

INTERNATIONAL MARKETING RESEARCH: TOO BIG AND TOO IMPORTANT TO FIT INTO A SINGLE CHAPTER

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ABSTRACT

Managers are spending more time conducting business and research in cross-cultural settings. Companies need well-trained graduates prepared to take on global marketing research tasks and challenges. Based on an extensive review of course offerings and textbooks available in marketing curricula across the US, this paper shows that critical issues in international and cross cultural marketing research are not receiving sufficient attention to prepare students for meeting these challenges. Programs outside the US seem slightly ahead in recognizing this need. The authors describe a customized international marketing research course designed for and delivered to an MBA program in Quito, Ecuador.

Having overcome some of the logistical challenges of collecting data internationally, cross-cultural market researchers – and students—need to take a cautious approach to critically evaluating the meaning of these data. It is one thing to make the (large) assumption that methodological and statistical techniques that make up the bulk of marketing research textbooks translate across cultures. It is quite another to assume that behavior and theoretical models or social constructs can be compared across two or more cultures.

Nonetheless most marketing research textbooks include only a cursory mention of these issues. Some have concluded that not much beyond minor emphasis would be given to internationalizing the marketing curriculum until teaching faculty members, themselves, are internationalized; until there is a model of a successful program to follow; and until marketing educators share their successes and failures with other educators. This paper is an initial step in that direction.

A content analysis of single-chapter treatment of international marketing research concepts in available general international marketing texts revealed that the following international marketing research concepts are typically covered.

- a. Challenges of multi-national marketing research including the following:
Complexity of research design;

- Lack of secondary data; Cost of collecting primary data; Coordination of research data collection across countries; Establishing comparability and equivalence.
- b. The well-known research process (problem definition to communication of findings) and its universality.
- c. Principles and techniques of marketing research used to systematically research potential country markets for political, economic, social, environmental, competitive forces.
- d. Identification of some of the problems inherent in conducting quantitative and qualitative primary research country to country.
- e. Translation problems in survey design.
- f. Comparability of constructs and equivalency of cross-cultural data.

International marketing texts with single-chapter treatments of international market research explain that international research serves two broad purposes. The first is to help firms formulate marketing strategy (market identification, entry, and expansion). Such research is facilitated by the availability of online secondary sources from governmental entities. The second area of research focuses on helping marketers understand the commonality or dissimilarity of customers from different cultures, defined broadly as cross-cultural marketing research. Such research is particularly vulnerable to issues of data comparability.

The customized course that was designed for the Ecuadorian MBA program addressed the above issues of primary data collection. It also included several hands-on activities using qualitative research methods as well as an extensive country-screening market entry exercise using electronic secondary data sources. The full text of the paper describes, in detail, the structure of the course and content of the exercises.

References Available on Request