Over the past 40 years, a wealth of scholarly contributions have been published that shed light on important problems and challenges facing firms in their international marketing activities. As a result, a wide range of research streams have been pursued that have contributed to the development of knowledge in international marketing. There is no shortage of review efforts that, in different occasions, attempt to evaluate, organize, and integrate the body of existing knowledge within specific areas or strands of empirical inquiry and, in some cases, to provide an assessment and synthesis of the literature in the general international marketing field (e.g., Leonidou et al. 2017). Such evaluations have always attracted considerable attention, as they play an important role in stimulating further research in international marketing and, in turn, the scholarly development of the field.

Notwithstanding the value of such assessments and syntheses of prior research, most of these efforts (1) are broad-

based, covering the spectrum of international marketing; (2) are dated and thus unable to detect recent developments in the field; (3) pay limited attention to specific thematic research areas of particular interest; and/or (4) provide little guidance for the way research should evolve and advance extant knowledge. In addition, review studies conducted within the broad spectrum of international marketing typically take no account of how developments in other related fields can help knowledge development in the area and often fall short of pinpointing emerging, fruitful, and intriguing avenues of future empirical inquiry that have the potential to take the disciplinary maturity of the international marketing field to the next level.

Given the heightened popularity of international marketing among academic researchers and practitioners, the purpose of this special issue is not only to identify trends in some key research streams pursued in the pertinent literature but, in particular, to highlight several new and emerging areas that have strong potential to stimulate significant empirical investigation, guide timely research efforts, and advance knowledge in the field. The articles for this issue reflect a broad lens in terms of scope of the topics covered, providing a diversity of interesting research directions that future research studies may take in international marketing. Furthermore, the special issue focuses on work that is conceptual in nature and articles that provide a systematic assessment of the literature on an important area or strand of research in international marketing. Notably, timely problems and emerging issues, which essentially have been initiated, conceptualized, and empirically researched in general marketing and other business disciplines, are investigated here within the particular context of international marketing.

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THE ARTICLES

The special issue is composed of conceptual and review articles that focus on timely and important issues and areas of research in international marketing, ranging from global customer engagement and the effect of new technologies on relational approaches to foreign market entry, to the role of marketing capabilities in international marketing, to consumers and brands across the globe and firms' exporting operations. Attention is given to capturing current trends and emerging directions in the body of knowledge due to new forces and developments in the international environment. As a result, the articles of the special issue provide opportunities to enrich and advance timely and relevant issues and isolate research priorities in international marketing.

The first article in the special issue, "Global Customer Engagement," by Gupta, Pansari, and Kumar, is a conceptual study in an emerging stream of research on engaging customers in guiding firm processes, activities, and value creation. The authors propose a conceptual framework that emphasizes the importance of cultural and economic aspects that managers must consider while engaging customers globally. Based on a rigorous conceptualization stemming from the extensive literature review and earlier work by the authors, this research suggests that successful implementation of the customer engagement framework at a global level is highly dependent on the cultural and economic factors affecting the country because these factors ultimately influence customers' purchasing behavior. In an endeavor to advance our scholarly understanding of the application and importance of the global customer engagement framework, this conceptual study proposes that cultural dimensions of Hofstede and country economic indicators (e.g., GDP per capita) shape the customer engagement process. Empirical testing of this framework, or parts of it, constitutes an interesting and valuable avenue of future investigation. In addition, a natural extension of this research would be to consider the impact of cultural dimensions on employee engagement and other stakeholders across international markets in which a firm operates.

Also dealing with the global business environment, "International Market Entry Strategies: Relational, Digital, and Hybrid Approaches," by Watson and colleagues, explores the role that new technologies and the changing business environment play in influencing relational approaches to international market entry. The article is built on a holistic assessment of extant literature in the international marketing field over the past 25 years. Specifically, the study provides an overview of the evolution of international market entry strategies, followed by a

systematic review of the literature on relational, digital, and hybrid approaches to international market entry. The research offers a taxonomic classification of market entry strategies according to a firm's simultaneous implementation of digital and relational approaches. The taxonomy is fueled by a detailed discussion of likely determinants of their success or failure in each context and illustrative cases examined that highlight key managerial considerations across different business settings. The authors of this study detail exciting opportunities for future research focusing on data-rich environments, marketing automation, and the use of artificial intelligence.

Another literature review in this special issue, "Marketing Capabilities in International Marketing," by Morgan, Feng, and Whitler, investigates the notion of international marketing capabilities in comparison with marketing capabilities in a domestic market context. The review outcomes are enhanced with insights from interviews with several executives of companies engaged in varying degrees of international operations and foreign market expansion. The study concludes that it is unclear whether internationalizing companies require different marketing capabilities or merely the ability to deal with the amplified complexity created by cross-national differences in creating and managing the same marketing capabilities applied in the domestic market setting. The article suggests that numerous questions remain unanswered regarding conceptualizing and empirically examining international marketing capabilities, and it provides fruitful ideas for future investigation in this area.

The next article, a review effort undertaken by Gurhan-Canli, Sarial-Abi, and Hayran, is titled "Consumers and Brands across the Globe: Research Synthesis and New Directions" and addresses the fragmented nature of research issues and topics within the global branding literature. The review demonstrates that the body of current knowledge in this area can be categorized under two broad perspectives evident in the literature: global-local branding and the influence of culture on consumer and brand interactions. The authors identify theoretical gaps in the current literature and discuss how new developments in the macroenvironment, for instance, those related to political issues and technological advancements, are likely to affect culture and consumer-brand interactions in a global world. The article concludes with important directions for future empirical research focusing on the dynamics in less developed markets, in addition to highlighting the concept of hybridization that is presented as a fruitful perspective on a

scholarly debate between globalization and localization within the context of global branding.

Finally, “An Assessment of the Exporting Literature: Using Theory and Data to Identify Future Research Directions,” by Chabowski and colleagues, assesses the body of knowledge associated with research on exporting. By providing an overview of the core theoretical exporting research streams and then empirically evaluating the exporting domain over the past six decades, the authors bring perspectives of both qualitative and quantitative mechanisms to their assessment exercise. Using co-citation analysis for data evaluation purposes, they propose a series of intellectual structure implications in relation to the internationalization process, dynamic capabilities, knowledge scarcity, social networks, export marketing strategy, and absorptive capacity and learning. Along with a range of insightful implications for future exporting theory from current research pertaining to product innovation, capabilities, trading partnerships, information sharing, knowledge transfer, ambidexterity, and other issues, the authors present detailed implications for practitioners concerning export management, international marketing, and public policy.

Most of the articles in this issue relate to topics that have contributed significantly to the development of knowledge in international marketing over the years. Emphasis has been placed in this issue to identifying directions for research that have clear potential to add to the literature and provide managers and/or policy makers with new insights. The conceptual and evaluation-of-knowledge nature of the articles offers a wealth of promising research directions within specific international marketing areas with the potential to influence future knowledge development in the field. It should be noted, however, that knowledge building in international marketing is not limited to the topics covered in the special issue. International marketing is a rich field in terms of the problems and issues addressed, due in part to the complexity and multiplicity of forces in the international environment and their impact on marketing practices and the development of international firms. Researchers may choose from a broad

range of problems to pursue value-enhancing research in international marketing.

CONCLUSION

The studies contained in the special issue provide a good reflection of the breadth of the international marketing field, which is in line with the reality of the multiplicity of factors involved in developing, establishing, and managing international business operations. The long-standing research interest in addressing ongoing and emerging challenges facing firms in their foreign market activities and international expansion has resulted in significant knowledge development in international marketing, marked by a broad and diverse range of research strands pursued. The conceptual and review articles of this special issue point to a multitude of timely and interesting research questions and clear research avenues of future inquiry, which can substantively facilitate the advancement of existing theoretical knowledge in the field and provide international business practitioners and policy makers with insights and actionable implications. I very much hope that all those connected with or interested in international marketing research will enjoy reading the articles of this issue as much as I did and that the studies and rich array of proposed directions for future research presented and discussed will serve as a platform for stimulating significant investigation in these areas, contributing to the theoretical and practical advancement of knowledge in the field.

—Constantine S. Katsikeas
Editor in Chief

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