

International Marketing or simply Marketing?

Riccardo Resciniti

1. Internationalization is the distinctive feature of our era, which characterises current social and economic systems by affecting the behaviour of people, firms and institutions.

Considering, for example, the university programs or the training courses. They are usually enriched with experiences abroad which often receive public subsidies. In the competitive environment, it is undeniable that consumers' behaviours are consequence of global drivers (multinationals' product offerings, high tech products, fashion, pervasiveness of sport and entertainment, etc.), even if the responses can be different according to the home country. The most important policies and laws on energy, environment and security are not decided anymore by national governments, but depend on decisions taken at EU level or in consultation with governments of the major economies in appropriate international forums like the G20.

Firms are no exception to this rule. Nowadays, there are no firms (even small ones) which are not busy with the internationalization activities or not planning to do so. Therefore, while the multinational corporations provide goods and services to consumers all over the world, small firms are trying to identify new markets and new opportunities in foreign countries.

Marketing is one, but it probably is the field of managerial science which is the most affected by changes. It is, indeed, by nature in direct contact with the social and economic environment. It is common to claim the birth of new types of marketing in order to both identify new approaches, such as the different "product orientation", "market orientation", "relation orientation", "experience orientation", and

Mercati & Competitività (ISSN 1826-7386, eISSN 1972-4861), 2017, 3

DOI: 10.3280/MC2017-003001

Copyright © FrancoAngeli

N.B: Copia ad uso personale. È vietata la riproduzione (totale o parziale) dell'opera con qualsiasi mezzo effettuata e la sua messa a disposizione di terzi, sia in forma gratuita sia a pagamento.

highlight the different targets: the final consumer (consumer marketing), the intermediate customer (trade marketing) or the business customer (b2b marketing), or the internal staff (internal marketing). As well as, Marketing may be different according to the sector (service marketing, tourism marketing, sport marketing, wine marketing, heritage marketing, bank marketing, non-profit marketing, etc.) or its aim (green marketing, sustainability marketing, social marketing, innovation marketing, etc.).

The increasing importance of internationalization produces two opposite theses about Marketing evolution.

The first one considers International Marketing as the most important area of Marketing subject. Indeed, if Marketing must provide practitioners with lenses to see further ahead and with languages to communicate in different countries, the most important area within Marketing is the one linked to the study of the cross-border processes.

The other thesis, moving from the same premise, denies International Marketing existence. It is argued that is now obsolete to define an International Marketing field, since the whole Marketing must have an international dimension.

The issue, that has also been the subject of debates in Società Italiana Marketing in occasion of the reconfiguration of its scientific interest groups, is controversial and nuanced. Suffice to say that while Philip Kotler is professor of International Marketing¹, in the Italian edition of his popular book *Marketing Management*, International Marketing chapter has been cancelled and its contents have been developed throughout the whole volume!

2. The relevance of International Marketing has important implications for firms, research and teaching.

With regard to teaching, the graduate and post-graduate courses in International Marketing (in its facets, as “global marketing”, “multicultural marketing”, or “export marketing”) increase in Universities all over the world.

With regard to research, International Marketing covers a great number of distinctive themes (international channels, country of origin effect, geo-cultural distance, cross-cultural/national consumer research, international market entry modes), in addition to the international aspects of Marketing (international research, positioning, branding, product, pricing, place, advertising, etc.).

1. Philip Kotler is professor of International Marketing at the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

Six journals which focus on International Marketing have a significant positioning for the scholars (see table 1). International Marketing Review and Journal of International Marketing are ranked as “Fascia A” by ANVUR Agency too.

Table 1

| Journal | Ranking AIDEA |
|---|----------------------|
| Advances in International Marketing | B |
| International Marketing Review | A |
| Journal of Global Marketing | B |
| Journal of International Consumer Marketing | B |
| Journal of International Marketing | A |
| Journal of International Marketing and Marketing Research | C |

There are also special issues in International Business or Marketing journals, conferences and tracks, interest groups in scientific associations. Even in SIM there is an International Marketing scientific interest group, which is one of the most dated and participated.

At institutional level, in the last legislature, the most important investments of the Italian Ministry of Economic Development concern the support of the firms to internationalise.

3. The reasons for the dissolution of International Marketing into Marketing tout court are essentially two.

First, in the biggest multinationals, which are the basis of managerial theories, Marketing and International Marketing coincide. In the organizational structures, there is no export unit and the international presence is characterised by subsidiaries that ensure coverage of the international market. Thus, the more pervasive the role of multinationals on the markets and the bigger the industrial concentration, the stronger the reason for the dissolution of International Marketing.

The second reason, to some extent, is complementary to the first one because it deals with the Italian (small and medium) firms behaviour. In this respect, it has been observed the extent to which they must export because they cannot rely only on the domestic market, differently from

American firms which have a bigger domestic market to serve. The national market size forces Italian firms to adopt a global long-term perspective, so that for them “Marketing is either global or not” (Ancarani, Costabile, 2014: XXVIII).

There is a third driver that strengthens the others, which is made up of the Internet and digital technologies. Without wanting to dismiss the issue by saying that it is only required a multilingual site to be international, there can be no doubt that the relations between suppliers and consumers from different countries are nowadays easier than in the past. On the other hand, the technological discontinuity asks for scientific competences to implement omnichannel strategies. At the international level, the biggest challenge is the ability to manage the online channel in accordance with the type of markets to serve.

4. The vision, according to which Marketing is anyway “international”, is very evocative. However, it seems premature and maybe inopportune at this time.

It is premature because of its distance from the reality. It is true for the big corporations with many subsidiaries, but it is not true for the smaller firms. Selling abroad, especially in distant countries, requires specific competences in order to manage export operations, cultural differences, payments, negotiations, customs regulations, that they often lack.

For this reason, such vision seems inopportune. The greatest danger is to diminish the importance of internationalisation. Taking for granted that the Marketing is already international may delay the technical and cultural evolution that small and medium sized firms need.

Furthermore, ignoring International Marketing may be dangerous in teaching, graduate and post-graduate courses when it is important to acquire such specific competences. As well as it can be dangerous to reduce the research interests on the internationalisation issues because doing research is fundamental to identify trends, policy areas and solutions.

The two perspectives, above mentioned, are divergent on corollaries but converge on the same assumption: it does need giving the greatest importance to the international aspects of Marketing because the target must be the development of an appropriate “*forma mentis*” and technicalities for marketing practitioners.

In the light of the above, we propose *Internationalisation Orientation* as the distinctive feature of today’s Marketing, in addition to those already identified in literature.

According to this orientation, the international perspective must lead small and large companies. They must refer to foreign markets as they do to domestic ones. Companies must be able to identify and evaluate

opportunities where they show themselves and create coherent product offering. But at same time this kind of “orientation” underlines that all companies must protect themselves from the threats of foreign competitors who can entry the domestic market.

In other words managers and entrepreneurs have to get used to *think international*.