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GUEST EDITORIAL

The international e-marketing framework (IEMF)

Identifying the building blocks for future global e-marketing research

Sandeep Krishnamurthy

Business Administration Program, University of Washington, Bothell, Washington, USA, and

Nitish Singh

Department of Finance and Marketing, College of Business, California State University, Chico, California, USA

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Abstract

Purpose – International e-marketing is emerging as an important area for marketers, as global online markets expand. This special issue is an attempt to encourage, showcase, and guide research in the area of international e-marketing.

Design/methodology/approach – In the editorial, Introduces the international e-marketing framework (IEMF) as a guiding template for future research in international e-marketing.

Findings – The IEMF should help shape scholarly inquiry in the domain of international e-marketing, classify current intellectual contributions in this area and delineate the gaps in the literature.

Originality/value – The editorial presents the IEMF and classifies various papers in this issue using this framework. Finally, concludes with several compelling research questions to motivate future research in this area.

Keywords Internet, Marketing, International marketing, Electronic commerce

Paper type Viewpoint

Introduction

The internet, web and related information technologies have proven to be transformational. While these technologies have impacted all parts of the corporation, the marketing function has perhaps been most affected. E-marketing is now a significant part of every global corporation's marketing arsenal. As international acceptance of the internet and web increases, the scope of international e-marketing now transitions from possibility to reality.

International marketing scholars have followed the transformational impact of the internet/web closely. Several studies in the international e-marketing context have already emerged at the individual consumer (Callow and Lerman, 2003; Dou *et al.*, 2003; Kucuk, 2002; Sing *et al.*, 2004; Waller *et al.*, 2005; papers by Sugai and Gong and McMillan, in this issue) and firm levels (Javalgi *et al.*, 2004; Singh and Kundu, 2002; and papers by Kaynak *et al.* and Javalgi *et al.* in this issue).

Recognizing the contribution of the work thus far, in this paper, we introduce the international e-marketing framework (IEMF) as a guiding template for future research



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in international e-marketing. The IEMF should help the global marketing community shape scholarly inquiry in the domain of international e-marketing, classify current intellectual contributions in this area and delineate the gaps in the literature to focus future research. Moreover, the IEMF should help global e-marketing scholars address the question – “How is International E-Marketing different from International Marketing?” The IEMF is an extension of the framework first introduced in Krishnamurthy (2006) to the international context.

An overview of IEMF

The IEMF has seven components – actors (i.e. those who take e-marketing actions), spaces (i.e. online theaters of engagement), technology form factors (i.e. the idiosyncrasies of information technologies that affect the user experience), country-level cultural factors (i.e. the Hofstedian framework), access to information technologies (or the “digital divide”), actions and outcomes (behavioral outcomes at firm-level). We now briefly introduce the seven components.

Actors

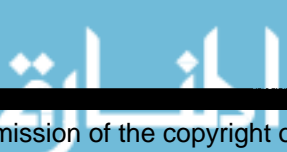
Establishing an online presence makes one an international e-marketing actor axiomatically. Since web sites can be accessed across country lines, e-marketing actors exert influence in the country of their origin and across borders. Moreover, companies now routinely create country-level sites to deepen their presence within a country (e.g. Amazon.com has stores in the UK, Canada, France, Japan and Germany). This could create arbitrage opportunities that have not been fully studied, e.g. Amazon.co.uk frequently sells books at a lower delivered price than Amazon.com. Yet, it is not clear if consumers are taking advantage of this.

Spaces

The conceptualization of spaces is fairly new in the business/management/marketing literature. Rayport and Sviokla (1994) first used the term “marketspace” and distinguished it from a marketplace. An online space is a theater of engagement between the company and the consumer (Krishnamurthy, 2006). Importantly, e-marketing is not confined to the brand or company’s web site. Spaces could include e-mail inboxes, mobile phone screens, public discussion boards, partner web sites, blogs and media, to name a few. Properties of online spaces and what distinguishes one from another needs more study. The role of the marketer in online spaces may be direct, indirect or reflective (Krishnamurthy, 2006).

Technology form factors

Across the globe, the internet means different things to different people. For those who have only seen it on the cell phone, the SMS is the unit of communication and the cell phone dial-pad is the form of entering information. For those who have always accessed it in a kiosk/access center/library, the perception of the internet is completely different from those who are accustomed to accessing it at home. For others who have used the internet/web on the personal computer or laptop, e-mail is the unit of communication. Form factors influence how people communicate, interact and transact online.



Country-level cultural factors

Country-level cultural factors are emerging as an important determinant in global e-commerce. The majority of online population today is non-English speaking which has led to a surge in language translation to localize web sites, and even emergence of language-specific URLs and multilingual domain names. Cultural factors have been shown to have a significant impact on how internet users browse, shop, and even influence their expectations from a particular web site. Research has also shown that culturally adapted web content leads to better usability, more favorable attitude toward the site, and higher purchase intentions (Luna *et al.*, 2002; Singh *et al.*, 2004). However, with few exceptions (Singh *et al.*, 2005), research is lacking on how to develop culturally congruent user-interfaces.

Access to information technologies

Access to information technologies is varied and a “digital divide” exists across nations (Lu, 2001) and within nations (Hoffman *et al.*, 2000). Countries with only a low penetration level of the internet/web are likely to not have the critical mass to sustain a local e-commerce operator or internet service provider. As a result, the potential for e-marketing is limited in such environments. As the level of internet access increases, the possibilities multiply. Over time, as the internet/web becomes accessible to a broad mainstream and individuals start perceiving it as indispensable, the nature of e-marketing also evolves.

Actions and outcomes

E-marketing actors have a broad set of actions open to them. As described in Krishnamurthy (2006), these actions can be classified broadly into three broad categories – communication actions, analytics and customer relationship management. Communication actions include advertising (e.g. text ad, immersive advertising, banner ad, pop-up ad, pop-under ad, advergaming), direct message dissemination (e.g. permission-based e-mail, e-mail newsletter, viral e-mail) and content creation and management (e.g. frequently asked questions, product information, downloadables). Analytics include search engine optimization and traffic analysis. CRM actions could be focused on an individual customer or a group of customers.

Potential linkages between framework components

It may be too early to conceptually identify the linkages among the different components of the IEMF. We briefly discuss potential linkages here.

Naturally, in any given space, actions by one marketing actor positively affect its own outcomes and negatively affect the outcomes of its competitors. Thus, advertisements by one actor will positively affect its sales and negatively affect the sales of its competitors. Some marketing actions will be more effective than others.

Extensive empirical investigation is needed to understand how spaces interact online. For instance, there is a need to understand actions in one space might reinforce the outcomes in another space. Some of these actions may be complementary and others may be harmful. For instance, an innovative banner ad might enhance the effectiveness of a promotional e-mail. Actions by competitors in one space might negatively impact the effectiveness of actions in other spaces.

When access to information technology is limited at a country level, there is an influence gap between the elites and the “have-nots”. We have a limited understanding

of who occupies these segments and what drives their behavior. Are these segments across countries and geographical regions? Interestingly, some countries have overcome these problems by leapfrogging generations of technology, e.g. adopting wireless technology (SMS, WAP) over PC-based technology. Limited access to information technology may leave only a few spaces for marketers to operate in. Once again, it is not clear if these spaces are the same across nations.

Today, two users situated in different corners of the globe may be accessing the same page using entirely different technologies and computing environments. One user may be transacting on her cell phone while another may be sitting in a kiosk in a mall checking e-mail. The research on the impact of technology form factors on marketing outcomes is very limited at this point. It is also fascinating to see how the two users discussed above may communicate with one another either in a direct way (e.g. e-mail) or in an indirect way (e.g. in a community).

Country-level cultural factors may moderate the impact of certain actions on outcomes. Just as in other forms of advertising, some communicative messages may be more effective in some countries and not others. Cultural factors might also limit the set of available actions.

An application of the IEMF

We analyze the diverse collection of papers in this special issue using this framework below:

- The Seth and Sharma paper focuses on the access to information technology component of the IEMF. It analyzes the impact of country's technology infrastructure and marketing institutions on the type of e-marketing strategy to be used within that market.
- The study by Kaynak, Tatoglu and Kula analyzes the determinants of e-commerce and internet applications adoption by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Turkey. It falls under the technology form factors of the IEMF as it specifically explores what kind of e-commerce technology applications are adopted by SMEs and what factors influence their adoption.
- The paper by Philip Sugai focuses on mental maps of Indonesian and Japanese consumers with respect to the mobile internet. He concludes that "the main barriers to widespread consumer adoption of the mobile internet were not found to lie in cognitive structures unique to a specific market, but appeared instead to be caused by inefficiencies in specific aspects of the wireless ecosystem". In other words, he was able to identify infrastructural effects in these mental maps.
- The paper by Javalgi, Radulovich, Pendleton and Scherer explores the role of customer behavior and customer relationship management in developing sustainable competitive advantage for internet based firms. Thus, it studies how marketing actors can build sustainable competitive advantage for firms through relevant customer-oriented actions.
- The paper by Wen Gong and Lynda Maddox studies the impact of inserting web URLs in traditional advertising. Their research suggests that marketing actors must establish an early online presence for long-term success.

- The paper by Luo, Zhao, and Du, explores the role of e-commerce companies as actors. This study explores both firm-level and national-level factors that impact the internationalization speed of e-commerce corporations.

Research questions

Using this framework as the backdrop, we identify five compelling sets of research questions to motivate future research in the area of international e-marketing:

- (1) How does one identify the relevant market actors in a given country when the online medium is global? This is an issue that may be particularly germane for market actors involved in non-price transactions, e.g. content, news. Is NYTimes.com a market actor in the UK? Is BBC.co.uk an important player in the US market? While marketers glibly talk of the universal set, identifying such a set in the online environment is very tricky for a given country.
- (2) Are some online spaces more effective from a marketing standpoint when the levels of access to information technologies are low and are others more effective when the level of access is higher? Are some market dynamics to be expected with low levels of access and others are higher levels of access to information technologies? What happens when the access to information technologies within a country is low, but a significant immigrant population lives in countries with high internet penetration rates?
- (3) How does the impact of actions in a particular space vary across countries with different cultural factors and varying levels of access to information technologies? For instance, permission-based e-mail might be an effective communication device in some countries, but not others. What are the factors that impact the acceptance of location-based advertising within a country?
- (4) How does space get demarcated on the web and how does this affect the enactment of marketing online? How does space interact with country-level cultural factors to affect cognitive, affective and behavioral outcomes such as attitude, choice and preference?
- (5) Does knowledge of online actions in a space affect physical marketplaces in multiple global locations? For instance, how does participation of consumers across countries affect brand identity in various cities around the world.

Conclusion

In this paper, the IEMF is provided as a means to identify the building blocks of research in global e-marketing. Using the IEMF, we have classified the papers in this issue and provided five sets of compelling research questions for the future. The IEMF should help us understand the relative scholarly contributions of comparative empirical studies and help us identify gaps in the literature. We believe that the area of global e-marketing is a burgeoning domain with rich opportunities for research. It is our hope that the IEMF streamlines the evolutionary path of this domain by identifying the key building blocks.

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(Sandeep Krishnamurthy is an Associate Professor of e-commerce and marketing at the University of Washington, Bothell. Today, he is interested in studying the impact of the internet on businesses, communities and individuals. He is the author of a successful MBA e-commerce textbook – *E-Commerce Management: Text and Cases* and has recently edited two books, *Contemporary Research in E-Marketing: Volumes I, II*. His academic research has been published in journals such as *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes (OBHDP)*, *Marketing Letters*, *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *Quarterly Journal of E-Commerce*, *Marketing Management*, *Knowledge, Technology & Policy* and *Business Horizons*. He is currently the Associate Book Review Editor of the *Journal of Marketing Research*.)

Nitish Singh is an Associate Professor of Marketing at the California State University, Chico. He is an author of the book *The Culturally Customized Website: Customizing Web Sites for the Global Market Place*. His current and forthcoming publications include papers in *Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Psychology and Marketing*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Multinational Business Review*, *International Marketing Review*, *Journal of Global Information Management*, *JCMC*, *Journal of Website Promotion* and several conference proceedings. His research emphasis is on international e-commerce.)

