

Systematic literature reviews in international marketing: from the past to the future

In academic research, existing works are fundamental to the creation and advancement of knowledge (Fisch and Block, 2018). When performing literature review, researchers analyse, interpret and synthesize a collection of related literature (Gusenbauer and Haddaway, 2020). This process, then, allows them to reconcile inconsistencies of the prior findings (Gaur and Kumar, 2018), comprehend the depth and details of the existing knowledge (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003; Xiao and Watson, 2017), expand the boundaries of the domain (Littell *et al.*, 2008) and reveal new research gaps that provide fruitful directions for further research (Palmatier *et al.*, 2018). Individual studies, as scientific enquiries, can yield different results (Shaffril *et al.*, 2021) for the same or related issues (Kozlenkova *et al.*, 2014); however, they should be valid, reliable and repeatable (Gusenbauer and Haddaway, 2020; Gaur and Kumar, 2018; Palmatier *et al.*, 2018). When studies are performed without preparation (Shaffril *et al.*, 2021) and are not based on the underlying knowledge base (Palmatier *et al.*, 2018), inefficiency appears. It is, therefore, necessary for the researchers to have a state-of-the-art understanding of the extant literature (Christofi *et al.*, 2017). Systematic literature reviews aim to fulfil that necessity and provide an overview of all these individual studies.

The systematic literature review deals with existing publications (Burgers *et al.*, 2019) and follows a systematic methodology for identifying, critically evaluating and synthesizing data that are already published (Vrontis and Christofi, 2019; Denyer and Tranfield, 2009; Littell *et al.*, 2008; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003) through a pre-defined process in a transparent, rigorous and replicable manner (Greyson *et al.*, 2019). As the transparency allows a repeatable methodology and the integration of all necessary literature (Greyson *et al.*, 2019), this provides a solid foundation on which to form conclusions and create evidence to support decisions in research and practice (Delaney and Tamás, 2018; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). Systematic reviews are not new; however, they have evolved dramatically in the recent years. When, for example, comparing the situation described by Hart (1998) with today, significant differences may be seen. This is most visible in the increased availability of literature in general, particularly online databases (EBSCO, Scopus, ABI/Inform, etc.), which allow researchers to conduct faster and much more transparent review processes (Gusenbauer and Haddaway, 2020; Gusenbauer, 2019) than was possible in the late 20th century.

Due to the rapidly growing popularity of this methodology in various disciplines (Kraus *et al.*, 2020), the systematic literature review has received more attention (Delaney and Tamás, 2018) and has become increasingly popular (Fisch and Block, 2018), almost even replacing traditional reviews for individual review papers (Shaffril *et al.*, 2021). Undoubtedly, the significance of systematic literature review in integrating and synthesizing the research of an accumulated body of knowledge (Kraus *et al.*, 2020; Yang and Gabrielsson, 2018), as well as in guiding future research efforts (Vrontis and Christofi, 2019), is a necessary step in the scientific process, which has grabbed the interest and rationale of various high-impact publication outlets (Palmatier *et al.*, 2018).

Conducting a systematic literature review, furthermore, provides researchers with an overview of the most important and relevant literature on the topic (Gaur and Kumar, 2018). On this basis, researchers receive the opportunity to develop a map of all the knowledge that was gathered in the field (Gusenbauer and Haddaway, 2020). This knowledge map, as well as the broad view from different disciplines (Greyson *et al.*, 2019), contribute to a holistic view and lay the foundation for synthesizing the research field across the



disciplines (Denyer and Tranfield, 2009; Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). The creation of a knowledge map can also assist researchers in determining a personal research focus (Littell *et al.*, 2008) and defining a niche that enables the development of new research (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). In addition, it can guide researchers to see emerging research trends and directions of the field (Burgers *et al.*, 2019). Besides, a broad overview on a specific topic, influenced by different disciplines, can help researchers to invent new theories (Palmatier *et al.*, 2018). The development of new theoretical constructs may lead to new research directions in the field (Shaffril *et al.*, 2021) and contribute to the broader debate (Palmatier *et al.*, 2018). With an increasing body of knowledge in various business disciplines, there is an increasing need to consolidate, structure and synthesize extant literature (Vrontis and Christofi, 2019; Yang and Gabrielsson, 2018; Fisch and Block, 2018). This is particularly important for specialized fields, such as IM and international business, due to a relatively limited number of systematic reviews in these fields (Gaur and Kumar, 2018; Palmatier *et al.*, 2018).

The objective of this special issue is to gather and publish systematic literature review articles on different thematic topics within the broad field of IM to provide ideas and directions for academics to undertake novel research, instead of doing repetitive and recycled types of research. The specific special issue attracted great interest and a vast number of submissions. This is the first out of two parts to be published in the International Marketing Review, and it includes ten systematic review papers covering contemporary topics in the field of international marketing (IM).

Vadalkar *et al.* provide the first comprehensive and long-term review of the literature on international print advertisements over half a century (1965–2020). The authors conclude the research on print advertisements has been increasing in scope and depth, contributing to its current critical mass overserved in 2020. They believe that the area has not yet reached its peak. The authors also provide a bubble map that indicates the concentration of studies in the beginning of this century. The findings also highlight a visible decline from 2015 onwards.

Donthu *et al.* provide a retrospective overview of the International Marketing Review. Employing a range of bibliometric techniques to analyse the performance of international marketing review (IMR) and its stakeholders, map the evolution of its thematic and intellectual structures and analyse the factors driving IMR's academic influence and impact, the authors find that the thematic structure of the journal has converged into six clusters: marketing channels, cross-cultural impact on emerging markets, export performance, country of origin, online consumers and global business environment.

In order to advance alternative perspectives on institutional voids, networks and the internationalization of small to medium enterprises (SMEs) in emerging economies, Dekel-Dachs *et al.* conducted a systematic literature review on IM and SMEs. The findings show that new perspectives have been progressively taking the place of conventional firm internationalization strategies—e.g. resource based view (RBV), formal institutions and business networks—and are becoming applicable solutions in the internationalization of SMEs from emerging economies. Their systematic review also offers new insights into SME internationalization.

Chandrasapth *et al.* provide a review on the topic of online conflicts in global consumption communities. The authors synthesized the current body of literature to provide a life-course overview on online conflicts and to identify the appropriate strategies to inform decision-making. In doing so, they aim to advance the IM literature by providing the first interdisciplinary literature-based conceptualization of online conflicts in global consumption communities and to propose a matrix of conflict resolution strategies based on two types of social control mechanisms and a five-folded governance structure from a socio-cultural and technological perspective. By incorporating diverse bodies of literature on online conflicts in consumption communities, the study identifies critical research gaps in the theoretical

understanding of presumption conflict and missing methodological contributions from multi-modal examinations, where, especially, visual data are considered.

Considering one of the most demanding topics in contemporary marketing research, big data, Akter, Hossain, Lu and Shams propose a holistic framework on big data-based strategic orientation for firms in international markets to attain a sustained firm performance. The authors systematically reviewed 45 most relevant papers out of 2,242 articles to propose an integrative conceptual framework. The findings of the systematic literature review revealed three primary orientations and that 11 distinct sub-dimensions reflect these three primary orientations. Finally, the authors illuminated a future research agenda that raises questions for the scholars to develop or extend theory in this area or other related disciplines.

Christofi *et al.* investigate smart cities and their internationalization process and efforts in order to gain the competitive advantage in the international arena. Their systematic review of extant marketing research on smart cities and their efforts to internationalize provides an integrative, internationally oriented framework that maps the extant literature across disciplines and countries, expands the boundaries of this research domain into new research paths and offers policy and practice implications. The authors, in addition, synthesize the findings of the studies, as well as literature gaps, to provide fruitful avenues for future research.

Chatterjee *et al.* take a cross-cultural perspective of IM to discuss the evolution of ethics and IM. The authors find that different kinds of research work have been published in the cross-disciplinary area of ethics and IM from 1994 to 2020. They also discover that the maximum research has been conducted in the USA and the UK. This study also offers new avenues targeting to influence other researchers to study the cross-disciplinary areas of marketing.

Huang *et al.* conduct a critical review and synthesis of the articles on determinants of international new venture (INV) performance to identify the research gaps in this area and develop a future research agenda. Adopting a semi-systematic review approach with a focus on using a vote-counting technique, the authors review 99 journal articles, published between 1994 and 2019, to assess the determinants of INV performance. Despite the lack of a broader integration of theories at different levels, inconsistent theoretical predictions and empirical results, the authors indicate that the majority of the INV performance articles employ a clearly specified theoretical foundation and focus on INVs in developed economies and non-service sectors. The authors, further, provide discussion with deeper insights from both theoretical and methodological aspects and point out some directions for future research.

Drawing on the economic crisis, resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, Battisti *et al.* provide a comprehensive analysis of IM studies within the context of banking and finance (B&F). The authors critically evaluate the extant IM research in B&F context in order to improve its coherence, scope and international dimension. Based on a systematic review of 66 studies, the findings reveal that over the last 35 years, the topic has expanded and continues to grow within the broader IM sector. Finally, the authors propose a multidisciplinary, integrative framework that serves as a guiding tool, and they provide the theoretical foundation for scholars to further expand the domain's boundaries.

In the last article of this special issue, Paul and Dhiman provide a comprehensive review on the methodologies and determinants of export competitiveness (EC), which is widely recognized as one of the mediums for achieving global competitiveness. The authors covered three decades of research articles published in Scopus-listed journals between 1991 and 2020. Their findings reveal that EC is now a scientific measure, since the studies in this subject field have moved towards measuring EC and its determinants. Moreover, based on the findings, they infer that there is scope for more studies to be conducted that introduce new theoretical approaches and better dynamic frameworks in the field of EC.

Collectively, the articles in this special issue include a compelling summary of the state of the art in a well-researched subject area in the field of IM. They can be used as a guide by both academics and researchers for uncovering future research avenues.

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