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International operations management and operations management research: a comparative analysis

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Abstract

By reviewing all articles published in 24 reputable journals that serve as outlets for operations management (OM) research, 587 articles on international operations management (IOM) are identified for a 12-year period from 1986 through 1997. These IOM articles are classified into 17 topical areas and the topical breakdown of IOM research is then compared with that of OM in general. Relative to OM, research in IOM is found to focus more on distribution, strategy, purchasing, facility location, and quality management as opposed to scheduling, inventory control, aggregate planning, capacity management, facility layout, services, quality of work life and project management. A significant upward trend is noted in the number of IOM articles published over time. Also, differences are found between the topical coverage of IOM research appearing in practitioner journals and that appearing in academic journals. The methodological profile of IOM research studies finds empirical articles to be most prevalent, followed by articles on models, descriptive articles, and literature reviews. As one might expect, the proportion of IOM research authored by practitioners relative to academicians is found to be higher for IOM research appearing in practitioner-oriented journals than that in academically-oriented journals. The study provides an understanding of what constitutes IOM research and the directions of research in this area. It discusses the implications of the findings for industry and for future research and also presents a comprehensive set of keywords that can be used for identifying IOM research publications. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: International operations management research; Topical classification; Research methodology; Authorship profile; Research directions

1. Introduction

There has been a significant increase in global trade and investment in recent years. With reduction in trade barriers and the opening of new markets such as

in China, India, and the newly independent states of Eastern Europe, this trend is likely to continue. A report in the *Wall Street Journal* showing US\$490 billion poured into developing countries in 1995 alone, which represented a 13% increase over the previous year, conveys in part the expansion of global trade in recent years [27].

International operations is an area becoming increasingly important for both practitioners and aca-

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demicians today. In keeping with Wheelwright and Hayes' [28] fourth stage in the strategic role of operations, international operations play an important role in shaping the corporate strategies of an increasing number of firms today. While many have examined research directions in the OM literature [1,6,8,9,12,15,16,17,23,26], only a few [2,5,11,21,25] have undertaken to assess parts of the international operations management (IOM) literature including international purchasing, logistics, inventory management, technology management, and networks. No study has examined the collective body of IOM research literature from recent years.

By examining a substantive body of the IOM research literature from the past 12 years, this study undertakes to shed some light on IOM research in general and to contrast the IOM research literature with that of OM, and the IOM research by academicians with that by practitioners. More specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

1. Define what constitutes IOM research and provide a list of keywords for identifying IOM research publications.
2. Classify IOM research articles as either academic or practitioner publications.
3. Explore the trend in the frequency of IOM research publications.
4. Compare the topical breakdown of IOM research with that of OM in general, and test for differences in emphasis between the two.
5. Explore the practitioner- and academic-intensity in authorship of IOM research.
6. Classify the IOM research articles as academic or practitioner publications and test for differences in topical coverage between academic and practitioner outlets.
7. Present a methodological profile of the IOM research literature.

This paper is organized as follows. First, we discuss how our data was collected, categorized, and analyzed. Results of the analysis are then presented. Following the patterns identified by the results, a discussion on the particular aspects of international operations management research is also presented. Finally, in Section 4, the key findings and their implications are briefly summarized.

2. Research methodology

All articles published over the 12-year period of 1986 through 1997 in 24 well-regarded OM journals were reviewed and those that were international in content were identified as IOM articles. A 1991 study by Barman et al. [3] defined a set of 20 reputable jour-

nals serving as outlets for OM research and established the quality ratings for these journals. In a 1996 study assessing POM research productivity, Young et al. [29] expanded the Barman et al. [3] set of journals to include *Production and Operations Management*, a premier core OM journal launched in 1992. Young et al. [29] also listed the *Journal of Manufacturing and Operations Management* under its new name of *International Journal of Production Economics* which it assumed upon its merger with *Engineering Costs and Production Economics* and gave it the same quality rating as was assigned to *Journal of Manufacturing and Operations Management* by Barman et al. [3].

Our journal set for this study included all of the 21 journals identified by Young et al. [29] as reputable OM journals. These journals, listed in the order of their quality rating (with the *Journal of Operations Management and Production and Operations Management* having the same quality rating) in the field of operations management by Young et al. [29], are: *Management Science*, *Decision Sciences*, *Journal of Operations Management*, *Production and Operations Management*, *IIE Transactions*, *International Journal of Production Research*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Operations Research*, *Naval Research Logistics*, *International Journal of Production Economics*, *European Journal of Operational Research*, *Interfaces*, *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*, *Journal of the Operational Research Society*, *Omega*, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Computers and Operations Research*, *Computers and Industrial Engineering*, *Production and Inventory Management Journal* and *International Journal of Purchasing and Materials Management*.

In addition to the 21 journals listed above, articles published in three other journals *California Management Review*, *Sloan Management Review* and *Strategic Management Journal* were also reviewed. These three journals were among the outlets Amoako-Gyampah and Meredith [1] examined for their research content when shaping an agenda for research in the field of OM. Thus, in all, 24 journals were reviewed for their published IOM research content and for the assessment of the IOM literature in this study. Each of the 24 journals was classified as being either an academic- or practitioner-oriented journal based upon its description by Cabell and English [7] in *Cabell's Directory of Publishing Opportunities* and by drawing from the institutional research productivity literature [22].

All articles published in the 24 journals during the 12-year period of 1986 through 1997 were reviewed and those with an IOM content were identified. To constitute IOM research, an article had to have both an international and an operations management

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