
BOOK REVIEWS

Research Methods in International Business

Lorraine Eden, Bo Nielsen and Alain Verbeke

(Palgrave MacMillan 2020, ISBN 978-3-030-22113-3), 511 pages

"Facts are the materials of science, but all facts involve Ideas ... we must, for the purposes of science, take care that the ideas are clear and rigorously applied."

William Whewell

Aphorism 4, 'Aphorisms Concerning Science'

The Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences (1840), Vol. 1, xxxvii.

This quote by William Whewell effectively summarizes the message of the volume edited by Lorraine Eden, Bo Nielsen, and Alain Verbeke. The volume is the latest in the Journal of International Business (JIBS) collection series. It is presented as a unique, up-to-date reference source on good and best practice, with a specific focus on international business (IB) research methods. Motivated by the belief that high-quality research methods enhance the credibility and usefulness of IB research for other scholars, policymakers, managers and the public, the different chapters in the volume identify a number of traditional methodological challenges that IB scholars face, and propose best practice for addressing them. The editors of the volumes are in a privileged position to embark on such a journey, with Lorraine Eden having served as Editor-in-Chief of JIBS and having been actively involved in the development of the Academy of International Business (AIB) Code of Conduct, Bo Nielsen being among the founders of the AIB Research Methods Shared Interest Group, and Alain Verbeke currently serving as JIBS Editor-in-Chief.

The effort of Eden and her colleagues is framed within the ongoing action, taking place across all business and social science disciplines, of improving the overall quality of methods used in business research. Similar initiatives have been echoed within the IB community to help IB scholars stay up to date with the latest research methods and to push the field toward the adoption of more advanced methods. The volume adds to these initiatives by putting together a bouquet of original JIBS articles on method, together with commentaries and reflections on these articles.

The volume is structured into 12 parts, including the introduction. Each part opens with an original JIBS article that is followed by a commentary from one or more

content experts. Four parts also include a Further Reflection chapter from one or more of the authors of the original JIBS article. To select the JIBS articles, the editors focused on 2010 as the starting year, thereby covering 10 years of JIBS publications. These publications identify different methodological challenges and contribute toward raising the rigor and relevance of IB scholarship. The selected JIBS articles included in the volume also reflect the diversity and plurality in the methodological focus of the field. They cover challenges and offer suggestions for both qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as mixed-method approaches.

The different parts of the volume can be organized into four main themes. The first concerns the recurring methodological challenges in contemporary IB research (Parts II through IV). The discussion ranges from the reproducibility and replicability of research findings to hypothesis-testing research and the relevance of ruling out alternative explanations to improve the trustworthiness of IB research. I personally appreciated the framing of the discussion on reproducibility and replicability within the more fundamental question of whether IB scholars want to invest in rethinking their core methods and in addressing the long-standing challenges of the field so as to conduct good, repeatable empirical research. The discussion around hypothesis-testing research and alternative explanations has a more operative tone, with the conversation between the authors of the original JIBS articles and of the associated Commentary outlining best practice for adequately reporting and interpreting research findings and improving the validity and generalizability of the findings.

In line with the volume's aim of offering a reference for the diversity and plurality of methodological focuses in the IB community, the second theme (Part V to VII) revolves around the methodological challenges and advances in qualitative research in IB. The focus of the discussion is on the relevance of developing a rigorous context-sensitive theory to challenge the view of case studies being a tool solely for inductive theory building. Case study research is proposed as a natural experiment for confirming or modifying theory, and as a form of interpreting sensemaking. I enjoyed this discussion because it highlights the versatility of this methodology for conducting both theory-building and theory-testing research along novel routes. The conversation further develops with suggestions for more holistic explanations that overcome the dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research and fully explore the potential of longitudinal qualitative research. In general, I found the overall discussion around this theme well developed, and especially appreciated the discussion on fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis as a tool to span both qualitative and quantitative analyses and generalize and contextualize qualitative findings that often span multiple levels of analysis.

The third theme turns the discussion to the methodological challenges in quantitative methods (Parts VIII to X). It focuses upon the challenges involved

in theorizing adequately, and in accurately testing interaction effects within and across levels of analysis in IB research, and on issues related to endogeneity and common method variance (CMV). For this theme also, the discussion indicates best practice by specifically focusing on the explanation of interactions, offering guidance on the steps IB researchers must take to deal with endogeneity, and reiterating the relevance of appropriate ex-ante research design decisions so as to limit CMV issues. Despite the technical nature of the issues at hand, in general, I think the authors have managed to find the right balance in avoiding unnecessary technical jargon while covering the topics extensively.

Frontier methodological challenges in IB research (Parts XI and XII) form the fourth theme the volume addresses. The complexities of modeling the multilevel nature of IB phenomena and of conducting distance research in IB are the two frontier challenges identified. I would personally have liked to have seen an additional chapter on lab experiments, a methodology hardly adopted by IB scholars but increasingly used in strategy and management. Yet, the two chapters addressing the identified frontier challenges do an excellent job of providing the reader with an in-depth overview of the topics examined. The conversation on multilevel models in IB research introduces the concept of cross-classified cases, and urges IB scholars to pay due attention to them, while also indicating several software packages that allow the adoption of multilevel modeling. Similarly, the conversation on distance research offers a detailed analysis of the various measures of cultural distance available, and a constructive discussion on how to solve the methodological issues faced by studies examining the distance between a single home or host country, and multiple other countries.

In conclusion, the volume fulfills the ambitions of the editors. It provides a firm reference for master's students as well as senior academics in IB by reflecting on the best methodological practices that can reasonably be adopted given the nature of the phenomena IB scholars examine. It also contributes, by raising awareness about the type of methodological challenges that plague IB research, towards improving the image of the IB field as a research field that is methodologically aligned with the more conventional subject areas in business schools. Such an effort was long overdue. Hence, I see the volume as a landmark in the development of the IB field and expect it to be highly welcomed by the IB research community.

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