



PERSPECTIVE

Emerging themes in international business research

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Abstract

This study is motivated by two research questions: (1) Which recent contributions have been driving the research agenda in international business? (2) Which emerging themes in the literature are likely to set the stage for future work? To examine these questions, the study examined scholarly work in international business over the time period 1996–2006 in six leading international business journals (*Journal of International Business Studies*, *Management International Review*, *Journal of World Business*, *International Marketing Review*, *Journal of International Marketing*, and *International Business Review*). Next, a Delphi study of the most prolific authors in these journals over the same time period was conducted to delineate a future research agenda in international business. Addressing these two research questions provides us with a more complete understanding of the progress made to date in international business research, and provides a glimpse of the future.

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INTRODUCTION

A series of recent articles in the *Journal of International Business Studies* have explored the future development of international business as a scholarly discipline (Buckley, 2002; Buckley & Ghauri, 2004; Buckley & Lessard, 2005; Lewin, 2005; Peng, 2004; Shenkar, 2004). Specifically, Buckley (2002) argues that the field of international business has run out of steam, largely answering the big questions posed in the past, with limited focus on issues to drive the field forward. Further, he contends that the field needs to identify key empirical factors to be explained and then search out a tractable means of explication within a coherent theoretical framework, lest we, as a field, fall victim to a lack of differentiation from other functional areas of management and social science. Peng (2004) responds to this call by identifying specific research questions that can be addressed to drive the international business agenda forward. While identification of the big issues in international business is important to the advancement of knowledge, it is also necessary to take stock of the contributions to date. Future advancement of the field is, to a large degree, dependent upon existing scholarship and the work of contemporary contributors generating new knowledge.

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Table 1 Fifteen most frequently cited articles: 1996–2006

No. of citations	Article
86	Dunning, J. H. 1998. Location and the multinational enterprise: A neglected factor? <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 29(1): 45–66.
86	Lyles, M. A., & Salk J. E. 1996. Knowledge acquisition from foreign parents in international joint ventures: An empirical examination in the Hungarian context. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 27(5): 877–903.
83	Leonidou, L. C., & Katsikeas, C. S. 1996. The export development process: An integrative review of empirical models. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 27(3): 517–551.
80	Newman, K. L., & Nollen, S. D. 1996. Culture and congruence: The fit between management practices and national culture. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 27(4): 753–779.
75	Ralston, D. A., Holt, D. H., Terpstra, R. H., & KaiCheng, Y. 1997. The impact of national culture and economic ideology on managerial work values: A study of the United States, Russia, Japan, and China. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 28(1): 177–207.
63	Aulakh, P. S., Kotabe, M., & Sahay, A. 1996. Trust and performance in cross-border marketing partnerships: A behavioral approach. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 27(5): 1005–1032.
62	Luo, Y., & Peng, M. W. 1999. Learning to compete in a transition economy: Experience, environment, and performance. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 30(2): 269–295.
60	Kuemmerle, W. 1999. The drivers of foreign direct investment into research and development: An empirical investigation. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 30(1): 1–24.
59	Eriksson, K., Johanson, J., Majkgard, A., & Sharma, D. D. 1997. Experiential knowledge and cost in the internationalization process. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 28(2): 337–360.
58	Barkema, H. G., & Vermeulen, F. 1997. What differences in the cultural backgrounds of partners are detrimental for international joint ventures? <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 28(4): 845–864.
57	Reuber, A. R., & Fischer, E. 1997. The influence of the management team's international experience on the internationalization behaviors of SMEs. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 28(4): 807–825.
51	Makino, S., & Delios, A. 1996. Local knowledge transfer and performance: Implications for alliance formation in Asia. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 27(5): 905–927.
50	Pan, Y. G. 1996. Influences on foreign equity ownership level in joint ventures in China. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 27(1): 1–26.
50	Shenkar, O. 2001. Cultural distance revisited: Towards a more rigorous conceptualization and measurement of cultural differences. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 32(3): 519–535.
49	Buckley, P. J., & Casson, M. C. 1998. Analyzing foreign market entry strategies: Extending the internalization approach. <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> , 29(3): 539–561.

Citations are as of 1 June 2007.

most frequently cited articles were analyzed (those with at least 20 citations: these accounted for over 40% of the total citations). Of these articles, 72 appeared in the *Journal of International Business Studies*, 13 in the *Journal of World Business*, eight in the *Journal of International Marketing*, seven in *Management International Review*, and four in the *International Marketing Review*. Of the 112 articles, seven were review articles (two covering research methods, three exporting, one international joint ventures, and one the internationalization process). Further, 36 articles were conceptual, while 76 were empirical contributions.

The thematic derivation results, presented in Table 2, indicate that the areas of research fall into: business dynamics and strategy (47 articles, 41.96%); culture, conflict, and cognition (15 articles,

13.39%); consumer behavior and supply chain management (13 articles, 11.61%); marketing, strategic human resource management, and industrial relations (11 articles, 9.82%); economics and political economy (10 articles, 8.93%); comparative capitalism, institutions, and international business (six articles, 5.36%); organization and management (five articles, 4.46%); technology and innovation (three articles, 2.68%); and entrepreneurship and new ventures (two articles, 1.79%). Further, in some of these areas, significant subthemes emerge. With respect to business dynamics and strategy, subthemes relating to entry mode strategy, the internationalization process, knowledge management, and exporting stand out. The dominant subthemes in culture, conflict, and cognition focused on national culture's influence on management

Table 4 Fifteen most frequently cited international business articles in AMJ, AMR, SMJ: 1996–2006

No. of citations	Article
170	Inkpen, A. C., & Beamish, P. W. 1997. Knowledge, bargaining power, and the instability of international joint ventures. <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 22(1): 177–202.
164	Christensen, C. M., & Bower, J. L. 1996. Customer power, strategic investment, and the failure of leading firms. <i>Strategic Management Journal</i> , 17(3): 197–218.
153	Dyer, J. H. 1996. Specialized supplier networks as a source of competitive advantage: Evidence from the auto industry. <i>Strategic Management Journal</i> , 17(4): 271–291.
149	Dyer, J. H., & Nobeoka, K. 2000. Creating and managing a high-performance knowledge-sharing network: The Toyota case. <i>Strategic Management Journal</i> , 21(3): 345–367.
144	Barkema, H. G., Bell, J. H. J., & Pennings, J. M. 1996. Foreign entry, cultural barriers, and learning. <i>Strategic Management Journal</i> , 17(2): 151–166.
140	Hitt, M. A., Hoskisson, R. E., & Kim, H. 1997. International diversification: Effects on innovation and firm performance in product-diversified firms. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> , 40(4): 767–798.
131	Dyer, J. H. 1997. Effective interfirm collaboration: How firms minimize transaction costs and maximize transaction value. <i>Strategic Management Journal</i> , 18(7): 535–556.
131	Gupta, A. K., & Govindarajan, V. 2000. Knowledge flows within multinational corporations. <i>Strategic Management Journal</i> , 21(4): 473–496.
122	Peng, M. W., & Heath, P. S. 1996. The growth of the firm in planned economies in transition: Institutions, organizations, and strategic choice. <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 21(2): 492–528.
107	Jones, C., Hesterly, W. S., & Borgatti, S. P. 1997. A general theory of network governance: Exchange conditions and social mechanisms. <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 22(4): 911–945.
102	Simonin, B. L. 1999. Ambiguity and the process of knowledge transfer in strategic alliances. <i>Strategic Management Journal</i> , 20(7): 595–623.
96	Park, S. H., & Ungson, G. R. 1997. The effect of national culture, organizational complementarity, and economic motivation on joint venture dissolution. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> , 40(2): 279–307.
96	Zahra, S. A., Ireland, R. D., & Hitt, M. A. 2000. International expansion by new venture firms: International diversity, mode of market entry, technological learning, and performance. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> , 43(5): 925–950.
94	Hoskisson, R. E., Eden, L., Lau, C. M., & Wright, M. 2000. Strategy in emerging economies. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> , 43(3): 249–267.
89	Doney, P. M., Cannon, J. P., & Mullen, M. R. 1998. Understanding the influence of national culture on the development of trust. <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , 23(3): 601–620.

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for example, *International Business Review* has only recently been included in its analysis, thereby leading to an under-reporting of its impact on the field of international business (this may also partially explain the higher citation rates for IB research published within the mainstream management journals).

Third, the utilization of a Delphi method with the most prolific scholars poses a set of limitations. Although the Delphi method allows for the development of specific themes based upon a broad range of experts, the identification of experts sets forth a specific segment with individual biases. Thus, by restricting the Delphi participants to only the top 4.61% of publishers in the leading six international business journals, the perceptions of these scholars may be more heavily biased toward either the research topics currently in the literature, or those unique to their current research. For, as

March (2004) and Daft and Lewin (2008) suggest, journals are subject to “creeping parochialism” over time, where they tend to focus inward. The results of the Delphi study may therefore be somewhat limited by the use of the most prolific authors. Thus future research may wish to employ a broader participant base when examining potential future research issues that may be driving the international business research agenda.

Fourth, it is important to note that a specific 11-year time period was selected, and that the selection of any other time period (even simply shifting from the 1996–2006 time period to a 1995–2005 time period) could result in different findings, as the number of citations of a particular work would vary over time periods. Clearly, another time period could identify a unique set of articles.

Finally, dissemination of scholarly work in international business is not limited to refereed journals;



Table 5 Select list of influential books in international business: 1996–2006 (as derived from the Delphi study)

Dicken, P. 2003. <i>Global shift: Reshaping the global economic map in the 21st century</i> (4th ed.). New York: The Guilford Press.
Dunning, J. H. 1997. <i>Alliance capitalism and global business</i> . Oxford: Routledge.
Friedman, T. L. 2005. <i>The world is flat</i> . New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
Hofstede, G., & Hofstede, G. J. 2004. <i>Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind</i> (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
Murmann, J. Peter. 2003. <i>Knowledge and competitive advantage: The coevolution of firms, technology, and national institutions</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Peng, M. W. 1999. <i>Business strategies in transition economies</i> . Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
Prahalad, C. K. 2005. <i>The fortune at the bottom of the pyramid</i> . Upper Saddle River, NJ: Wharton School Publishing.
Rugman, A. M. 2001. <i>The end of globalization: Why global strategy is a myth & how to profit from the realities of regional markets</i> . New York: AMACOM.
Stiglitz, J. E. 2003. <i>Globalization and its discontents</i> . New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

books and monographs also serve this purpose. In fact, some of the most important contributions to the international business literature have been advanced through non-journal outlets. Given this, it was deemed appropriate to also explore influential works disseminated through books and monographs during the period 1996–2006. For this purpose, we asked the international business researchers who participated in the Delphi study to suggest titles of research monographs and books published during the specified time frame that they considered influential. After compiling the recommendations of the Delphi participants, we employed Google Scholar to examine the number of citations each contribution had received.

Table 5 presents influential books and monographs in IB published during the time period 1996–2006 with citations of greater than 100 times. Textbooks were excluded. Several observations can be offered. First, some of these publications are intended for broad audiences, and indeed gained widespread approval by being included in bestseller lists. Examples are the books by C K Prahalad and Tom Friedman. Second, some offer integrated frameworks of research streams rather than revealing a particular research project. Third, several are commentaries on the globalization phenomenon and explore some aspect of it. Another favorite topic is culture. Fourth, not all authors are necessarily international business scholars; those with a journalistic background or academics from other disciplines do provide revealing insights that gain the widespread attention of researchers trained in the international business discipline.

CONCLUSION

The present investigation provides a glimpse of the current nature of themes in international business. Importantly, it also reveals research topics and questions that warrant future attention by interna-

tional business scholars. The findings provide an opportunity to assess the field of international business in terms of its influence of articles, dominant themes and emerging themes. With continued questioning of the focus of the field of international business, and the need for authors to discern the issues within the field (e.g., Buckley, 2002), we believe that this study offers some empirically based insights. It is hoped that IB scholars will use the emerging themes noted in Table 3 as a platform for charting out new investigations.

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NOTES

¹The table of contents of each of the six journals was used to develop a data set of author productivity following the adjusted authorship approach employed by Inkpen and Beamish (1994).

²One author of the 115 most prolific scholars is deceased, thus resulting in a sample frame of 114.

³Of these, 112 articles (8.92%) were cited 20 times or more, accounting for 3815 citations (39.98%); 180 articles (14.34%) were cited at least 10 but less than 20 times, accounting for 2436 citations (25.53%); 200 articles (15.94%) were cited at least six but less than 10 times, accounting for 1480 citations (15.51%); and 717 articles (60.80%) were cited five times or less, accounting for 1810 citations (18.97%).

⁴We followed Werner and Brouthers's (2002) definition of international management in the classification of international business articles. An article is classified as related to international business when there is clear indication of international business content in the title, abstract, or keywords.