

Executive Perceptions on International Education in a Globalized Environment: The Travel Industry's Point of View

J. Mark Muñoz

Tabor School of Business, Millikin University jmunoz@mail.millikin.edu

Marios I. Katsiolouides

Intercollege, Cyprus katsiolouides.m@intercollege.ac.cy

Research on globalization has determined travel executives' perceptions of the psychological implications brought about by an interconnected global environment and the implications on international education. With the concepts of Clyne and Rizvi (1998) and Pittaway, Ferguson, and Breen (1998) on the value of cross-cultural interaction as a framework for international learning, the study has explored strategies by which international education may be nurtured in a globalizing environment.

The globalized environment has affected business in a way that it has re-shaped cross-border interactions. This new landscape has provided the potential to affect the individual's psyche and opened new avenues towards the delivery of innovative international learning approaches.

executive perceptions, international education, globalization, travel industry

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has led the growth of business between nations of the world, so that money flows rapidly in and out of them, creating a situation of economic and political interdependence among these countries. A number of factors account for this event. First, technology has drastically lowered the cost of transportation and communication, thereby enhancing opportunities for international commerce. Second, laws regulating trade have generally become less restrictive throughout the world. Third, developing nations have expanded their economies by promoting exports and opening their doors to foreign companies seeking investments. This trend has expanded opportunities for economic growth and competition throughout the world (Greenberg and Baron, 1997, p.37).

As a result of this evolving landscape, the speed and volume of information has increased proportionately. These changes have led to the rethinking and creative implementation of mechanisms for efficient knowledge transfers. Corporate universities have become an accepted element within the educational landscape. Corporate organizations and academic institutions are exploring combinations of bricks and mortar and virtual learning through the Internet to disseminate critical knowledge and information across borders. The Lufthansa School of Business in Frankfurt has initiated measures to bridge potential knowledge gaps that may exist between the academic world and the business world.

In the travel industry, rapid spread of cross-border information and knowledge is the crux of business. The pursuits of greater efficiency in technology, communication, and education have become routine.

Within this landscape, it is likely that cross-cultural social interactions enhance personal development and provide a rich venue for increasing efficiency through network expansion, and may constitute the most fruitful aspect of an international learner's experience (Clyne and Rizvi, 1998; Pittaway, Ferguson, and Breen, 1998).

This study sought to explore the potential impact of globalization on the mindsets of individuals and the delivery of international education as perceived by the travel executives and members of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA).

The travel executives were selected for the study for reasons of linguistic congruency, or proficiency in English. This perspective was a factor because the travel executives had very likely traveled to various parts of the world. Multicultural exposure or contact with various races and cultures was another factor. Cross-cultural involvement was considered because the travel executives were involved in activities and transactions with people from various sectors. Technological aptitude was a criterion because the travel executives were familiar with the use of advanced technology that related to the work they performed.

SAMPLE POPULATION

In the context of this study, a Travel Executive is defined as a professional performing a management function relating to travel and tourism. A travel executive may be involved in either the production or delivery of a travel related product or service.

This broad definition encompasses individuals engaged in ventures such as travel agencies, travel research and consulting, travel technologies, hotels and resorts, hospitality management, travel media, airlines and aviation, car rental, tour operators, tourism boards, convention and exhibition bureaus, travel distribution systems, travel and tourism education, travel media, destination management, and destination investment companies.

TRAVEL INDUSTRY CLASSIFICATION

The travel executives are classified according to their primary functions. *Cluster 1 (Travel Services)* refers to those executives directly involved in the business of selling and promoting travel related products and services. This category includes travel agencies, tour operators, travel technologies, distribution systems, and related businesses. *Cluster 2 (Tourism)* refers to executives who sold and promoted tourist destinations and tourism in general. This category includes tour boards and destination management companies. *Cluster 3 (Airline)* refers to executives working in the airline industry. *Cluster 4 (Hospitality)* refers to executives working for hotels, resorts, lodging and related businesses.

Utilizing this classification, the respondents are described as follows:

Classification	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Travel Services	42	35%
Tourism	40	34%
Airline	8	7%
Hospitality	28	24%

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE POPULATION

The respondents came from thirty-five (35) countries: *Austria, Australia, Bahrain, China, Canada, Cook Islands, Fiji, France, French Polynesia, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, New Guinea, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, Tonga, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United States, United Kingdom, and Vietnam.*

Out of the 118 respondents, 87 (73%) were male, and 31 (27%) were female. All of the respondents were college graduates. The profile of the respondents based on their level of education was as follows:

Degree Completed	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Bachelor's Degree	60	50%
Master's Degree	54	47%
Phd	4	3%

The average industry experience of all the respondents was 20 years.

Industry Experience	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1-5 Years	3	3%
6-10 Years	11	9%
11-15 Years	30	25%
16-20 Years	21	18%
Over 21 Years	53	45%

It was evident that 88 per cent of the respondents had at least 11 years of industry experience.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Survey forms were sent out to 1,000 members of the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA). This international organization is composed of senior executives in the travel and tourism industry. There were 118 valid surveys completed and returned, comprising a return rate of 12 per cent.

The data collected related to the respondents' perceptions of the potential psychological impact of globalization, as well as selected international education deliveries.

Each of the statements in the survey was assessed on a five-point Likert-type scale. The respondents were asked to indicate their response to each statement. The possible responses were 5 for Strongly Agree (SA), 4 for Agree (A), 3 for Undecided (U), 2 for Disagree (D), and 1 for Strongly Disagree (SD).

Since the purpose of the study was to determine the central tendency of the responses to each statement, the weighted mean of each statement was calculated.

In order to arrive at a definite interpretation of the respondents' central tendency, the researchers assigned the following hypothetical mean range to the scales for each item:

Range	Scale
4.21-5.00	Strongly Agree (SA)
3.41-4.20	Agree (A)
2.61-3.40	Undecided (U)
1.81-2.60	Disagree (D)
1.00-1.80	Strongly Disagree (SD)

FINDINGS

The data were recorded on tables showing the frequencies and percentages of responses under each item in the various dimensions of the survey. The weighted mean, as well as its qualitative equivalent were also recorded and interpreted.

Table 1 shows the travel executives' perceptions regarding the (psychological) impact of globalization. The factor average of 3.85 revealed their agreement to the statements in this dimension.

Table 1. Travel executives' perceptions on the psychological impact of globalization

Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		(N = 118)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	u	Scale
Globalization is a fact in our world today, and most of what we do has international repercussions.	49	41.52	55	46.61	6	5.08	8	6.78	0	0	4.23	SA
The globalized system has changed the way I perceive the world to be.	30	25.42	44	37.29	20	16.95	20	16.95	4	3.39	3.64	A
I feel pressured and threatened as our world becomes more globalized.	39	33.05	66	55.93	9	7.63	4	3.39	0	0	4.19	A
There is a risk that those who are left behind in a globalizing world will create a backlash that is chaotic.	17	14.41	36	30.51	38	32.20	26	22.03	1	0.85	3.35	U
Factor Average											3.85	A

Strong agreement was shown by the travel executives with the statement that "globalization is a fact in our world today, and most of what we do has international repercussions". This finding has a number of implications. First, globalization affects an individual's way of perceiving his or her ability to respond to the purposes of globalization. Second, globalization affects the way in which people view technology. In the past, people used to think of technology as a luxury that only a few privileged persons could acquire whereas today people view technology as indispensable. Third, anyone who has a tendency to resist change will eventually accept that there are modifications in one's lifestyle and way of doing things, and that these changes are necessary. This realization makes people alert, responsive, and aware of the importance of interconnectivity.

The respondents agreed, the "globalized system has changed the way I perceive the world to be". The respondents realized that the world is no longer composed of isolated countries working toward survival and sustenance. Instead, they perceived the world to be so interconnected that individuals and countries acquire voluminous amount of information across borders. The world today is integrated in a way that can lead to worldwide learning.

The respondents agreed that they "felt pressured and threatened as our world globalizes further". This feeling is psychological, and affects those who think that they are not prepared for globalization. The pressure to excel, to compete with others, and to pass on new standards set by a global labor market may be felt by many individuals. Furthermore, the realization that globalization may be complicated and that every individual must cope with the pressures of globalization may lead to an individual's feeling of insecurity when witnessing the transformation of a globalizing world. Employees in travel organizations felt this insecurity because any lapse in the technology or information on travel may cause the travelers to transfer their patronage to other travel organizations.

As international learners and processors in a global environment, those unfamiliar with varying cultural codes may experience a high level of stress in social encounters, and suffer from interpersonal anxiety and self-doubt (Gudykunst and Hammer, 1988; Zaharna, 1989).

Indecision was shown by the travel executives with respect to the statements that "there is a risk that those who are left behind in a globalizing world will create a backlash that is chaotic".

Despite their anxiety and feelings of pressure regarding globalization, the travel executives were not sure that a backlash against globalization would create a chaotic world. The respondents recognized the need for an acceleration of technology, an improvement of information systems, and the management of quality in order to conform to a globalizing world. However, they doubted that there would be violent reactions to globalization even if those who were slow to change and develop were left without economic advantages. Instead, it is possible that international learners who lack social skills and aptitude may decide to withdraw from the process and prefer to stay within their comfort zones and interact with co-ethnic or like-minded members (Fan and Mak, 1998).

Perceptions of International Education

Table 2 presents the travel executives’ perceptions on international education. The factor average of 3.84 denoted that the respondents generally agreed to the statements under this factor.

Table 2. Travel executives’ perceptions of international education

Statement	Strongly Agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		(N = 118)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	u	Scale
Academy has a major role to play in educating and preparing youth to cope with our globalizing world.	51	43.22	56	47.46	10	8.47	1	0.85	0	0	4.33	SA
Studying in another country would heighten an individual’s chance of succeeding in a globalized world.	52	44.07	50	42.37	8	6.78	8	6.78	0	0	4.24	SA
On-line education is an effective method of providing educational access across borders.	12	10.17	65	55.08	29	24.58	9	7.63	3	2.54	3.63	A
I would spend over \$500 for a relevant short-term course offered by an academic institution in another country, on the internet.	11	9.32	32	27.12	45	38.13	24	20.34	6	5.08	3.15	U
Factor Average											3.84	A

The respondents strongly agreed, “Academy has a major role to play in educating and preparing youth to cope with our globalizing world”. They acknowledged the important role of the academic sector in revolutionizing technology, imparting radical theories of economics and trade, and refining students’ skills and competencies so that they can cope with rapid globalization. The respondents showed confidence in the capabilities of academic institutions to promote a better understanding of globalization and its features among people, to encourage research on globalization, and to clarify the role of individuals in a globalized society.

The travel executives strongly agreed, “studying in another country would heighten an individual’s chance of succeeding in a globalized world”. The respondents affirmed the importance and value of experiential learning in other countries, especially in those that have achieved technological and scientific advancement. Studying in another country provided the learner with opportunities to meet prospective investors, to make comparative analyses of the government systems that encourage globalization and of those that militate against globalization, and to learn about advances in science and technology.

Mangan (1997) highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity in offshore learning experiences. Intensive offshore teaching has the potential to contribute significantly to an institution’s internationalization process (Watkins, 1993; Mangan, 1997). It is widely believed that international protagonists need effective cross-cultural awareness skills and knowledge to allow them to adjust their service to meet the needs and expectations of international colleagues and to communicate effectively with others in diverse cultures (Mallison, 1997, p.35).

Mendenhall, Punnett and Ricks (1995) stress the importance of the study of other cultures and highlight the interrelationship between labor and globalization and the importance of ethics in the global environment. They suggest that when a company faces risks in international transactions, an understanding of cultural differences becomes a necessity. Robey and Sales (1994, p.462) also

recommend that international participants and global learners should endeavor to understand the ethical considerations of global business.

The travel executives agreed, “online education is an effective method of providing educational access across borders”. They affirmed that unbounded knowledge could be gained through on-line education. Knowledge of new trends in production and technology as well as global marketing is possible through on-line education. Clark et al. (1995) noted that academics have made inroads in innovating and developing on-line support materials that augment student learning and enable students to work collaboratively.

However, the respondents were uncertain that “they would spend over \$500 for a relevant short term course offered by an academic institution in another country on the Internet”. Their uncertainty could be due to the relatively high cost of online education. With the knowledge that they could acquire knowledge free of charge on the Internet, the travel executives were in doubt as to whether a fee of \$500 would be acceptable.

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION ADAPTATION

From the results of the study, it is clear that globalization has an impact on the psyche of organizational participants. The effects of a closely-knit and competitive environment linger in their mindsets. The respondents clearly see the important role academic institutions need to play in furthering international education and believe there is value in cross-border and online education. Appreciation of academic institutions and openness towards cross-cultural learning is evident.

In the context of pedagogical approaches for the international learner, the study demonstrates the need for the consideration of the following issues: a) assessment of the technological compatibility, as well as the learner’s psychological preparedness and learning predisposition in a globalized environment; b) strategic partnering with corporate or field-related institutions may provide added value to the learner; c) foreign institutional alliances that allow a learner’s exposure to other countries and cultures can expand one’s learning within an international context; d) incorporation of online learning methodologies may provide a timely and more extensive knowledge sourcing; and f) sensitivity to the variations in the price of knowledge across borders needs to be considered.

Cateora and Graham (1999, p.117) recommend 10 criteria that international organizations need to meet when adapting to a globalized environment. They are:

1. open tolerance;
2. flexibility;
3. humility;
4. justice/fairness;
5. ability to adjust to varying tempo;
6. curiosity/interest;
7. knowledge of the country;
8. liking for others;
9. ability to command respect; and
10. ability to integrate oneself into the environment.

It is important for an organization to assess and benchmark their position based on these criteria. Gorman (1999) cited the need for awareness of an international learner’s cultural disadvantages, such as adaptations pertaining to information gathering and presentation, dealing with status, gender and family roles, financial security issues, and diversity.

Language can be a challenge when attempting to transfer knowledge across borders. “It is impossible to consider any form of education, or even human existence, without first considering the impact of language on our lives” (Cole and Scribner, 1974).

Mak et al. (1999) recommend overcoming barriers relating to ineffective coaching and limited feedback, feelings of inadequacy due to a large number of adjustments that need to be made, interpersonal anxiety to other races, and threats to the international learner’s original identity.

In the light of the impact of globalization on organizations, it is necessary for corporations, governments, and educational institutions to be prepared to undertake adjustments and plan for effective international knowledge transfer within a global framework.

The manager of a travel agency who seeks to build an international enterprise needs to understand fully where the competitive edge is anchored. The organization must readily capitalize on its inherent strengths whether these lie in technology, communication, information process flow, or a highly skilled and globalization-ready workforce.

The organization needs to be prepared to introduce innovations in order to cope with global competition. In the travel industry, the predominant practice is to send letters to institutions and companies to invite their employees to avail themselves of a tour package. The information is limited to a one-page poster. Today, however, the principle is, "If you are not online, you are not on sale" (WTO, 1999, p.4). Destinations and travel businesses eager to have an impact on the marketplace must be on-line. Remote destinations and products with well-developed and innovative web sites can now become "equal contributors" to international information and be active participants in the spread of knowledge. With the advent of technology and information relating to e-business, travel and destination marketing organizations can improve their relative positions within the international context (Trade and Development Board, 2000, p.8).

Furthermore, the Trade and Development Board (2000, p.13) advocates that the tourism industry develops a web site with a message that is appropriate to the target audience, and characterized by a lively design reflecting the nature of the firm's destination and corporate and promotional style, as well as updated information on travel. The web site must have two versions, one of which is suitable for low technology users. This demonstrates the need for sensitivity to varying levels of technology across borders.

Technological advancement can give rise to accelerated information flow. A dynamic web service makes information about a travel product or service highly accessible to customers, suppliers, partners, and researchers worldwide through the Internet. Pollock and Benjamin (n.d.) enumerate the benefits of deploying web services as: 1) enabling full interoperability between platforms and applications as they can be read and processed by all operating systems; programming languages and applications; 2) being ubiquitous or accessible; 3) enjoying widespread support; and 4) enabling automation.

The simultaneous occurrence of various innovations may have a psychological impact on organizational participants. Insecurities may result from the knowledge that one may not have a competitive advantage or the skills to compete effectively in a globalized environment. Starkov and Price (n.d.) advocate the adoption of more aggressive e-business strategies and a move toward the web at low cost, and highly efficient marketing and distribution. These strategies could potentially increase organizational efficiencies while requiring some form of adaptation or re-adjustment from employees.

It is possible that not all employees within an organization share the same propensity or desire for international adaptation and learning. An assessment of the psychological and behavioral implications of a globalized environment on employees may need to be fully explored as a company maps out its globalization strategy.

Opportunities in international education abound on the web. Though a short-term course on the Internet may not be necessary, many organizations are now responding to new ways to accelerate communication and education. Educational institutions are creatively offering information technology and interdisciplinary studies using computer-aided instruction. Cross-border online education has grown in popularity and usage.

The access and provision of international education may not be as daunting a task as previously perceived by many. Travel executives worldwide have responded to a global learning environment by building efficiencies in technology, communication, information and knowledge flows.

REFERENCES

- Cateora, P.R. and Graham, J.L. (1999) *International Marketing*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Clark, E.E. and Johnson, S. (1995) The role of information technology in university teaching. *Journal of Law and Information Science*, 6(2), 131-163.
- Clyne, F. and Rizvi, F. (1998) Outcome of student exchange. In D. Davis and A. Olsen (Eds.) *Outcomes of International Education*, Sydney: IDP Education Australia, 35-49.
- Cole, M. and Scribner, S. (1974) *Culture and thought*. New York: John Wiley.
- Fan, C. and Mak, A. (1998) Measuring social self-efficacy in a culturally diverse student population. *Social Behaviour and Personality*, 26, 31-144.
- Greenberg, J. and Baron, R.A. (1997) *Behaviour in Organizations: Understanding and Managing the Human Side of Work*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall International.
- Gudykunst, W.B. and Hammer, M.R.G. (1988) Strangers and hosts: An uncertainty reduction based theory of intercultural adaptation. In Y.Y. Kim and W.B. Gudykunst (Eds.) *Cross-Cultural Adaptation: Current Approaches*, Newbury Park CA: Sage, 105-139.
- Mak, A.S., Westwood, M.J., Ishiyama, F.I. and Barker, M.C. (1999) Optimising conditions for learning socio-cultural competencies for success. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23, 77-90.
- Mallison, H. (1997) Sensitivity to Japanese cultural baggage: A key attribute for front office staff. *Australian Journal of Hospitality Management*, Spring, 35-38.
- Mangan, K.S. (1997) Business schools promote international focus, but critics see more hype than substance. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 12, A14.
- Mendenhall, M., Punnet, B. and Ricks, D. (1995) *Global Management*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell.
- Pittaway, E., Ferguson, B., and Breen, C. (1998) Worth more than gold: The unexpected benefits associated with internationalisation of tertiary education. In D. Davis and A. Olsen (Eds.), *Outcomes of International Education*, Sydney: IDP Education Australia, 61-71.
- Pollock, A. (n.d.) Internet access through many devices. [Online] <http://www.desticorp.com>.
- Robey, D. and Sales, C.A. (1994) *Designing Organizations*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Starkov, M. and Price, J. (n.d.) Independent hoteliers: e-business levels the playing field. [Online] <http://www.hotelbenchmark.com>.
- Trade and Development Board, (2000)
- Watkins, B.T. (1993) Internationalizing graduate education, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 17, A48.
- World Trade Organization (1999) Marketing Tourism Destinations Online.