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ENTREPRENEURS' DECISIONS TO INTERNATIONALIZE EARLY: AN EMPIRICAL REVIEW FOR ADVANCING FUTURE RESEARCH (SUMMARY)

Denis Grégoire  
*Georgia State University, dgregoire@gsu.edu*

David W. Williams  
*University of Tennessee*

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ENTREPRENEURS’ DECISIONS TO INTERNATIONALIZE EARLY: AN EMPIRICAL REVIEW FOR ADVANCING FUTURE RESEARCH

Denis A. Grégoire, Georgia State University, USA
David W. Williams, University of Tennessee, USA

Principal Topic

Entrepreneurs’ decisions are at the center of theoretical models of International Entrepreneurship (IE). This implies that IE research should develop explicit strategies to account for the many challenges that early internationalization poses as a decision task (e.g., ex-ante uncertainty, complexity imposed by the multitude of relevant factors, ambiguity of information signals, resources constraints and unique circumstances, etc.). In spite of its many achievements however, evidence suggests that IE research has yet to fully and completely articulate such strategies. These failings limit our understanding of entrepreneurs’ decisions to internationalize early, as well as our ability to design effective policies to support IE and foster economic growth.

Methods

To address these issues and provide concrete means for advancing IE research, we analyze the theoretical and methodological articulation of a corpus of 423 decision-relevant articles identified from a broader comprehensive sample of 955 IE articles. More specifically, we use content-analysis techniques to reveal the articulation of IE research in light of seven key considerations, namely:

1) What theoretical idea(s) motivate the research?
2) What is (are) the key dependent variable(s) of the study?
3) Is the data collected before or after the internationalization event(s)?
4) Does the data consist of direct or indirect observations about IE decisions?
5) At what level(s) of analysis?
6) Does the study focus on single or multiple IE decision(s) by the same individual/firm?
7) Are the internationalization opportunities for these decisions the same for all internationalization events (or different)? Does the study control for these differences?

Results and Implications

Our analyses show that in spite of many arguments about the centrality of entrepreneurs’ decisions in theoretical models of IE, many studies investigate IE decisions after these decisions have been made, on the sole basis of firm- or environment-level data, or without considering important differences between the internationalization opportunities that are pursued. In addition to important threats to validity, these strategies make it impossible to distinguish between the factors that favor early internationalization, and the unique circumstances of the internationalization. Building on these observations, we propose a research agenda to help augment the theoretical rigor and methodological validity of future IE research.

CONTACT: Denis A. Grégoire; dgregoire@gsu.edu; (T) 404-413-7533; (F) 404-413-7571; Robinson College of Business, PO Box 4014; Atlanta, GA 30302-4014.