

## The Reincarnation Of International Marketing

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In this paper, I will first trace the evolution of International Marketing (IM) and its determinants and demonstrate that IM has been primarily contextual in nature and, therefore, unable to generate its own theory or constructs to justify it as a unique school of marketing thought [Sheth, Gardner, and Garrett 1988; Sheth and Eshghi 1989; Ricks, Fu, and Arpan 1974].

As a contextual practice, IM has rightfully focused on two obvious dimensions: how the practice of marketing varies from country to country (extension vs. adjustment tactics) and why it varies (cultural, social economic, political, and physiological differences) from country to country [Buzzell 1968; Levitt 1983; Quelch and Hoff 1986; Boddewyn 1981]. The second part of the paper proposes that most of the contextual determinants of IM are disappearing and, that there will be no discipline of IM even if it was developed based upon a contingency theory approach. It is even likely that IM practice as we know it today may also become less relevant as these contextual determinants become less relevant [Levitt 1983; Bartlett and Ghoshal 1989; Sheth 1992].

The final part of the paper discusses the emerging reincarnation of IM with its emphasis on global (as opposed to international) and cross-functional (as opposed to functional) dimensions. I will conclude that the reincarnation of IM holds the promise of becoming a subdiscipline or a school of marketing thought.

### DETERMINANTS OF INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

International marketing refers to the understanding of marketing practices in different countries (comparative descriptions); its structural determinants anchored to national differences (comparative explanations); and deployment of country specific marketing strategies and operations by multidomestic firms (comparative prescriptions). Therefore, its primary focus is the description, explanation, and managerial control of marketing practices across national boundaries [Toyne 1989].

Compared to international trade and export marketing, IM is a more recent phenomenon [Root 1978; Yoshino 1976]. It has grown since World War II and presumably was a consequence of the demise of colonialism and the recreation of numerous independent nations. In my view, this origin for the rise of IM resulted in a number of contextual determinants for its practice and became the focus of academic research and thinking. Figure 1 displays the contextual determinants of IM.

Numerous books, monographs, and review papers have been written which document how these contextual determinants have shaped the marketing practices between countries [Ohmae 1985; Porter 1986,1990; Kotler 1991]. Therefore, it is better for me to simply focus on a few key points with respect to these determinants instead of describing them in detail.

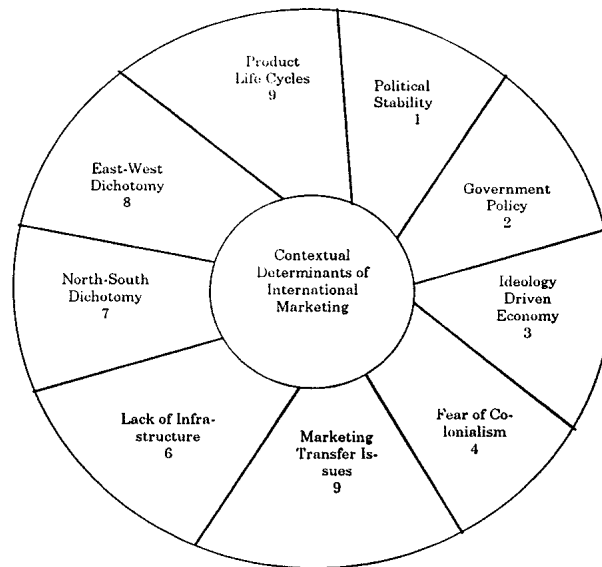
The first four determinants (political stability, government policy, ideology driven economy, and fear of colonialism) are more responsible for the prescription of multidomestic marketing practices, therefore, there exists more anecdotal and trade literature [Ricks, Fu, and Arpan 1976] and less academic research on them. This includes such managerial decisions as selection of countries with which to do

business and specific entry strategies. Most of this has required the understanding and utilization of what has been recently referred to as the fifth "P" of marketing (politics and public relations). Unfortunately, there is very little theoretical foundation underlying these determinants partly because IM has not borrowed from the social sciences, even political science.

The next three determinants (marketing transfer issues, lack of infrastructure, and North-South dichotomy) need a little more description. Marketing transfer issues relate to the *operational* challenges of product, price, distribution, and promotion adjustments across national boundaries due to divergence in support and core value chain activities including materials, people, processes, and facilities.

Lack of infrastructure refers to inadequate availability of transportation, communications, physical, financial, natural, and human resources most especially in less developed countries. This lack of infrastructure impacts the adjustment process for the marketing mix. Finally, the North-South dichotomy refers to the "have" and "have-not" countries of the world and is a direct reflection of the traditional economic development theories and their importance to IM practices. Academic research on these three determinants is moderately rich and seems to be grounded in the theories of economics, logistics, and public policy.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Contextual Determinants of International Marketing**



Finally, most of the academic research in IM has been focused on the last two determinants: East-West dichotomy and product life cycles. The first refers to the cultural differences between nations both at a macro and micro level of understanding and explanation [Clark 1990]. The second refers to the birth and death theories of product life cycles as they move across national boundaries [Wells 1968; Johanson and Valhne 1977]. Again, the product life cycle concept has benefitted from population ecology and biology theories as its basis and, to that extent, it seems to have at least face validity and empirical support.

This analysis clearly suggests why IM has predominately remained a contextual practice and why it has been difficult to develop a theory of IM even based upon contingency propositions: Most determinants of IM are ad hoc, dynamic, and unstable and, therefore, not subject to theory building opportunities. For example, who could have forecasted the demise of the Soviet Union (political stability), development of regional integrations (European Community (EC) '92), privatization of industries (Japan and United Kingdom) and pro-western links by Muslim states (Indonesia and Egypt)?

#### THE BORDERLESS WORLD

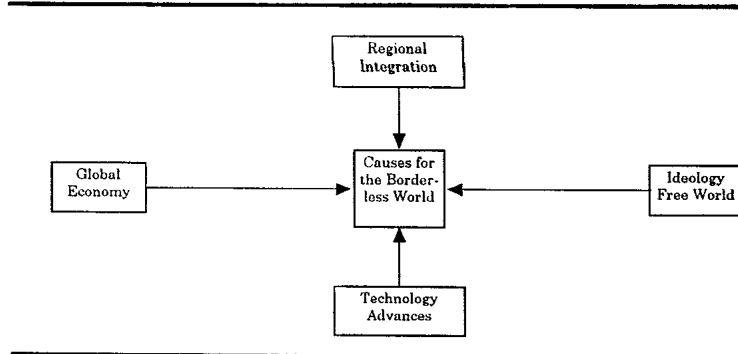
The fate of IM is closely tied to its determinants. As they change, both the theory and practice of IM must change. Ironically, it is not the *direction*, but the *existence* of most of the determinants that is increasingly under attack. Consequently, the existence of IM as we know it today is questionable.

A number of powerful macroeconomic forces are reshaping the world. They are: regional integration and the emergence of the triad power; technology advances, especially the adoption of information technologies in business operations; emergence of a free world ideology and the role of the market economy policy; and the borderless economy as a consequence of global sourcing and global competition.

These four major macroeconomic forces are also shaping the determinants of IM [Sheth 1992], and are represented in Figure 2. Together, these forces are creating a borderless world where the national boundaries are becoming either obsolete or less relevant in determining differential marketing practices. As the economic world becomes global, *international* differences are being supplanted by *intranational* differences, but on a global basis. In other words, in a global economy, *within-country* differences will surpass *between-country* differences. Therefore, it may be advantageous to look at different target markets within a country, but on a global basis [Sheth and Eshghi 1989; Ohmae 1990; Lamont 1991].

The regional integration of Western Europe (EC '92) and Southeast Asia (ASEAN) has recently demonstrated that nations can gain more competitive advantages by enduring alliances rather than by self reliance or by bilateral trade agreements [Porter 1990]. The emerging economic power of EC '92 is, in turn, creating a domino effect on the rest of the world. For example, it encourages North American regional integration between the United States, Canada, and Mexico and has encouraged Japan's attempted alignment with the ASEAN bloc. The economic blocs of EC '92, ASEAN, and North American integration have resulted in the emergence of a triad power dominating the world economy [Ohmae 1985]. It is estimated that 75 percent of world GDP and 70 percent of world trade are concentrated among these three regional economic blocs.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Causes for the Borderless World**



#### REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Regional integration is not a new concept. It has been practiced by kings and emperors in ancient times and by colonial powers in modern times [Kennedy 1987]. In fact, the United States, after the Civil War, created regional integration among all its states which resulted in several competitive advantages over dominant European nations such as England, France, and Germany. What is new is the emergence of three super economic powers replacing the old model of a single economic superpower ruling the world. Additionally, these superpowers are highly interdependent in their economic activities through mutual presence and mutual trade—the future of one is a lot more dependent upon the future of the others, resulting in the need for greater cooperation and understanding.

#### TECHNOLOGY ADVANCES

Technology advances, especially in electronics, have revolutionized business processes and practices [Guile and Brooks 1987; Gerstein 1987]. The computerization of people, machinery, and physical facilities has literally reshaped the traditional economic concepts of scale, scope, and structure. Similarly, the use of telecommunications and information technologies has reduced the time and place barriers of doing business. It is no exaggeration to suggest that the traditional marketing theories based on location (for example, the law of retail gravitation, wheel of retailing, inventory management, logistics, and physical distribution) may be obsolete when customers and suppliers can do business at anytime and from anywhere. Finally, electronic advances result in market egalitarianism.

The traditional trickle-down theory of markets (government, industrial, service, consumer) for diffusion of technology and products is being replaced by a trickle-up theory (from consumer, to services, to industrial markets). This is evidenced by the use of transistors in personal radios prior to computers; or the mass

marketing of television prior to the emergence of CRT's; or the use of compact discs (CD-ROM) in personal entertainment prior to storage of library information.

As we will discuss later, this egalitarian and convergent nature of the electronics technology will challenge such well-known concepts as the diffusion of innovation theory and product-market definitions in marketing strategy.

#### IDEOLOGY FREE WORLD

A third macroeconomic force is the economic collapse of ideology driven nations, especially the communist countries. As governments become more pragmatic and less ideology driven, it is inevitable that many of the traditional beliefs about the role of the market economy and private enterprises will change [Drucker 1989; Burnstein 1991]. This is likely to result in privatization of the public sector, less regulation of most industries, and development of procompetitive policies to encourage innovation and efficiency in different sectors of the economy. This is bound to blur the distinction between marketing practices of profit versus nonprofit entities and industries. Also, significantly different marketing practices across nations which are based upon government trade and employment policies are likely to give way to more market based marketing practices in the future.

#### GLOBAL ECONOMY

Finally, and probably as a consequence of the other three macroeconomic forces, we are experiencing globalization of domestic economies, primarily through global sourcing and global competition. Marketing practices will have to be understood and adjusted to this reality of a borderless economy [Ohmae 1990]. Borderless markets emerge when four flows (products/services/people, money, and information) are driven by market practices without government intervention [Reich 1991]. In a borderless economy, marketing practices related to procurement, marketing mix, and customer understanding are bound to change.

#### THE REINCARNATION OF INTERNATIONAL MARKETING

As the traditional determinants of IM go out of existence, the result is bound to be the demise of IM as we know it today; namely the description, explanation, and management of between-country differences in marketing practices.

In my opinion, IM will be reincarnated into global marketing and in the process, will result in two dimensional shifts. The first shift to global marketing will focus more on cross-functional integration and coordination and less on functional adjustments across national boundaries. The second shift will focus more on transnational similarities for target markets across national boundaries and less on international differences. This is represented in Figure 3.

#### FROM INTERNATIONAL DIFFERENCES TO TRANSNATIONAL SIMILARITIES

Four specific processes of transformation in the psychology and practice of IM are bound to result as a consequence of its transition to global marketing:

1. *Global Coverage.* The elitism of the diffusion of innovations from the home country to the rest of the world is replaced with the concept of global coverage. Global coverage theory is more likely to be developed because it can rely on world

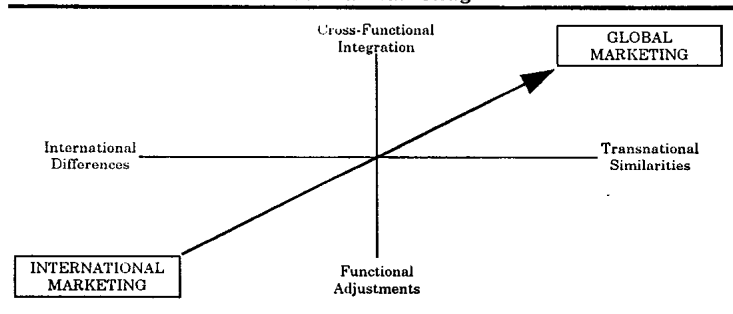
demographics. For example, if a marketer targets its products or services to the teenagers of the world, it is relatively easy to develop a worldwide strategy for that segment and draw up operational plans to provide target market coverage on a global basis. This is becoming increasingly evident in the soft drinks industry.

2. *Mass Customization*. The concept of mass customization [Davis 1987] refers to standard platforms, but custom applications. It is also referred to as "Think Global, Act Local." It breaks the oxymoron of efficiency of mass production with the effectiveness of personalization of a product or service. Again, it is likely that we will develop a theory of mass customization in marketing that transcends national boundaries.

3. *Relationship Exchange*. In a world that is moving toward a global market economy, it is becoming increasingly necessary to rely on customer relationships to preempt competition. Emphasis on relationship exchange (as opposed to transaction exchange) allows scholars to reduce the impact of unexpected events and, therefore, capably model more consistent behavior with some well grounded theories.

4. *Trickle-Up Theory*. Technology advances created by the electronics revolution suggest that it might be best to deploy new technology in low end applications and move up to high end applications. In general, this means starting with consumer markets and moving up to commercial, industrial, and government markets. Market upstreaming becomes highly desirable to gain scale and scope advantages. Therefore, it is possible to develop a conceptual framework based on the classical theories in industrial economics [Porter 1986].

**FIGURE 3**  
**The Reincarnation of International Marketing**



**FROM FUNCTIONAL ADJUSTMENT TO CROSS-FUNCTIONAL INTEGRATION**

A second dimensional shift is from functional adjustment to cross-functional integration. This is likely to generate new research opportunities for scholars in at least the four following transformation process areas:

1. *Global Accounts*. As the focus of marketing and business operations shifts from production to consumption, the need for customer orientation increases. Customer orientation suggests account by account market segmentation but on a

global basis. This is already practiced in several industries and by several companies such as IBM, Procter & Gamble, and Boeing. Managing global accounts becomes a challenge for both marketing practice and academic research.

2. *Cross-Functional Consistency.* As operations get organized around global customer accounts, it becomes increasingly necessary to deploy quality consistency across all functional units. For example, the six sigma or zero defect concept is no longer limited to manufacturing or to line operations, but is extended to all functions, line and staff. A theory of consistency becomes a very viable concept for global marketing.

3. *Value Based Accounting.* Allocation of costs to different functional and business units traditionally has been based upon accepted accounting principles. Unfortunately, they are not so universally accepted, let alone practiced on a global basis. While a recent effort to utilize activity-based costing (ABC) is gaining popularity, the ultimate option may be to develop a matrix which measures value to the market and its attribution to different functional and business units. Since we have some well accepted concepts of value creation and value distribution in economics and social sciences that transcend national boundaries, it may be possible to generate a unified theory in this area.

4. *Networked Organization.* Cross-functional integration requires coordination and communication. While functional adjustments are dependent upon the contextual determinants, cross-functional integration and coordination is capable of transcending ad hoc, context-driven issues to a higher plane of conceptual theory. In other words, it has the potential to be invariant to context.

As I have outlined the reincarnation of IM into global marketing and the consequent domain of emerging research and practice, it is becoming increasingly evident that we can utilize basic concepts and theories of economic and social sciences to develop a theory of global marketing. Furthermore, this theory, if grounded on time and distance concepts, may actually not only contribute, but revolutionize a more general theory of marketing.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have identified why IM has remained a contextual practice devoid of a well-accepted theory. The nine determinants of IM (political stability, government policy, ideology driven economy, fear of colonialism, marketing transfer issues, lack of infrastructure, North-South dichotomy, East-West dichotomy, and product life cycles) are gradually becoming extinct as markets become increasingly borderless. The forces driving a borderless world are: regional integration, ideology free world, technology advances, and global economy.

This is likely to transform IM into global marketing with less emphasis on functional adjustments across countries and differences among national and more emphasis on cross-functional integration and transnational similarities. I have identified eight processes of this transformation: global coverage, mass customization, relationship exchange, trickle-up theory, global accounts, cross-functional consistency, value based accounting, and networked organization. All these processes of reincarnation are likely to elevate the practice of marketing from the specifics of context and anecdotes to a more generalizable theory of global marketing.

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