

Exploring periphery–core dynamics in international management: A review, characterizations, and future research agenda

Abstract

This Special Issue aimed to provide insights into the concept of periphery–core dynamics in international business and management. In this issue, we introduce a number of studies shedding light on different core issues situated in the "Periphery–Core Relations" and the knowledge domain of international management. The core themes inherent in periphery–core dynamics research include resource disparities, institutional difference hypothesis (IDH), knowledge transfer, innovation, and emerging MNEs in periphery–core dynamics. We outline a new research agenda on core-periphery relations.

Keywords: Periphery–core; International Management; business model.

1 Introduction

In the realm of international business (IB) research

Abstract

This Management Focus section aims to provide insights into the concept of periphery–core dynamics in international business and management. In this Management Focus section, we introduce several studies that illuminate various core issues situated within the "Periphery–Core Relations" and the knowledge domain of international management. The core themes inherent in periphery–core dynamics research include resource disparities, the institutional difference hypothesis, knowledge transfer, innovation, and the significant role of emerging multinational enterprises in these dynamics. Additionally, we outline a future research agenda on core-periphery relations.

Previous article in issue

Next article in issue

Keywords

Periphery–core dynamics Emerging multinational enterprises (EMNEs) Indigenous scholarship International management Peripheral ecosystems

1. Introduction

In the realm of international business (IB) research, there has been a renewed and growing scholarly effort directed toward unraveling the core issues situated at the periphery–core dynamics (Benito & Narula, 2007; Dicken, 2015; Mudambi & Santangelo, 2016; Stallkamp, Pinkham, Schotter, & Buchel, 2018; Young, 2010). The core–periphery nexus has continued to garner new streams of research

(Benito & Narula, 2007; Mudambi & Santangelo, 2016), with some focusing on core issues, including market location choices and expansion of developed market firms (Stallkamp et al., 2018), and the institutional and resource differences dynamics between advanced and developing market economies (Julian & Ofori-dankwa, 2013). The periphery broadly refers to countries or regions that are less connected or in remote regions (Young, 2010). Within the growing scholarly insights, both the core and periphery nations (Mudambi & Santangelo, 2016; Stallkamp et al., 2018), organizations, and regions seen as the "periphery" have often failed to amass robust scholarly attention. Indeed, much of mainstream management literature has tended to relegate issues pertaining to developing and peripheral regions and nations to the background. In the recent two decades, there has been growing recognition that there is more to learn from regions considered 'the periphery' to boost business competitiveness and economic development (Dicken, 2015).

The purpose of this Management Focus section is to examine the differences between Europe and other well-established economies in their approach to the periphery – the emerging and less developed economies of Asia, Latin America, and Africa – as a center of economic activity and to take stock of not only the geographical divide between core and periphery but also the economic, political, social, and cultural systems (cf. Shenkar, Tallman, Wang, & Wu, 2020; Zilber, 2015). This approach helps to explain and buttress those core–periphery relations that improve or hinder the connectivity of the periphery with the core. Thus, it is vital to examine multinational enterprises (MNEs) behavior, knowledge co-creation and transfer through the lens of the ‘periphery–core’ instead of the previous core–periphery dominated research. This paradigmatic change offers enormous potential for understanding and expanding the knowledge domain of the majority of existing IB theories on MNEs originating from developed market economies. Although there have been calls for applying

indigenous theories and deeper contextualization (Chiu, 2017; Lau, 2002; Tsui, 2004), there are relatively limited studies which have taken such an approach.

Against this backdrop of the core–periphery nexus, this Management Focus section has attracted a number of interesting papers shedding light on various aspects of the subject, including knowledge transfer, headquarter–subsidiary dynamics, absorptive capacity, and corporate social responsibility in shaping firm performance.

2. Core–periphery dynamics: an overview

Rooted in the core–periphery and "periphery–core" dynamics (Mudambi & Santangelo, 2016; Stallkamp et al., 2018), the assertion is that the location of firms can be classified into the core and periphery based on stages of countries' economic development. As the "periphery–core" gains prominence, instead of the previous core–periphery model, largely due to rapid economic development and the increasing presence of emerging market multinationals in the global business context (Kim, Wu, Schuler, & Hoskisson, 2020), thereby weakening the powers of historically powerful entities situated in the Western context (Ramamurti & Singh, 2009). The essence of periphery–core relations is typified by the economic power of nations, with developed nations situated at the core and less developed nations often at the periphery. Due to advantages such as access to low-cost semi-skilled workers and the availability of raw materials, the periphery is generally seen as an attractive destination for MNEs (Mudambi & Santangelo, 2016; Santangelo, 2009). The periphery has become an attractive location for MNEs' foreign direct investment activities, and as a result, much smaller cities in peripheral economies are increasingly considered as important for economic growth and development, thus suggesting that non-urban peripheral regions matter (Mans, 2014).

By offering a diverse range of benefits such as tax relief, subsidies, and preferential treatment, governments can attract investment into peripheral locations and businesses (Doganis, 2005; Wu, Zhou, Park, Khan, & Meyer, 2022). Increasingly, firms in the periphery play pivotal roles in the global economy as producers of raw materials, access to low labor costs, and sources of a rising middle class of consumers (Dicken, 2015; Mudambi & Santangelo, 2016). Compared with the periphery, it has also been found that core businesses holding more involvement in directorship have a greater propensity for expansion following MNE investment (Ayyagari, Dau, & Spencer, 2015). However, little is known about the motives of emerging market MNEs and whether existing IB theories are suitable for explaining their investment behavior (cf. Cuervo-Cazurra & Ramamurti, 2014; Piperopoulos, Wu, & Wang, 2018), their surging power, and the various consequences (Khan, Amankwah-Amoah, Lew, Puthusserry, & Czinkota, 2022; Sinkovics, Yamin, Nadvi, & Zhang, 2014).

In addition, there has been an increase in interactions between MNEs and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in both the central and peripheral terms of strategic alliances, joint ventures, and acquisitions typifying much of the 21st-century global business ecosystem. For instance, many Chinese and Indian firms have not only expanded to other developing regions, including Africa and Latin America but also acquired and entered partnerships with Western European and American corporations (He, Khan, & Shenkar, 2018; Ramamurti & Singh, 2009).

2.1. Resource disparities

One of the mechanisms through which the periphery and core can be distinguished pertains to capabilities and resource disparities (Guo & Zheng, 2019). The core is characterized by prosperous regions and nations coupled with more intensive research and development activities. In contrast, the periphery tends to be less-developed nations, and their MNEs and SMEs tend to be resource-

constrained, having limited influence on the global stage. For example, firms can employ low-cost advantages in periphery markets and enter core markets to meet demands for high-quality products, capitalizing upon technology (Li, Capone, & Malerba, 2018). Similarly, a firm's position in a network (e.g., periphery or core) provides differential access to resources and the capabilities to respond to market opportunities (Ahuja, 2000).

2.2. Institutional differences

Institutional differences generally typify countries in peripheral areas and are a fertile area for further scholarly discourse on periphery–core relations (Wu & Park, 2017). Institutional voids denote deficiencies in the functioning of market-supporting structures or essential market intermediaries (Khanna & Palepu, 1997, 2010), encompassing characteristics such as weak intellectual property rights, inefficient contract enforcement, a high level of corruption, government bureaucracy, and poor or inadequate transport infrastructure (Adomako, Amankwah-Amoah, Dankwah, Danso, & Donbesuur, 2019; Amankwah-Amoah, 2023; Khanna & Palepu, 2010; Koch, 2022; North, 1990). Another feature that can be utilized to differentiate the core from the periphery is the legal frameworks. The core regions of advanced market economies are typified by very well-developed legal frameworks supported by effective enforcements, as well as a stable political system that helps facilitate the peaceful transfer of power and protection of private property (Wu & Ang, 2019). On the other hand, the periphery is often punctuated by higher regulatory burdens and complex government red tape and bureaucracy (Bao et al., 2021; Wu, Ma, Liu, & Lei, 2019). This paradigmatic change offers enormous potential for understanding and expanding the knowledge domain of the majority of existing IB theories on MNEs originating from developed market economies. While there have been

calls for applying indigenous theories and deeper contextualization (Chiu, 2017; Lau, 2002; Tsui, 2004), progress has been quite slow.

3. Papers in the management focus section

The aim of this Management Focus section was to examine the periphery-core dynamics and the knowledge domain of international management, given that peripheral economies have not received sufficient research attention as the key center of power. We solicited contributions from a variety of theoretical lenses, research methods, and studies analyzing periphery-core dynamics within the international management domain. In the following section, we provide a summary of the papers that are part of this Management Focus section (see Table 1).

2 3. Papers in the management focus section

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Table 1. Summary of the Articles included in this Management Focus section.

Author(s)/Article	Research Question(s)/Objectives	Theory/Perspective	Context and Method	Key Findings
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<p>Choksy, U. S., Zeng, J., Rehman, W. U., Mirza, Z., & Puthusserry, P. (2024). The role of peripheral vendors in enhancing the absorptive capacity of offshore software development teams in challenging institutional environments</p>	<p>How do vendor teams in periphery regions, operating in adverse skill environments, acquire need knowledge from core clients and contributes to their solution knowledge to enhance offshore software development teams' absorptive capacity</p>	<p>Absorptive capacity in challenging institutional environment</p>	<p>Qualitative inductive study based on interviews of software vendor firms headquartered in Pakistan that have overseas office in the US, Saudi Arabia, UK, US, Singapore, Malaysia, Netherlands</p>	<p>The article finds that periphery vendor team, client teams, external agents, global experts, consultants, and incubators co-drive the absorptive capacity process whereby periphery vendor teams are not merely recipient of knowledge but also contributes to knowledge towards foreign clients in core regions</p>
<p>Le, T. T., Battisti, E., & Mai, T. L. (2024). Peripheral-based subsidiaries and financial and non-financial performance: Evidence from an emerging market</p>	<p>The key aims of the study is to explore the mechanisms by which peripheral-based subsidiaries not only enhance financial and non-financial performance (i.e., business performance) but also contribute to creating value for MNEs</p>	<p>Stakeholder theory; dynamic capability theory; organizational theory</p>	<p>Survey of MNEs' subsidiaries based in Vietnam that have headquartered in US, UK, France, Canda, Japan, Germany</p>	<p>There is a significant positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and absorptive capacity, knowledge ecosystem, and business performance. Furthermore, the relational strategy moderates the influence of corporate</p>

				social responsibility and knowledge ecosystem
Roh, T., Lee, M. J., Yang, Y. S., & Lee, J. Y. (2024). Learning by giving-and-taking: Two-way knowledge transfer between core and periphery	Which factors and multifaceted relationships may influence the tendency of the newly created innovation knowledge of foreign subsidiaries in Korea, as the periphery, to be transferred to headquarters or peer subsidiaries in developed countries at the core?	Network theory	Survey data of 279 foreign subsidiaries operating in Korea	Positive effect of knowledge from headquarter at the core on the innovation performance of the focal subsidiary at the periphery is positively moderated when the subsidiary's entry objective is knowledge seeking
Park, B.I., & Xiao, S. (2024). Reverse knowledge transfer from the periphery to the core: Focusing on local market Information	The study examined the roles played by relational capital in promoting favorable learning environment and the knowledge transfer capacity of teaching firms within the periphery-core context	Knowledge transfer and relational capital perspective	Survey of 195 foreign subsidiaries in Africa established by Chinese multinational enterprises	Knowledge transfer capacity and relational capital are major determinants for the occurrence of reverse knowledge transfer. Knowledge development capability possessed by subsidiaries are effective in promoting MNEs learning. Furthermore, relational

				capital between international joint venture and multinationals' headquarters functions as a vehicle to facilitate reverse knowledge transfer
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In the first article of this Management Focus section, *Choksy, Zeng, Rehman, Mirza and Puthusserry (The role of peripheral vendors in enhancing the absorptive capacity of offshore software development teams in challenging institutional environments)* documents how software development vendors based in peripheral regions facilitate the development of offshore software development teams' absorptive capacity despite the unfavorable skill environment encountered by these vendors in their home market. Using an inductive approach, the authors highlight the importance of recursive interaction between diverse stakeholders such as the periphery vendor team, client teams, external agents, global experts, consultants, and incubators that facilitate the process of knowledge transfer and the development of absorptive capacity of vendors' teams. The authors indicate that all these actors co-drive the absorptive capacity development process whereby periphery vendor teams are not just recipients of knowledge but also act as important contributors of knowledge for their international clients in core regions.

The second article by *Le, Battisti, and Mai (Peripheral-based subsidiaries and financial and non-financial performance: Evidence from an emerging market)* examines the mechanisms through peripheral-based subsidiaries not only enhance financial and non-financial performance but also contribute to creating value for MNEs. The authors document the vital role of corporate social

responsibility in supporting absorptive capacity and knowledge ecosystems, which in turn lead to business performance. Using a survey data drawn from MNE subsidiaries operating in Vietnam, they further examine the moderating role of relational strategy in the linkages between corporate social responsibility and knowledge ecosystem. Their findings suggest a positive relationship between corporate social responsibility and absorptive capacity, knowledge ecosystem, and business performance. They also find support for the moderating role of relational strategy.

Third, *Roh, Lee, Yang and Lee (Learning by giving-and-taking: Two-way knowledge transfer between core and periphery)* examine the mechanisms and multifaceted relationships that may influence the tendency for the newly created innovative knowledge of foreign subsidiaries based in Korea, to be transferred to headquarters or peer subsidiaries operating in developed (core) market economies. Based on survey data from 279 foreign subsidiaries operating in Korea, they find that the positive effect of knowledge from the headquarters on the innovation performance of the focal subsidiary at the periphery is positively moderated when the subsidiary's entry objective is knowledge seeking (i.e., research and development). They further note that when the status of subsidiaries rises throughout the network, knowledge transfer from the periphery to the core becomes more prominent.

Finally, *Park and Xiao (Reverse knowledge transfer from the periphery to the core: Focusing on local market information)* examine key factors that affect reverse knowledge transfer from the periphery to the core. The authors further differentiate subsidiaries into wholly owned subsidiaries and international joint ventures in understanding the factors that influence reverse knowledge transfer from peripheral based subsidiaries to the parent MNEs based in the core. The authors utilize survey data of 195 subsidiaries of Chinese firms operating in Africa and find that knowledge transfer capacity and relational capital are key determinants for reverse knowledge transfer from peripheral based

subsidiaries. Their findings also indicate that the knowledge development capability possessed by subsidiaries is a significant influential factor in promoting learning in MNEs.

3 4. Future research agenda and conclusion

The papers included in this Management Focus section go a long way in furthering the understanding of resources and institutional differences between well-established economies and less developed economies in Asia, Latin America, and Africa (cf. [Zilber, 2015](#)). The management focus section and the papers that featured in it underscore the growing relevance and importance of a deeper understanding of periphery–core dynamics to help firms navigate their competitive landscape more effectively ([Brown, 2004](#)). Flowing from the scholarly discourse is the need to curtail the rampant application of theories associated with developed market economies that have stable institutional environments and well-established innovation ecosystems. Thus, there is a need for a greater focus on contextual and institutional conditions shaping organizational outcomes in the global south and less connected regions of developing economies ([Pugh and Dubois, 2021](#)).

It is crucial to investigate MNEs' behavior, knowledge co-creation, and transfer, particularly through the lens of the “periphery–core” instead of the previous core–periphery. Future studies could also be directed towards examining institutional influences on business competitiveness in less connected and remote regions. For instance, studies could explore the potential positive effects of institutional voids in fostering frugal innovations and better resource utilizations in peripheral markets and regions such as Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa.

Considering new technological advancements, such as generative AI and robotics, there is an inherent risk that many in developing market economies and peripheral regions could be further left behind in

accessing the technology necessary to improve their living standards and access work opportunities ([Amankwah-Amoah, Abdalla, Mogaji, Elbanna, & Dwivedi, 2024](#)). Indeed, rural areas often face challenges associated with being on the peripheries of national economies, including more stringent and limited access to transport infrastructure, high-speed internet broadband, learning and education opportunities, and financial capital ([Dicken, 2015](#); [Mack, Loveridge, Keene, & Mann, 2024](#)). Much of the limited research on entrepreneurship in developing countries tends to focus on firms in urban areas ([Coad & Tamvada, 2012](#); [Muhammad, McElwee, & Dana, 2017](#)). Given that business activities and entrepreneurship in rural areas can differ significantly from those in urban areas in emerging market economies ([Muhammad et al., 2017](#); [Wu, Zhuo, & Wu, 2017](#)), the disparities in access to new technologies between rural and urban areas in the Global South present a unique opportunity for future periphery–core relations to focus on business–government collaborative activities and policy incentives aimed at closing the gap of economic development and growth. This also necessitates a more grounded analysis of the role of business in helping rural communities leapfrog to the latest technologies in areas such as solar energy and food technology, thereby stimulating regional and rural innovations ([Wu, Wang, Hong, Pieropoulos, & Zhuo, 2016](#)). The management focus section, therefore, underscores the intricacies of periphery–core dynamics, not only pivotal in firms developing and enriching their competitiveness but also crucial in fostering economic development and growth of peripheral regions. In addition to the above, there is a need for new research focusing on the nature of, and impediments to, new ventures and incumbent firms’ innovative activities in peripheral regions ([Eder, 2019](#)). In addition, future studies could build on the papers featured in this management focus section and examine in-depth the following.

Utilize panel data sets and mixed methods comparative studies from peripheral regions and discuss the consequences of knowledge transfer from peripheral regions to developed (core) market economies' firms.

Explore the role of firms based in peripheral regions in diffusing environmental and social sustainability practices to developed market economies firms.

Examine the impact of peripheral regional regulatory policies on knowledge transfer and resultant innovation in peripheral regions and the reverse transfer of innovation from peripheral regions to firms based in developed market economies.

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Investigate the internationalization patterns of both the peripheral and semi peripheral economies' firms' into developed (core) market economies. An example of peripheral economies is Southern countries; and semi peripheral includes Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tunisia, Türkiye, Vietnam (see [Gómez, Oinas, & Wall, 2022](#)).

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Considering the nature of the topic, studies can draw inter-disciplinary insights such as from the international relations, political economy, and economic geography in conceptualizing the core-periphery phenomenon, as these issues may also affect the investment flows in the regions ([Cheng & Zhai, 2021](#); [Gómez et al., 2022](#); [Tickner, 2013](#)), as well as the acquisition of small entrepreneurial firms by MNEs in peripheral regions ([Zahra & Hashai, 2022](#)).

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Both the international and subnational spatial heterogeneity rooted in economic geography should be considered. For example, in examining the foreign investment location decisions of MNEs in host subnational peripheries and subnational periphery capability upgrading ([Ma, Tong, & Fitz, 2013](#); [Zhao, 2024](#)).

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Policy interventions at regional level and the roles of regional policy makers can be considered in the future work on core–periphery ([Prashantham & Bhattacharyya, 2020](#)).

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Study the influence of peripheral regions firms acting as lead firms within the global value chain and their impact on core markets suppliers' products, process, and social upgrading.

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Explore the innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems of peripheral regions and their impact on developed markets' firms operating in peripheral and semi peripheral regions of Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America ([Forbes, 2016](#)). Such studies could pay more attention to historical events taking place in peripheral regions and their impact on diverse types of firms.

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Examine the potential drivers of absorptive capacity of firms originating from periphery and the knowledge co-creation processes of periphery and core firms operating into each other's markets.

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In-depth analysis of peripheral context in shaping peripheral firms' competitive advantage in core regions.

To conclude, we hope that this Management Focus has provided important insights and raised scholarly interest in the topic and will pave way for further research on periphery-core dynamics within the international management field.

4 CRediT authorship contribution statement

Zaheer Khan: Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Jie Wu:** Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Huda Khan:** Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Joseph Amankwah-Amoah:** Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Michael Czinkota:** Conceptualization. **Nadia Zahoor:** Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

5 Acknowledgement

We dedicate this introductory editorial of management focus section to Michael Czinkota. He provided valuable contributions in developing this management focus section, and the guest editorial team would like to formally acknowledge and recognise his inputs as a credit note in the acknowledgement. The guest editorial team extend their deepest condolences to his family.

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Citation on deposit: Khan, Z., Wu, J., Khan, H., Amankwah-Amoah, J., Czinkota, M., & Zahoor, N. (2024). Exploring periphery–core dynamics in international management: A review, characterizations, and future research agenda. *European Management Journal*, 42(5), 653-657.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2024.07.004>

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