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COMMENTARY

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U.S. hegemony and international business research: Further considerations

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Abstract

The commentaries in this issue raise many insightful questions and considerations regarding the Livanis and Geringer (Thunderbird International Business Review, 2023, 64) study and we address a few of these. In particular, we focus on the following five areas: (i) the relationship of international business (IB) publications with the English language, (ii) resource constraints and IB research, (iii) institutional rewards and IB research, (iv) methodological considerations in evaluating IB research productivity, and (v) opportunity costs of pursuing a Ph.D. and IB research and publication.

KEYWORDS
academic competitiveness of nations, business school rankings, institutional productivity, international business research

1 | INTRODUCTION

The relative competitiveness and performance of nations and regions have been a salient issue during recent decades. Such considerations remain of interest to this day, as illustrated by a host of recent studies examining academic, technological, economic, and other dimensions of competitiveness (e.g., IMD World Competitiveness Center, 2022; Kirby, 2022; National Science Board, 2020; Schwab & Zahidi, 2020; The Economist, 2022; Times Higher Education, 2023; Wagner, Zhang, & Leydesdorff, 2022). The study presented by Livanis and Geringer (2023) as the lead article in this issue represents a novel addition to this literature, conducting a 45-year analysis of the evolution of published international business (IB) research in a select sample of highly-rated journals to shed light on geographic and institutional trends.

The commentaries by Robert Grosse (Grosse, 2023), Peter Buckley (Buckley, 2023), and Alfredo Behrens (Behrens, 2023), all of whom are respected scholars and leaders in the field of IB, provide a rich review and critique of the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study. These commentaries raise many insightful questions and considerations and we appreciate the opportunity to address a few of these. In particular, we focus on the following five areas: (i) the relationship of IB publications with the English language, (ii) resource constraints and IB research, (iii) institutional rewards and IB research, (iv) methodological considerations in evaluating IB research productivity, and (v) opportunity costs of pursuing a Ph.D. and IB research and publication.

2 | THE RELATIONSHIP OF IB PUBLICATIONS WITH THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

As noted in the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study, English has essentially become the lingua franca for IB and for publishing academic research in top business and management journals, including in IB (e.g., Lillis & Curry, 2010; Horn, 2017; Geringer, McNett, & Ball, 2022: p. 403), and fluency in English is indeed linked closely to productivity in the journals comprising this study's sample. Despite the significant country entry in IB contributions and decline in U.S. dominance noted in the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study, all of the top four countries in the last period (i.e., United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, as shown in their table 1) are predominantly English speaking, suggesting a potential advantage for countries with English as a first language, although language fluency is unlikely to explain all of the performance differences. The share of these four countries in total contributions has been dropping steadily, however, from 86.1% in 1976–1990 to 76.0% in 1991–2005 and 59.5% in the last period. This result is mostly due to the decrease of U.S. contributions, as Canada's contributions have remained relatively constant over time, while the contributions of the United Kingdom and Australia have risen significantly. Concentration of IB research among these four countries is even stronger when analysis is based on the authors' Ph. D. affiliation. Notably, there were IB publications by Ph.D.s originating from a peak of 57 different countries during the last 15-year period examined, reinforcing that Ph.D.s trained in other than the top four dominant English-speaking countries are publishing IB research in high-quality journals. Yet, while the U.S.'s dominance has dropped significantly, authors with Ph.D.s from the United States still represent almost 45% of the IB research output during this last period, a finding consistent with studies elsewhere in business (e.g., Wapman, Zhang, Clauset, & Larremore, 2022).

A link between facility with English and IB research productivity may suggest a situation creating an advantage for English-speaking researchers, particularly those from the United States, a finding consistent with other research (e.g., Burgess, Gea-Valor, Moreno, & Rey-Rocha, 2014; Geringer & von Glinow, 1999; Lopez-Navarro, Moreno, Quitanilla, & Rey-Rocha, 2015; Ryazanova, McNamara, & Aguinis, 2017). Although many mainstream journals in IB specifically, and in business and economics in general, have undertaken efforts to be more inclusive in their editorial boards, publication guidelines, and so forth (e.g., Cantwell, Piepenbrink, Shukla, & Vo, 2016), there are indications that authors lacking English fluency may still confront barriers (Aissaoui, Geringer, & Livanis, 2021).

As noted by Grosse (2023), there are many nations and institutions where English is the primary language of use, yet these nations and institutions did not rank highly in terms of their published output of IB research. In addition, it may be the case that a number of the individual authors who did successfully publish had limited or no personal fluency with English. As a result, a researcher's facility with English is not a sufficient, nor perhaps even a necessary, criterion for being able to conduct and publish IB research in leading journals. Of course, international networking, academic mobility, and collaboration with English-speaking colleagues represent potential options for addressing the challenge of limited proficiency with English (Jonkers & Cruz-Castro, 2013; Jons, 2009; Lages, Pfajfar, & Shohan, 2015; Ryazanova et al., 2017; Üsdiken, 2014). In addition, the broad availability of editorial and proofreading skills for converting other languages into English suggests that, even for nations or authors not deeply fluent in English, the barrier to publication may not be insurmountable. There is indication, both in the study by Livanis and Geringer (2023) and in other research (Abramo, D'Angelo, & Di Costa, 2019; Lopez-Navarro et al., 2015) that such strategies have indeed enabled non-native English speakers to achieve publication success in leading journals published in the English language. Further, many if not most of the top-ranked institutions in non-English dominant nations offer business degree programs in the English language. For example, the 2020 Academy of International Business curriculum survey (Kwok, Grosse, Fey, & Lyles, 2022) found that 67% of graduate level courses among responding business schools in Asia were delivered in English and 53% in Europe. The average proportion of business courses offered worldwide in English was reported to be 70% at the level of bachelor's degree programs and 69% at the master's degree level. This broad adoption of English in the delivery of university coursework may correspondingly help reduce the barrier of language for authors from those institutions. Kwok et al. (2022) also report that European business schools tend to organize themselves in a way that prioritizes IB more than is the average situation in other regions of the world, possibly further reducing the potential constraints associated with the English language for achieving journal publications in IB.

3 | RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS AND IB RESEARCH

As noted by Grosse (2023), certainly there are many business schools worldwide that confront the challenge of limited resources and multiple competing demands for those resources that may be available, thereby creating a challenge for building a pool of human capital for producing IB research. Indeed, Kwok et al. (2022) found that inadequate levels of funding were identified as the most significant obstacle to internationalizing business school faculty. Behrens (2023) also refers to the challenge that many non-American business schools may confront in generating sufficient revenue to support IB research efforts by the members of their faculties, which may limit their ability to reduce U.S. hegemony in this area. Resource constraints may occur in such areas as the aforementioned English proficiency, connections to journal editors or other gatekeepers (Brogaard, Engelberg, & Parsons, 2014; Colussi, 2018; Harzing & Metz, 2012; Zinovyeva & Bagues, 2015), familiarity with and expertise in advanced methodological approaches (Lopez-Navarro et al., 2015), and access to relevant and often expensive data (Eden & Rynes, 2003). While developments such as more affordable and dependable global telecommunications and international travel may reduce the scope and severity of some of these constraints (Cantwell et al., 2016), they are not likely to eliminate them. The nature and extent of resource constraints may be expected to generally be higher in countries with lower levels of economic development, as well as in institutions below the top tier in a nation. For example, Belkin and Hua (2022) argue that despite China having nearly 3,000 universities, there is a "very significant" decline in quality after that nation's top 50 institutions, with corresponding implications for resource availability.

These resource considerations highlight the potential transitional value of alternatives such as promoting academic mobility and fostering collaborative research undertakings, particularly with authors who may be located in highly productive or otherwise prestigious institutions (Ackers, 2005; Aissaoui & Geringer, 2018; Jonkers & Cruz-Castro, 2013; Jons, 2009; Lages et al., 2015; Wapman et al., 2022). Such collaborative approaches can be particularly valuable for scholars located in institutional or national contexts that are the most under-resourced (Aissaoui et al., 2021). Access to resources may also be enhanced if institutions and scholars are able to target their research toward topics viewed as relevant to business managers and to effectively communicate such relevance, to enhance prospects for accessing research funding and gaining access to data from private or public sources (Czinkota & Pinkwart, 2012; Pendergast & Geringer, 2012; Geringer & Pendergast, 2012). Such alternatives may be stepping stones toward committing to one of the three categories of business school strategies identified in the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study and the resource allocations that would correspond with such a commitment. Indeed, research by Aissaoui et al. (2021) suggested a stages-based model of the internationalization of IB research, linked to resource endowments, absorptive capacity, and capability development, that may help nations and institutions better understand and develop the capacity for enhancing IB research productivity. Such an approach appears consistent with comments by Buckley (2023) about the process of internationalizing IB research. It is also consistent with comments by Grosse (2023) about the challenges of successfully implementing the third business model identified in the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study, the Institutional Autarky model. An institution may have to undergo an extensive process of capacity- and capability-building efforts before it is able to position itself to successfully undertake such a development model.

4 | INSTITUTIONAL REWARDS AND IB RESEARCH

Journal publications play an important role in advancing academic knowledge and facilitating advancement in management practice. As tangible outcomes of sustained research efforts, publications are also used as an important criterion for assessing the interests and quality of universities and their faculty. Indeed, publication records—particularly regarding publications in the leading journals of one's academic discipline—have been associated closely with outcomes such as the level of faculty rewards, including promotion and tenure. In that respect, Grosse (2023) raises an important issue regarding Livanis and Geringer's (2023) finding that business schools in the United States have a higher level of dominance in general business journals than in the core IB journals and he ponders whether it may be linked to differences in perceptions and practices regarding IB research in the United States versus in other nations. The presence of journal-ranking lists from non-U.S. countries such as the Academic Journal Guide of the Chartered Association of Business Schools (ABS) and the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC), rankings that are commonly used by many institutions around the globe, provides support that differences in perceptions of what constitutes a top-tier journal are minimal when viewed broadly. Rather, it points out that general business journals might still have gatekeepers or that IB research in these journals has become of secondary importance given the rise of IB-specific top-tier journals (Kwok et al., 2022). It may also reflect a tendency in business schools in the United States and Canada to disperse faculty with IB expertise across different, often function- or discipline-specific departments, wherein IB expertise and emphasis—and the associated IB-focused journals—may be less recognized and valued (Kwok et al., 2022).

The potential challenges associated with conducting and publishing IB research, including the previously mentioned resource barriers, must also be considered in relation to business school personnel policies and established criteria for tenure and promotion. The socialization process of doctoral programs carries explicit and implicit messages about appropriate scholarship. This reflects the evolution of Western and particularly U.S. business scholarship in a specific cultural and institutional context, one where business schools have sought to establish their "scientific" legitimacy. This legacy may have carried over to some extent to other parts of the world, as academic mobility and the transfer of norms impacted business research (Aissaoui et al., 2021). This can impact not only the topics and techniques that may be more highly valued within academic institutions, but also the publication outlets such as journals that are valued most highly. As noted by Kwok et al. (2022), the Journal of International Business Studies is regarded as a leading academic journal by the majority of business schools worldwide. Other IB-focused journals also are highly respected, albeit frequently being viewed as lower in prestige. To the extent that publications in IB-focused journals are accorded high value by a business school's leadership and the associated policies and processes such as performance evaluation and tenure and promotion, there will be increased incentive for faculty to submit research to such journals. However, as suggested by Grosse (2023), to the extent that performance assessment and rewards (e.g., raises and promotions) are biased away from IB journals and toward other, more general or discipline-specific business journals, whether at a national or an institutional level, the implications for development and enhancement of IB-oriented human capital may be negatively impacted. Indeed, Kwok et al. (2022) reported that the publication of IB research is perceived to be significantly more difficult in Asia versus the United States and Canada. Further, Kwok et al. (2022) reported that faculty with an international orientation who worked in Asian business schools perceived greater difficulty in attaining tenure than was the case for their counterparts in the United States and Canada. To the extent that such challenges exist, the impact on the level of IB research may be consequential.

5 | METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN EVALUATING IB RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY

Buckley's (2023) commentary provides a valuable contribution in highlighting the linkage between the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study and theoretical models in IB. While noting that the United Kingdom was an important source of IB-related theory, particularly in IB's early years, there may be a disparity between being the institutional source of theory versus being the institution or collaborative group that successfully exploits the theory in the form of publications, an important distinction. Institutions evidencing strengths in human or other resource endowments may be better positioned, for example, to quickly convert theoretical developments from a different nation or institution into an impressive stream of publications than might be the case for the theory-innovating institution itself. In this respect, future research incorporating citation-based analysis rather than the publication-based metric used in the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study might reveal interesting differences in the evolution of IB research.

Buckley (2023) also mentions the issue of the choice of journals used in the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study, including the exclusion of several IB-focused journals that many contemporary scholars may consider to be among the currently leading journals in IB. As Buckley (2023) notes, it is always a difficult issue in research such as this to establish the scope of which journals to include or not, but such choices must be made due to conceptual and practical considerations. Business journals with an exclusive or primary orientation toward IB issues began to emerge in earnest during the 1960s, including Management International Review in 1960, Columbia Journal of World Business (now Journal of World Business) in 1965, and Journal of International Business Studies in 1969.

The Livanis and Geringer (2023) study uses an initial starting date of 1976 to compile its sample, in an effort to ensure the availability of journals with a sufficient volume of IB-focused publications and availability of data on the institution of authors' Ph.D. training. Because of IB's cross-functional nature and relatively nascent stage of development, along with a tendency of many journals to appeal to audiences of limited size and scope, it was not likely that most of the significant IB publications would have appeared in only one journal (Chan, Fung, & Leung, 2006; Treviño, Mixon, Funk, & Inkpen, 2010), suggesting that efforts to capture a major portion of important IB research would require the use of multiple leading journals. Identifying the appropriate list of such journals posed a practical and conceptual challenge. In response, the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study reflected a conscious decision to use the Journal of International Business Studies, widely acknowledged as the leading IB-focused scholarly journal (e.g., see Kwok et al., 2022), as the foundation for identifying which journals to include in the analyses. Therefore, they examined all qualifying articles and research notes published in Journal of International Business Studies for the 12-year period from 1980 to 1991, counting each journal citation contained therein. From the list of cited journals thus produced, they identified the 14 most highly cited journals, using that as a breakpoint for inclusion since the 14th-ranked journal was cited 29% more than the next highest-ranked journal and thus suggesting a natural breakpoint for journal inclusion.

As mentioned by Buckley (2023), the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study did not include certain other IB-focused journals that may currently be viewed as prominent outlets for IB research. This decision was based on these journals being established at a much later date, such as International Business Review (established in 1992), Journal of International Management (established in 1995), or Global Strategy Journal (established in 2010). Although the choice of any set of journals for such an analysis may be subject to criticism, the journals ultimately used in the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study clearly included highly-ranked outlets. For example, 13 of the 14 journals used have appeared in the Financial Times' list of leading journals that are part of that organization's system for ranking MBA programs worldwide (McMaster University Library, 2022; Ormans, 2016) and all 14 journals are highly ranked by the Australian Business Deans Council and numerous other journal ranking bodies (Harzing, 2022).

The Livanis and Geringer (2023) study presented a novel classification of three business school strategies that yielded success in entering the rankings of the most productive institutions in terms of IB research. However, this classification approach was based on observation of institutions that had successfully implemented such strategies, rather than trying to examine all institutions that may have attempted to design and implement such approaches. Of course, a university's mere decision to pursue one of the strategies for IB research is not a guarantee of success. It also requires attention to effective execution of the strategy and dealing with the challenges and opportunities that lie therein. For example, merely hiring a star researcher does not necessarily produce significant and sustainable levels of research productivity, particularly among the other members of the hiring institution's faculty. Bringing a top researcher into an institution can indeed have beneficial effects, such as increasing visibility and legitimacy for IB as an area of research, inspiring other researchers to pursue IB research at an enhanced level, expanding the foundation of research contacts and providing access to transnational knowledge networks, and encouraging collaboration (e.g., Call, Campbell, Dunford, Boswell, & Boss, 2020; Jons, 2009). However, such benefits are not guaranteed. The presence of a star researcher brought in from the outside may even negatively impact research performance, for example, by reallocating resources away from other faculty, arousing discomfort or envy, demotivating individuals who compare themselves with the new star, or causing existing faculty to become more dependent on the star for ideas and output. This caveat therefore raises the potential for future research to examine actual practices pursued by more, and less, successful institutions in their efforts to implement strategies for increased IB research productivity, such as the three models identified in the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study.

6 | OPPORTUNITY COSTS OF PURSUING A PH.D. AND IB RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

Another promising avenue for future study is the relatively unexplored issue of opportunity costs. Behrens (2023) discusses the issue of higher costs in obtaining a U.S.-based doctoral degree. While this may not be necessarily true, as Ph.D. studies are generally scholarship- or stipend-funded in the United States, it could be that the opportunity cost of getting an IB Ph.D. degree, and in general a business Ph.D. degree, in the United States has increased due to alternative career pathways that may be offering higher rewards and at a faster pace. In turn, Grosse (2023) argues that the third business model might be difficult for an institution to implement. Perhaps this

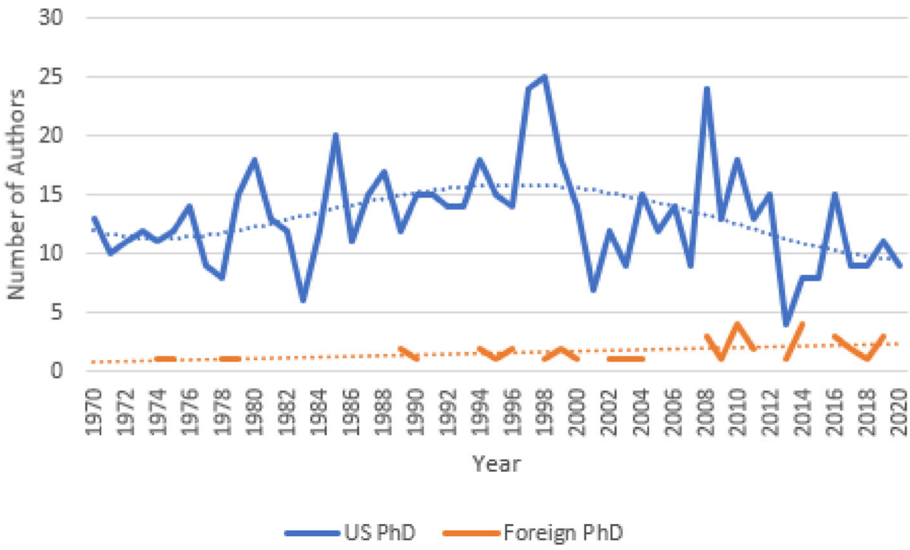

FIGURE 1 Number of new Ph.D. authors with an IB publication within 2 years of graduation from U.S. or non-U.S. doctoral program [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

is true in the United States, where opportunity costs may be higher, but in countries where Ph.D. education is highly subsidized by the government and may provide opportunities equal to other career paths, it may be easier to implement. Hence, we see the effect of Copenhagen Business School and Uppsala University. Buckley (2023) also discusses the issue of higher costs in U.S. education, using Vernon's (1966) model of the international product lifecycle. This model implies that foreign IB research production progresses down a learning curve or, in other words, as it becomes cheaper or at least more productive to produce IB research abroad. In summary, in each of the commentaries on the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study, there is an element of higher educational costs in the United States. But is what we observe an issue of higher direct costs in getting a Ph.D. education in the United States or higher opportunity costs that drives fewer people to IB? And how do these opportunity costs differ by nation or institution? Figure 1 presents the number of unique U.S. authors that for the first time published IB research in the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study's sample journals. This serves as a rather rough proxy for the number of Ph.D. graduates pursuing IB research, as it is confounded with productivity. Nevertheless, Figure 1 shows an upward trend of new Ph.D. authors publishing in IB up to 2000, but subsequently, a general downward trend is observed. This provides an indication, but not a proof, that opportunity costs in the form of alternate career paths may have increased in the United States since 2000. Future research may be able to shed more light on this phenomenon and thereby identify potential institutional or national policies to address such a trend.

7 | FINAL THOUGHTS

Are we in the midst of what Buckley (2023) suggests may be an evolutionary model of internationalization of IB research, a context in which we might expect to see continued increases in the dispersion of IB research away from the United States? Indeed, such a perspective has been argued elsewhere as well (e.g., Aissaoui et al., 2021). Or are we instead facing a situation where factors such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), resource availability, and institutional influences may help to maintain U.S. hegemony in IB research, as suggested by Behrens (2023)? Certainly, the answer to these questions is not provided with certainty by the findings contained in the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study. Yet, as noted by Buckley (2023), the intention of the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study was to shed some new light on the evolution of published IB research, a goal that we hope has been achieved to at least some extent. It is our desire that the Livanis and Geringer (2023) study, as well as the various commentaries contained in this issue, will stimulate a lively conversation that can yield a richer, more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon and its implications for researchers, institutions, and nations.

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