

# A blueprint for international marketing

## *Reaching audiences in the digital era*

### Review

As we start a new decade in 2020, it is inevitable that we look back at the last decade and forward to the next ten years to try and gain some perspective. In terms of marketing, it is one of those areas where it is difficult to imagine a period of greater change in terms of how quickly things have developed. In 2010, social media was in its infancy – Twitter had 30 million active monthly users compared to over 300 million by the end of the decade, and Instagram only appeared for the first at the end of that year. For marketing, and certain international marketing, it is as if the whole world opened up through new channels, and perhaps more importantly, those channels were free to use an audience becoming quickly addicted to their mobile phones. For many firms, it must have felt like a tap was suddenly being turned on through which their messaging could come gushing out.

However, in terms of the central tenets of marketing, has anything really changed? Well, the answer probably has to be yes and know. The essence of marketing is still the same – firms still have to reach customers, inform them of their products and persuade them to buy things. But how this happens has changed markedly, with a completely new and vast stream of data and analytics to tell companies how engaged customers are. Perhaps the biggest changes can be seen in the use of that word “engagement” – before the internet and social media, engagement could only be guessed at or surveyed through questionnaires; now it can be measured on a minute-by-minute basis through dashboards powered by thousands of mobile phone users.

### New engagement

The question, then, for firms is how much do they stick to the traditional principles of marketing and apply them in the new digital age, or do they need to radically rethink what marketing means? This is the core challenge behind the article “Revisiting international marketing strategy in a digital era Opportunities, challenges, and research directions” by [Katsikeas et al. \(2019\)](#), who look at the new digital environment with fresh eyes in order to create a new blueprint for international marketing programs.

The authors start by proposing a new framework for international marketing in order to help firms develop their digital resources, and in so doing identify the key areas requiring focus for organizations – internal resources, external environment, foreign market selection, international marketing mix, and strategy implementation and control. They take each area in turn and break it down into constituent parts while assessing how each area impacts on the others.

### Inside and out

Organizational resources and capabilities are essential in terms of internal competences when it comes to maximizing the use of digital tools. This may seem self-evident, but there

can be areas that are blind spots for many organizations. For example, the authors point out that the time and effort required to develop and maintain online marketing activities can be underestimated due to the continuous support needed from human, financial and technical resources. Online capabilities also need to utilize all the available data that online activities provide and not ignore the wealth of data at firms' disposal.

In terms of the external environment, foreign buyer behavior can change country by country, and services require 24-hour deployment to take into account of time differences. Customer relationship management (CRM) strategies also need to encompass the global market, as well as take into account global competition. In addition, the macro-environment for each country operated in will differ, such as telecommunications technology and standards, so any use of digital tools will have to bear this in mind. Legal issues can also impinge on this, such as the use (or banned use) of certain sites in China for example.

### Mix and match

Selecting foreign markets that match the products firms have to sell can be both easier and harder in a digital environment. While knowledge about foreign markets has never been so abundant, the complex and diverse nature of markets in the digital era make decision-making much more difficult, especially when it comes to which market entry mode to choose. For foreign direct investment, however, digital technology can aid the process in terms of choosing investment partners and locations.

The revered marketing mix also has a key place in the new digital environment, and seems to be one area where the traditional tenets do hold for the "4Ps":

1. Product: There is a longstanding debate about product standardization or customization in different countries, however digitization allows for better market knowledge and flexibility in different markets, so a mix of strategies can be employed
2. Price: Pricing is perhaps more risky an area than ever before, as digital technologies mean that customers are not only much more price savvy, they can also price and source internationally as well as take advantage of foreign exchange fluctuations.
3. Place: Distribution and logistics have become easier in the digital age. When firms enter a foreign market, it is easier to identify and communicate with potential distributors, while logistics are being increasingly enabled by new technologies.
4. Promotion: With the advent of social media, this is probably the part of the mix that has changed most significantly. It is simply a lot cheaper to engage with millions more customers globally, while at the same time bringing much enhanced capabilities to analyze that engagement.

Implementation and control are the final piece in the new jigsaw for firms to understand, and these too are made more convenient for firms for a number of reasons due to the ease of

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communication and flow of data. The key conclusion, then, that the authors derive from their review is that while digitalization presents more opportunities than threats to firms in international markets, firms need to invest substantially in new competences and approaches to make the most of this new environment.

### Comment

The article "Revisiting international marketing strategy in a digital era Opportunities, challenges, and research directions" by [Katsikeas et al. \(2019\)](#) is a fairly comprehensive overview of international marketing issues through the prism of new technology and social media. There is perhaps little that will surprise marketing managers in the article, but it nevertheless can be used as a blueprint to ensure their organizations are maximizing the opportunities social media affords them.

#### Keywords:

International marketing,  
Marketing mix,  
Digital marketing

### Reference

Katsikeas, C., Leonidou, L. and Zeriti, A. (2019), "Revisiting international marketing strategy in a digital era opportunities, challenges, and research directions", *International Marketing Review*, doi: [10.1108/IMR-02-2019-0080](https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-02-2019-0080), ISSN: 0265-1335.

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