

Discipline note

International operations management research

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Abstract

This paper profiles the literature on international operations management (IOM) from 28 leading operations management, international business, and management journals over the years 1986–1997. Trends in the frequency of IOM articles published and in topical coverage are identified based on research appearing in the journal set reviewed. A framework is developed and presented for classifying the IOM research literature by topical area and scope. Based on the articles reviewed, IOM research is found to focus most on industrialized countries and regions. There is need for empirical studies that span a wider range of countries in order to glean broader insights and to develop generalized theories of international operations management. A number of issues are identified for possible future research. The IOM literature from the journal set is reviewed and the comprehensive set of bibliographic references included provides both academicians and practitioners with a useful source of information to draw from. As identified, much of the work in international operations management seems motivated by a desire to provide firms with an economic benefit. While this is undoubtedly worthwhile, the objective of IOM research could be broadened to encompass social and economic goals of non-profit organizations as well as international agencies such as the United Nations. © 2000 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

International trade and investment has increased dramatically in recent years. The massive transfer of goods, services, and wealth through global trade and

investment is having a profound effect on the economies of nations worldwide. Such doses of foreign investment have helped alter the very landscape of some countries. Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and other international agencies invest overseas by initiating start-ups, entering into joint ventures, or acquiring existing organizations. Most of these transactions involve construction of new facilities, transfer of technology, and supply chain management. Undoubtedly, such developments present a particularly rich opportunity for studying International Operations Management (IOM). The need to

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understand international operations is becoming an important requisite for academicians as well as practitioners today.

A number of scholars have examined and provided useful insights on research directions in the broad field of Operations Management (OM). These include Buffa (1980), Chase (1980), Miller et al. (1981), Mabert (1982), Voss (1984), Saladin (1985), Chase and Prentis (1987), Hill (1987), Amoako-Gyampah and Meredith (1989), Meredith and Amoako-Gyampah (1990), Meredith et al. (1989), Swamidass (1991), and Neely (1993).

A few authors have examined parts of the international operations literature. For example, Birou and Fawcett (1993) and Ellram and Carr (1994) report on the publication activity in international purchasing. Boone et al. (1996) examine the research on international operations networks, Flynn (1992) identifies some of the international quality management literature, and Roth et al. (1997) provide a partial bibliographic list of the IOM literature. Nevertheless, despite the growing importance of international operations, no attempt has been made to comprehensively profile and classify the IOM research literature. Our study attempts to fill this gap by examining the body of IOM literature from a broad set of reputable journals over the last 12 years. In so doing, it aims to: (1) identify the trend in the number of IOM articles published across these journals, (2) profile this work by its focus on country, region, and level of industrialization, (3) define a framework for IOM research, and (4) provide a comprehensive review of the IOM literature from the journal set.

In view of the above-mentioned objectives of this study, identifying the trend in the number of publications in the journals reviewed shows whether IOM is receiving the increased attention in research that it deserves. A profile of the IOM research by its focus on individual countries, regions, and their level of industrialization can serve as a useful indication of whether IOM research adequately complements the actual significance placed on particular countries and regions for international trade and manufacture. The classification framework enables a better understanding of the IOM literature and facilitates further inquiry into relevant issues and comparisons across countries and regions. Finally, review of the IOM literature from the journal set and its bibliographic

references in this paper provides practitioners and academicians with a comprehensive source of information to draw from. It also helps identify areas for future research.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Journal set

For this study, 28 journals were identified as reputable outlets for research in the area of IOM. Studies by Barman et al. (1991) and Young et al. (1996) have identified and rated a set of 21 well-known Production and Operations Management (POM) journals. To this set of 21 journals we added *California Management Review*, *Sloan Management Review*, and *Strategic Management Journal* — three journals suggested by Amoako-Gyampah and Meredith (1989). To further expand the scope of our assessment of IOM research in leading journals, we also included *Academy of Management Executive*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of Management* and *Journal of World Business* (formerly *Columbia Journal of World Business*). Thus, in our study, we base our assessment of IOM research primarily on publications appearing in the 28 journals listed in Table 1. We recognize that there exists a substantial body of literature in OM and other functional areas such as in marketing, finance and accounting that interacts with one or more international variables to affect operations management. In order to further ground the literature, we do include some additional references to salient books and articles which may not be part of the 28 journals listed in Table 1.

Our review of IOM publications in the 28 journals spans a 12-year period from 1986 to 1997, and our classification of IOM articles is based on a defined set of criteria. However, defining what constitutes both OM and international research undoubtedly involves some subjective judgement. While we made every effort to identify IOM articles by reviewing all articles appearing in these journals during the relevant period, some may have been overlooked. Any omissions of IOM articles from these journals are unintentional.

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