

## **International Marketing Curricula in Higher Education: Investigating Potential Content and Learning Gaps**

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### **Abstract**

This exploratory study examines the current course contents of international marketing (IM) courses in higher education institutions. Using Leximancer, a qualitative research tool for text-mining and lexicographic analysis, we conducted a content analysis of 290 course contents of U.S. and Australian business schools accredited by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Concept mapping reveals broad diversity among the topics covered in IM. Our findings suggest that topics related to international services and thus, the global services sector do not receive the attention that one would expect in today's rapidly changing marketplace, where growth in the demand for services is unprecedented. The results indicate that the majority of course contents are structured around global macro-environmental forces and the traditional goods-centered marketing mix framework as opposed to micro-environmental forces, such as consumption patterns and buying behavior of consumers, and meso-environmental forces, which include standard operating procedures, rules and guidelines. We provide a discussion to inform and stimulate the future development of IM curricula.

### **Introduction**

The delivery of international marketing (IM) plays a key role in the business curricula of many universities and is a major source of exposure to global business issues for students (Crittenden and Wilson 2005; Pestonjee et al. 2010; Vos 2013). Early internationalization of business school curricula occurred in response to corporate needs (Crittenden and Wilson 2005). For example, studies show that business leaders believed that business schools were responsible to educate students for careers as competent global managers (Nehrt 1987; Ball and McCullough 1993). The importance of this issue was addressed by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) through a series of guidelines developed from the period between the 1960s to the 1990s (Cort et al. 2003; Crittenden and Wilson 2005).

Previous research shows that macro-environmental factors such as, the political and legal environment, international trade and culture tend to dominate IM education. With regard to internal factors of the micro-environment, the focus has been primarily on marketing mix variables, e.g. distribution or promotion (Crittenden and Wilson 2005). However, the global environment continues to be rapidly changing. In particular, the services sector has been playing an increasingly important role in the globalization of the world economy. Statistics show that the pace in the globalization of (digital) services has been outstripping the globalization of goods over the past decade (Wirtz et al. 2015; McKinsey Global Institute 2016). Dramatic advances in information and communications technologies such as the Internet have provided firms with greater incentives to fragment production processes and to geographically delocalize them (Nicita et al. 2013). These developments have led to the widespread outsourcing and offshoring of services (Mann 2005; Wirtz et al. 2015), as we see today. Along with the rapid growth of the service sector there has been an evolution of services education in business schools (Bitner and Brown 2008).

While the business environment is evolving, IM education appears to be lagging behind. For instance, Crittenden and Wilson (2005) found that many topics of importance to global managers are not being taught or taught in sufficient depth. More recently, Vos (2013) argues that "curriculum designers of business programs with "international" in their title are challenged by the complexities, discipline-crossing boundaries, and ever shifting nature of this domain." She continues to raise the question what

“subject matter and content should be included” and what “skills and competencies” graduating students require (Vos 2013, p. 81). As such, our main objectives of this research are to investigate the current status-quo of IM curricula (i.e. content delivery, learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods, learning resources, and assessment) and to identify potential content gaps (i.e. topics of importance that are not being taught) among undergraduate students enrolled in an IM course.

### **Methodology**

We employed content analysis as a qualitative methodological approach, similar to the previous examinations of marketing course descriptions (e.g. Crittenden and Wilson, 2005; Crittenden and Crittenden 2006; Ferrell and Keig 2013). The purpose of the content analysis was to quantify and “analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of words and concepts” in relation to IM topics (i.e. knowledge taught), and, to “make inferences about the overall phenomenon within the context” (Perera and Hewege 2016, p. 130). To obtain our cases, we chose AACSB-accredited schools in the U.S. and Australia as our sample (AACSB 2015). At the time of the research, the AACSB’s list of accredited schools numbered 516 in the U.S. and 10 in Australia. All websites were analyzed to determine if “International Marketing” was offered as an undergraduate marketing course (for a similar approach see Butler 2011). Data were collected successfully from 280 (54%) of the 516 U.S. institutions. In Australia, we collected data from ten AACSB-accredited schools.

The next step involved software-facilitated content analysis of the course contents. We employed the qualitative research software Leximancer 4.0 ([www.leximancer.com](http://www.leximancer.com)) which is a text-mining and lexicographic tool that uses word association information to automatically identify collections of words that co-occur frequently in the text data (Smith and Humphreys 2006; Crofts and Bisman 2010; Tkaczynski et al. 2015). The software is used to analyze the data to create a relational map (i.e., concept map) in order to outline major concepts as well as their relationship with other second tier variables (Darcy and Pegg 2011; Thomas 2014).

### **Results**

The results provide evidence that current IM curricula contains several learning gaps when it comes to integrating new content (i.e. knowledge) in IM courses. Most course descriptions are focused on macro-environmental factors such as culture and the economic environment, and the implementation of the goods-centered marketing mix. The top five emergent themes in rank order are: cultural, consumer, global, marketing, course, and product. Our study identifies four areas of learning gaps in current IM curricula: (1) a distinct lack of emphasis on services; (2) a lack of focus on the proliferation of SMEs worldwide and the emergence of the Internet and disruptive technologies; (3) learning gaps in relation to meso-environmental forces and their associated impact of IM; and (4) content gaps in relation to the coverage of standardization and adaptation in the services sector.

We believe that this study provides useful insights to identify topics that are relatively new to the IM classroom (e.g. services offshoring, crowdsourcing and new technological innovations). Furthermore, we hope that our research contributes to a discussion that will reduce the disparity between IM course contents, potentially influenced by IM textbook content, and the student needs in IM education.

References Available upon Request.