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Doing Research and Publishing on Latin America

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Introduction

Emerging market firms have become an important topic of research in recent times. However, it is somewhat surprising that little has been published about Latin American firms in top management journals, neither by Latin American scholars nor by North American and European scholars for that matter (Pérez-Batres, Pisani, and Doh, 2010). In fact, Latin American scholars and PhD students have not only been virtually absent from publications (or else have published in their native languages and gotten only local readership), but they have also been underrepresented in the most important conferences and fora on management. A report by UNESCO (2010) indicates that total publications by Latin American researchers in 2008 were only 18.3% of that of US researchers. However, the good news is that growth in publications, from 2000 to 2008, was 109.0% in Latin America and 24.4% in the United States.

Although this was understandable in the 1980s, when the region experienced a deep economic crisis and hyperinflation in most countries, and companies were mostly concerned with survival, this has not been the case since the 1990s. In fact, the region has achieved growth and prosperity, with economies growing robustly and the Latin American and Caribbean region becoming a large participant in the world economy, featuring 8.0% of world’s GDP with six countries ranking among the world’s 40 largest by GDP: Brazil at 7th, Mexico at 14th, Argentina at 26th, Venezuela at 31st, Colombia at 32nd, and Chile at 37th (World Bank, 2013). Moreover, some of the region’s companies have become multinationals and global leaders in their industries (Carneiro and Brenes, 2014; Cuervo-Cazurra, 2010).
More importantly, Latin American firms and their business environment can shed new light on extant theory and empirical practices, given the relative similarities in development of the countries and their differences with other widely analyzed emerging countries like China or India, which, given their unique development processes, may not offer applicable insights.

Therefore, in this chapter, we provide some guidance to researchers on how to do research in, and publish on, Latin America. We first discuss the advantages and disadvantages of analyzing Latin America and its firms as a research setting, providing suggestions on how to turn the disadvantages into advantages, in particular by addressing how particularities of the Latin American setting might influence theory building. We then analyze the reasons for the reticent participation of Latin American researchers in the literature and discuss the impact (or lack thereof) of publishing on academic careers in Latin America. Then, we address the importance of authors using their names as brands. Finally, we suggest possible avenues for Latin American researchers to catch up and build a scholarly reputation that parallels the rising importance of the region in the world’s economy and politics.

Research on Latin America

Latin American researchers publish little (Pérez-Batres et al., 2010). Besides, in management studies there can be observed a limited interest to date on Latin America as a region in which to analyze companies (Birnik and Bowman, 2007; Fastoso and Whitelock, 2011; Pérez-Batres, et al., 2010).

Interestingly, much as there are unfavorable circumstances in which to conduct research in, and publish on, Latin America, there are also some – not often clearly perceived – advantages of realizing research in the region.

Disadvantages of doing research on Latin American firms

A combination of circumstances contributes to the fact that there is relatively little research about Latin America and by Latin American scholars.

First, many editors and reviewers of leading academic journals are located in the United States and Western Europe and may have, albeit not consciously, an ethnocentric eye. They may hold biases against Latin America (and other less-developed regions of the world) and present limited interest in knowing about firms from these countries. Their limited knowledge about the differences across countries may lead them