

# Marketing Standardization and Firm Performance in International E-Commerce

## 国际电子商务中的营销标准化和公司表现

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### Abstract

The standardization of marketing has been one of the most focused research topics in international marketing. The term “global marketing” was often used to mean an internationally standardized marketing strategy based on similarities between foreign markets. Marketing standardization was discussed only within the context of traditional physical marketplaces. Since then, the digital “marketspace” of the Internet had emerged in the 90’s, and it became one of the most important drivers of the globalization process opening new opportunities for the standardization of global marketing activities. On the other hand, the opinion that a greater adoption of the Internet by customers may lead to a higher degree of customization and differentiation of products rather than standardization is also quite popular.

Considering this disagreement, it is notable that comprehensive studies which focus upon the marketing standardization especially in the context of global e-commerce are missing to a high degree. On this background, the two basic research questions being addressed in this study are:

- (1) To what extent do companies standardize their marketing in international e-commerce?
- (2) Is there an impact of marketing standardization on the performance (or success) of these companies?

Following research hypotheses were generated based upon literature review:

- H 1: Internationally engaged e-commerce firms show a growing readiness for marketing standardization.
- H 2: Marketing standardization exerts positive effects on the success of companies in international e-commerce.
- H 3: In international e-commerce, marketing mix standardization exerts a stronger positive effect on the economic as well as the non-economic success of companies than marketing process standardization.
- H 4: The higher the non-economic success in international e-commerce firms, the higher the economic success.

The data for this research were obtained from a

questionnaire survey conducted from February to April 2005. The international e-commerce companies of various industries in Germany and all subsidiaries or headquarters of foreign e-commerce companies based in Germany were included in the survey. 118 out of 801 companies responded to the questionnaire.

For structural equation modelling (SEM), the Partial-Least-Squares (PLS) approach in the version PLS-Graph 3.0 was applied (Chin 1998a; 2001). All of four research hypotheses were supported by result of data analysis.

The results show that companies engaged in international e-commerce standardize in particular brand name, web page design, product positioning, and the product program to a high degree. The companies intend to intensify their efforts for marketing mix standardization in the future. In addition they want to standardize their marketing processes also to a higher degree, especially within the range of information systems, corporate language and online marketing control procedures.

In this study, marketing standardization exerts a positive overall impact on company performance in international e-commerce. Standardization of marketing mix exerts a stronger positive impact on the non-economic success than standardization of marketing processes, which in turn contributes slightly stronger to the economic success. Furthermore, our findings give clear support to the assumption that the non-economic success is highly relevant to the economic success of the firm in international e-commerce.

The empirical findings indicate that marketing standardization is relevant to the companies’ success in international e-commerce. But marketing mix and marketing process standardization contribute to the firms’ economic and non-economic success in different ways.

The findings indicate that companies do standardize numerous elements of their marketing mix on the Internet. This practice is in part contrary to the popular concept of a “differentiated standardization” which argues that some elements of the marketing mix should be adapted locally and others should be standardized internationally. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the overall standardization of marketing –rather than the standardization of one particular marketing mix element – is what brings about a positive overall impact on success.

**Keywords:** Marketing standardization, Firm performance, Marketing mix standardization, Marketing process standardization, International E-Commerce.

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## 摘要

市场营销的标准化已经成为有关国际市场营销的研究中最为关注的焦点之一。全球营销这个术语常被定义为以国外市场的共同性为前提的国际标准化的营销战略。营销标准化仅在传统的实体市场交易场所的背景中被讨论。自从上个世纪90年代起, 联网上的电子市场交易场所开始兴起, 并成为全球化过程中为全球营销活动标准化开拓新机会的最重要的动力之一。另一方面, 消费者由于更大程度的接受互联网而可能产生与标准化相比更高水平的定制化和产品的差异化, 这样的观点也很流行。

考虑这个分歧, 在全球电子商务的背景下关注营销标准化的综合的研究不能达到一定高度的这种情况值得注意。在这个背景下, 本研究提出了两个基本研究问题:

- (1) 在国际电子商务中公司多大程度标准化了他们的营销?
- (2) 营销的标准化对公司的表现(或成功)有没有影响?

根据文献回顾提出了下列研究假设:

- H1: 从事国际电子商务的公司为营销标准化做了更多的准备。  
 H2: 营销标准化在帮助公司在国际电子商务中获得成功的方面发挥积极的作用。  
 H3: 在国际电子商务中, 营销组合标准化在公司获得经济的和非经济的成功方面比营销过程标准化发挥更积极的作用。  
 H4: 国际电子商务公司获得非经济的成功越大, 获得经济的成功也越大。

本研究的数据是通过在2005年2月到4月间进行问卷调查获得的。本调查包括了德国各种产业中的国际电子商务公司和国外电子商务公司驻德国的所有总部和分公司。801家公司中的118家回答了问卷。

本研究为结构方程模型, 使用PLS-Graph3.0版本中的偏最小二乘法。数据分析结果支持所有的4个研究假设。

结果表明, 从事国际电子商务的公司在商标, 网页设计, 产品定位和产品项目上的标准化很高。这些公司打算未来在营销组合标准化方面加大努力。另外, 他们想提高营销过程标准化的水平, 尤其是和信息系统, 企业语言和在线营销控制程序一起。

在本研究中, 营销标准化对企业在国际电子商务中的表现起到了积极全面的影响。营销组合的标准化在非经济的成功方面比营销过程的标准化发挥更积极的影响。相反, 营销过程的标准化在经济的成功方面发挥了较积极的作用。另外, 我们的结果明确的支持了在国际电子商务中非经济的成功和经济的成功是高度相关的这一假设。

实证结果表明, 国际电子商务公司的成功与营销标准化高度相关。但营销组合和销售过程标准化以不同的方式帮助企业的经济和非经济的成功。

结果表明, 公司在互联网上使营销组合的众多因素标准化。这种做法在一定程度上违背了“划分标准化”的经营理念, 认为营销组合的一些因素应该适应本土化, 其他的应该国际标准化。而且, 发现表明, 相比一个特定的营销组合元素的标准化, 整体标准化营销为成功带来更积极的总体影响。

关键词: 营销标准化, 公司成果, 营销组合标准化, 营销过程标准化, 国际电子商务

## I. Introduction

For more than four decades, the standardization of marketing has been one of the most focused research topics in international marketing (e.g. Buzzell 1968; Elinder 1965; Hamel and Prahalad 1985; Keegan and Green 2008, pp. 10; Levitt 1983; Samiee and Roth 1992; Szymanski, Bharadwaj and Varadarajan 1993; Zou and Cavusgil 2002). Thanks to the seminal work of Levitt (1983), numerous articles on this topic were published. In these studies, the term “global marketing” was often used to mean an internationally standardized marketing strategy based on similarities between foreign markets (Jeannot and Hennessey 1995, p. 6; Taylor and Okazaki 2006, p. 98). Hence, marketing standardization was discussed only within the context of traditional physical marketplaces. Since then, the digital “marketplace” of the Internet had emerged in the 90’s, and it became one of the most important drivers of the globalization process opening new opportunities for the standardization of global marketing activities (Dholakia, Fritz, Dholakia and Mundorf 2002; Kotler and Keller 2006, p. 679; Rayport and Sviokla 1994; Welge and Borghoff 2009). On the other hand, the opinion that a greater adoption of the Internet by customers may lead to a higher degree of customization and differentiation of products rather than standardization is also quite popular (e.g. Swaminathan 2001, p. 125).

Considering this disagreement, it is notably that comprehensive studies which focus upon the marketing standardization especially in the context of global e-commerce are missing to a high degree. On this background, the two basic research questions being addressed in this study are:

- (1) To what extent do companies standardize their marketing in international e-commerce?
- (2) Is there an impact of marketing standardization on the performance (or success) of these companies?

## II. Theoretical Perspectives and Hypotheses

### 2.1. Basic Definitions

In this article, the term “standardization of marketing” encompasses the standardization of marketing mix (four Ps: product, price, promotion, and place) as well as the standardization of marketing processes (e.g., new product planning; Kreutzer 1988, p. 20; Sorenson and Wiechmann 1975). The existing as well as the anticipated level of marketing standardization will be examined in the consumer-oriented international e-commerce. Furthermore, by making a distinction between an economic (financial) and a non-economic (non-financial) dimension of performance, the effects of marketing standardization on corporate success are examined in a differentiated way.

## 2.2. Theoretical Considerations

From a theoretical perspective, marketing standardization must be considered within the standardization-differentiation continuum that has been discussed extensively (Szymanski, Bharadwaj and Varadarajan 1993; Theodosiou and Leonidou 2003; Waheeduzzaman and Dube 2002). There are many arguments both for and against marketing standardization. Those researchers who argue in favour of standardization highlight the globalization trends in the world as the driving force behind a growing market similarity, more technological uniformity, and a higher convergence of consumer needs and wants (e.g., Jain 1989; Kotler and Keller 2006, p. 679; Levitt 1983; Ohmae 1985). Hence, an increasing number of consumers in distant parts of the world tend to exhibit similar preferences and demand the same products. Therefore, the ability to produce internationally similar or identical products becomes a major source of the competitive advantage of firms in the global market. Furthermore, by selling these products using standardized marketing programs, firms may obtain considerable cost advantages. To the proponents of this view, the rationale for marketing standardization is substantial savings offered through economies of scale leading to lower production and transaction costs as well as to lower prices. Other important rationales for marketing standardization are the global consistency in dealing with customers and the creation of a uniform brand image across markets (Backhaus, Bueschken and Voeth 2005, pp. 288; Taylor and Okazaki 2006, p. 104; Whitelock and Pimblett 1997, pp. 57; Zou and Cavusgil 2002, p. 41).

Advocates of multi-domestic or differentiation strategies, in contrast, point out that many markets are not exactly alike and therefore it is necessary to adapt marketing instruments to effectively satisfy customer needs that are widely different (e.g., Quelch and Hoff 1986; Wills, Samli and Jacobs 1991). Nevertheless, many multinational firms are adopting standardization strategies to increasingly gain competitive advantage. The benefits of standardization seem to outweigh its disadvantages in many cases (e.g., Waheeduzzaman and Dube 2002; Whitelock and Pimblett 1997). Furthermore, standardization appears to be related positively to the performance of firms (e.g., Szymanski, Bharadwaj and Varadarajan 1993; Waheeduzzaman and Dube 2002, p. 199; Zou and Cavusgil 2002, pp. 52). This view, however, remains controversial (e.g., Samiee and Roth 1992; Theodosiou and Leonidou 2003, pp. 162).

The theoretical considerations thus far have been limited to the traditional discussion of the standardized global marketing on physical marketplaces. Some of these considerations seem to be valid also for the standardization of marketing within the digital marketplace of the Internet. For example, the global consistency of dealing with customers and the creation of a uniform brand image across markets by standardizing international marketing on the Internet will be beneficial for e-commerce firms as well as for traditional firms. But other

considerations appear questionable, for example some of the transaction cost based arguments. Independent of standardization strategies, the Internet itself seems to create substantial cost savings. For example, in many cases small niche markets or even individual customers can be served on the Internet at low or zero costs (Anderson 2006). Furthermore, the customizing and personalizing of products and services at low costs becomes possible even on mass markets (e.g., Hanson and Kalyanam 2007, pp. 298). The Internet offers many other possibilities of reducing transaction costs without standardization strategies (e.g., Benjamin and Wigand 1995, Dholakia, Dholakia and Park 2002, pp. 38). Thus, standardization may have a lower overall significance for obtaining cost advantages on the Internet. But this must not prevent firms from seeking cost savings also by using standardization strategies on the Internet, while other firms may follow different ways in order to reach the same goals. Consequently, a simple transfer of some considerations stemming from the traditional standardization debate to the Internet seems to be questionable. These assumptions should be tested empirically within the digital market environment of the Internet.

## 2.3. Hypotheses

Because the Internet may be regarded as one major driving force of the globalization process and the convergence of international markets, the standardization of marketing is probably of high importance to international e-commerce firms. Hence it is assumed, that the growing trend towards marketing standardization (Whitelock and Pimblett 1997, p. 45) is not restricted to the physical marketplace but can also be observed in international e-commerce. This consideration leads to the first hypothesis:

**H 1:** Internationally engaged e-commerce firms show a growing readiness for marketing standardization.

One of the important findings of many (but not of all) previous studies suggests that there is a positive overall impact of marketing standardization on company performance in the physical marketplace (e.g., Szymanski, Bharadwaj and Varadarajan 1993, p. 11; Waheeduzzaman and Dube 2002; Zou and Cavusgil 2002). One major reason is the substantial cost savings associated with standardization strategies. But, as mentioned above, standardization may have a lower overall significance for obtaining cost savings on the Internet. It follows that company performance on the Internet may be influenced to a lower degree by marketing standardization as well. However, the validity of these assumptions for the international e-commerce is yet unknown, and therefore a second hypothesis is to be tested:

**H 2:** Marketing standardization exerts positive effects on the success of companies in international e-commerce.

As already mentioned, in this study a distinction is made between economic and non-economic aspects of firm

performance and between the standardization of marketing mix elements and those of marketing processes. Studies conducted on physical marketplaces found that marketing mix and marketing process standardization have different effects on performance. For instance, Bolz (1992, p. 177) as well as Meffert and Bolz (1995, p. 107), found that marketing mix standardization exerts a stronger positive impact on performance than process standardization. According to these empirical findings, the major reason is a dominant positive effect of the product standardization as a core element of marketing mix standardization on performance. Within marketing process standardization the findings show inverse influences instead. Standardization of information processes exerts a positive impact and the standardization of human resource processes a negative influence on performance at the same time (Bolz 1992, pp. 177, 178). It follows that the overall effect of process standardization on performance is weaker compared to the effect of marketing mix standardization. This relationship, which has so far not been examined for firms in international e-commerce settings, leads to the third hypothesis:

**H 3:** In international e-commerce, marketing mix standardization exerts a stronger positive effect on the economic as well as the non-economic success of companies than marketing process standardization.

Furthermore, a relationship between the two performance dimensions may be observed. Marketing literature indicates that there is a positive effect of non-economic performance aspects, e.g., customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, on the economic success in terms of the profitability of companies (e.g., Anderson, Fornell and Lehmann 1994; Homburg, Kuester and Krohmer 2009, pp. 296; Mittal, Ross and Baldasare 1998; Reicheld and Teal 1996). An empirical study of the German e-commerce industry also detected a generally positive effect of customer acquisition as well as customer loyalty on economic success (Olderog 2003, p. 253). This leads to our fourth hypothesis:

**H 4:** The higher the non-economic success in international e-commerce firms, the higher the economic success.

### III. Methodology

#### 3.1. Data Collection and Sample Characteristics

As a preparation for the survey, exploratory interviews with ten experts of marketing research and practitioners were conducted in order to refine the design of the questionnaire and to select the appropriate items.

The data for this research were obtained from a questionnaire survey conducted from February to April 2005. The international e-commerce companies of various industries in Germany and all subsidiaries or headquarters of foreign e-commerce companies based in Germany were included in the

survey. The addresses were taken from a mailing list purchased from a leading German market research institute.

A total of 801 companies engaged in international e-commerce were identified from the mailing list, and 118 (14.7 %) of these companies responded to the questionnaire. Although the response rate is only moderate, a chi-square test showed no significant difference between the responding units and the total of the companies.

The companies were grouped into three different industry types: Trade companies (n=41 or 34.7 %), service firms (n=51 or 43.2 %) and manufacturers/producers (n=26 or 22.0 %). 17 out of the 118 firms (14.4 %) were pure-click companies only represented on the Internet. It follows that the big majority of firms (85.6 %) were brick-and-click companies offering products via Internet and/or traditional distribution channels. Typically, the persons responding to the questionnaire were members of the top or

higher-level management of the marketing or e-commerce departments of their firms (CEOs or managing directors: 59 %; division marketing managers: 32 %; department managers e-commerce: 9 %). These managers received the questionnaires by mail. If available, the e-mail address was used additionally to send an electronic invitation for participating in the survey. The respondents had the option of filling out either the paper-and-pencil questionnaire or an identical WWW-questionnaire. A total of 51.7 % chose the WWW-questionnaire and 48.3 % the questionnaire using paper and pencil.

In many cases, data gathered online seem to be equivalent to data obtained offline (Roberts 2003, p. 180). However, the quality of online data compared to data gathered by traditional survey methods remains somewhat controversial (Miller 2001). But the results of t-tests conducted for each variable showed no important differences between the two modes of data collection in this study.

#### 3.2. Data Analysis and Measurement Procedure

For structural equation modelling (SEM), the Partial-Least-Squares (PLS) approach in the version PLS-Graph 3.0 was applied (Chin 1998a; 2001). PLS seems suitable for the purpose of the study because it is regarded as an adequate method for handling formative indicators in measurement models (Chin 1998b, p. IX; Chin and Newsted 1999, pp. 310). In the structural equation analysis it is assumed that marketing standardization and success are latent variables or constructs measured by formative indicators only. Consequently, the popular criteria usually used in order to investigate the validity and reliability of reflective measurement models within covariance-based SEM (e.g., Cronbach's Alpha, average variance extracted, factor reliability, Fornell and Larcker criterion) cannot be applied (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer 2001). Formative measurement models must be evaluated by using other criteria like content validity and reliability as indicated by the weights and significance of the formative

indicators (e.g., Bollen and Lennox 1991).

In this study, the development and evaluation of formative measurement models followed three of the four principles suggested by Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer (2001, pp. 271). This procedure encompasses the three steps of content specification, indicator specification, and analysis of indicator collinearity. The fourth step proposed, the analysis of external validity of the formative measurements, could not be carried out because external criteria or additional reflective measures of marketing standardization and corporate success were not available and thus could not be included in this study.

**Content specification.** The term “marketing standardization” was already defined as the use of a uniform marketing mix as well as uniform marketing processes in international e-commerce. According to the traditional view, the marketing mix may be characterized by McCarthy’s classical four Ps: product, price, place, and promotion (e.g., Kotler and Keller 2006, p. 19). Although for some purposes it may be useful to extend this list of marketing instruments by additional Ps (e.g., personnel, public opinion, politics), the four Ps are regarded traditionally as the hard core of the marketing mix concept. The importance of the four Ps is not only given for traditional marketplaces. Their relevance for the marketing on the Internet is equally compelling (Siegel 2004, p. 215; Strauss, El-Ansary and Frost 2006, pp. 78). Hence in our study the standardization of marketing mix covers the four Ps on the Internet.

Compared to the marketing mix concept, the content specification of the marketing process concept is less obvious. In general, this concept covers the structures and processes of development, implementation, and control of marketing programs as well as the information processes connected with them in offline settings (Kreutzer 1986, 1988, p. 20; Sorensen and Wiechmann 1975). Based on a literature review (e.g., Bolz 1992; Meffert and Bolz 1995; Kreutzer 1986, 1988; Sorensen and Wiechmann 1975) and on results of the expert interviews conducted, four basic processes relevant to the Internet marketing were identified: information, planning, control, and human resource processes. In this study, these four processes are regarded as the fundamental categories of the marketing process concept and as well as the central elements of process standardization of Internet marketing.

Corporate performance or success is usually measured in monetary or financial categories (e.g. return on investment, profit). Yet in traditional as well as in Internet marketing, additional non-monetary or non-financial performance categories, like customer satisfaction and loyalty, brand awareness, and web site awareness, must also be taken into account (e.g., Roberts 2003, pp. 267; Strauss, El-Ansary and Frost 2006, p. 62). Nevertheless, a closer look at recent studies on the success of marketing standardization shows that non-monetary performance criteria have often been neglected (Oezsomer and Simonin 2004, p. 400; Theodosiou and Leonidou 2003, pp. 162; Zou and Cavusgil 2002, p. 50). But in this study, performance is analyzed in a more comprehensive way

encompassing economic as well as non-economic performance or success dimensions, as already mentioned.

**Indicator specification.** Critical for the design of valid measurement models with formative indicators is the choice of indicators, because these indicators must capture the essential content of the latent construct. On the basis of an extensive review of the marketing literature (e.g., Bolz 1992; Meffert and Bolz 1995; Kreutzer 1986, 1988; Sorensen and Wiechmann 1975) and the exploratory discussion with the experts, 13 indicators of marketing mix standardization, nine indicators of marketing process standardization, and six indicators of performance were identified (see figures 1 and 2, table 3, and appendix). A high correspondence to the constructs was attributed by the experts to each of these indicators. The indicator variables were measured as self-estimations of the respondents based on five-point Likert scales (see appendix).

**Indicator collinearity.** A high multicollinearity among indicators would negatively affect the estimation of indicator coefficients, because formative measurement models are based on multiple linear regression systems (Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer 2001, p. 272). In the data of this study, only two of the 22 indicators of marketing standardization caused a high multicollinearity and were therefore excluded from the structural equation analysis.

### 3.3. Criteria of Model Fit

The criteria of fit for structural models with formative indicators are extensively discussed in the methodological literature (e.g., Bollen and Lennox 1991; Chin 1998a and 1998b; Chin and Newsted 1999; Diamantopoulos and Winklhofer 2001; Lohmoeller and Wold 1984; Wold 1982). On this background, in our study we will regard a model as at least being tentatively supported by the data if (1) the measurement model contains a majority of formative indicators showing substantial and significant weights as well as a low degree of multicollinearity as indicated by a small variance inflation factor (VIF), and if (2) the structural model shows a majority of substantial and significant path coefficients as well as an acceptable degree of predictive validity as indicated by a positive value of the Stone-Geisser-criterion. These criteria correspond in principle to the logic of the “soft modeling”-approach of structural equation analysis with PLS (Wold 1982).

## IV. Empirical Findings

### 4.1. The Growing Readiness for Marketing Standardization: Hypothesis 1

In order to test the first hypothesis, the current and the anticipated level of marketing mix as well as marketing process standardization were compared. This analysis was conducted for the 22 indicators individually. Significant

differences in the means between the given and the anticipated standardization level suggest a changing readiness for marketing standardization in the future.

### 4.2. Marketing Mix Standardization

According to the findings presented in figure 1, aspects of product standardization (brand name, product program, program positioning, service) achieve the highest level of the current standardization (continuous line in figure 1). In international e-commerce, the brand name reaches the highest degree of standardization. Pricing shows an above average degree as well, i.e. price adjustment, payment methods, and price level. In contrast, promotional activities such as banner, e-mail, and offline advertisement, are standardized less. Only the design of web pages is an exception. The aspects of marketing channel management show only a medium degree of standardization. The marketing channel organization is standardized relatively high, but the complaint management shows a lesser level of standardization.

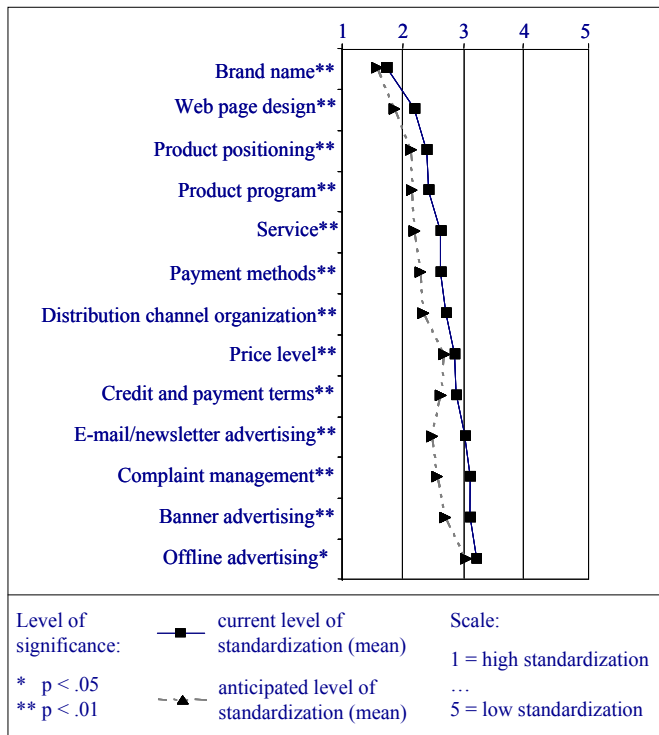


Fig. 1. Standardization of Marketing Mix Elements

According to the anticipated standardization level (dotted line in figure 1), all thirteen marketing mix elements significantly differ from the current standardization degree indicating increasing levels of marketing mix standardization for the next two years. These findings support hypothesis 1. The companies obviously show a growing readiness to strengthen their efforts of marketing mix standardization, especially in the product related field. As far as promotional elements are concerned, this intention appears less distinct.

### 4.3. Marketing Process Standardization

Both the given as well as the anticipated level of marketing process standardization in the international e-commerce are represented in figure 2. The elements of human resource processes, such as human resource development and online recruiting, exhibit the relatively smallest degree of standardization in international e-commerce. The highest level of standardization was found in the areas of information systems, corporate language, and online control procedures in marketing. Overall the level of standardization found in marketing processes was slightly less than that of the marketing mix.

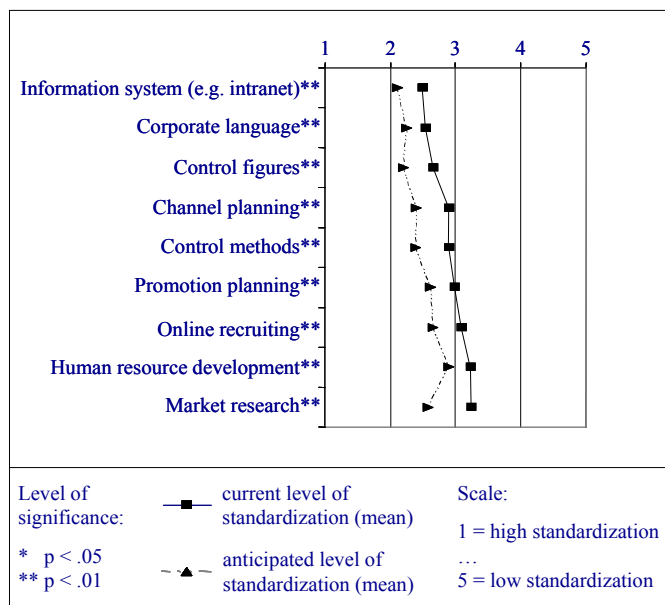


Fig. 2. Standardization of Marketing Processes

All nine anticipated standardization levels in marketing processes are significantly higher than the given ones. It follows that the companies also aim at a higher level of marketing process standardization for the next two years. These findings give additional empirical support to hypothesis 1.

### 4.4. The Performance Impact of Marketing Standardization

#### 4.4.1. Measurement Models

The measurement models of marketing mix and marketing process standardization were developed by using a two-stage estimation procedure using PLS shown in tables 1 and 2. At the first stage, the individual indicators for each of the four Ps respectively the four processes were evaluated with respect to their weights, significance, and intercorrelations (as indicated by the variance inflation factor VIF). On the second stage, then the four Ps and the four processes were treated itself as individual formative indicators of the constructs “marketing mix” respectively “marketing process standardization”.

Table 1. Measurement Model “Marketing Mix Standardization”

First stage: „Standardization of 4 Ps“					Second stage: “Marketing Mix Standardization”				
Constructs and indicators	Weight	T-value (Bootstrapping)	p	VIF	Constructs and indicators	Weight	p		
Promotion					Promotion				
E-mail/newsletter advertising	.41	2.32	*	1.32		.38	*		
Web page design	.55	3.81	**	1.19					
Banner advertising	.10	.54	n.s.	1.30					
Offline advertising	.07	.43	n.s.	1.18					
Complaint management	.46	2.54	**	1.23					
Price					Price				
Price level	.32	1.52	+	1.41		.33	*		
Terms of credit and payment	.37	1.49	*	1.45					
Payment methods	.61	2.90	**	1.23					
Product					Product				
Product positioning	.60	3.59	**	1.61		.30	*		
Service	.45	2.95	**	1.39					
Product program	.17	.84	n.s.	1.75					
Place					Place				
Channel organization	1.00	1.00	-	-		.24	*		

Levels of significance: +: p < .10 (t<sub>crit</sub> = 1.29); \*: p < .05 (t<sub>crit</sub> = 1.66); \*\*: p < .01 (t<sub>crit</sub> = 2.36); n.s.: not significant; t<sub>crit</sub>: critical t-value for the given significance level; VIF: Variance Inflation Factor

Table 2. Measurement Model “Marketing Process Standardization”

First stage: „Standardization of 4 Processes“					Second stage: “Marketing Process Standardization”				
Constructs and indicators	Weight	T-value (Bootstrapping)	p	VIF	Constructs and indicators	Weight	p		
Information processes					Information processes				
Information support systems (e.g. intranet)	.53	2.77	**	1.10		.25	*		
Market research	.76	4.86	**	1.10					
Planning processes					Planning processes				
Promotion planning	.80	5.65	**	1.39		.39	*		
Channel planning	.36	1.99	*	1.39					
Control processes					Control processes				
Control methods	.62	4.07	**	1.69		.20	*		
Control figures	.52	3.01	**	1.69					
Human resource processes					Human resource processes				
Recruiting	.62	3.99	**	1.25		.36	*		
Human resource development	.57	3.54	**	1.25					

Levels of significance: +: p < .10 (t<sub>crit</sub> = 1.29); \*: p < .05 (t<sub>crit</sub> = 1.66); \*\*: p < .01 (t<sub>crit</sub> = 2.36); n.s.: not significant; t<sub>crit</sub>: critical t-value for the given significance level; VIF: Variance Inflation Factor

As tables 1 and 2 show, the measurement models cannot be rejected. At the first stage, 17 out of a total of 20 indicators (85 %) show an acceptable and significant, or at least marginally significant, weight as well a low variance inflation factor (VIF). A maximum VIF of 1.75, which is far below the usual limit value between 5 (Studenmund 2006, p. 259) to 10 (Hair et al. 1998, p. 193), indicates a low degree of multicollinearity in the measurement models. At the second stage, each of the four Ps and four processes must be regarded as a significant formative indicator to the overall construct.

Regarding the individual formative indicators at the first stage, it is clear that three of them do not contribute significantly to the formation of the constructs. The elimination of formative indicators with only small and non-significant weights is sometimes proposed in the literature. However, this would reduce the substantial content of a latent construct and therefore this procedure is not used in this study (see Bollen

and Lennox 1991, p. 308; Jarvis, MacKenzie and Podsakoff 2003, p. 202; Rossiter 2002, p. 315; Slotegraaf and Dickson 2004, p. 379).

The measurement model of the two performance variables is shown in table 3. Four out of the total of six indicators show a significant weight and a low VIF. With regard to the two non-significant indicators, one of them shows only a zero weight indicating practically no contribution to the formation of the construct. Only in this case the exclusion of a formative indicator from further analysis seems to be justified. With this modification, the performance measurement model is accepted for further structural equation analysis.

Table 3. Measurement Model “Corporate Success”

Indicators	Weight	T-Value (Bootstrapping)	p	VIF
Non-economic success				
Customer acquisition	.58	2.52	**	1.37
High profile	.62	2.99	**	1.43
Customer loyalty	.01	0.05	n.s.	1.32
Economic success				
Cost saving	.57	3.40	**	1.54
Market share	.47	1.97	*	1.82
Profit	.12	.55	n.s.	1.54

Levels of significance: +: p < .10 (t<sub>crit</sub> = 1.29); \*: p < .05 (t<sub>crit</sub> = 1.66); \*\*: p < .01 (t<sub>crit</sub> = 2.36); n.s.: not significant; t<sub>crit</sub>: critical t-value for the given significance level; VIF: Variance Inflation Factor

4.4.2. Structural Model

The structural equation model showing the influence of marketing standardization on company performance in international e-commerce is presented in figure 3. The evaluation of the squared correlation coefficient (R<sup>2</sup>) shows two very different results. The R<sup>2</sup> of the economic success reaches 0.4, which is a quite acceptable level. However, the non-economic success exhibits only a R<sup>2</sup> of 0.05. Although no general minimum requirement to R<sup>2</sup> exists, the value appears to be very small. Obviously, the exogenous variables of the marketing mix and process standardization considered in this structural equation model are able to explain the variance of the non-economic success only to a small extent. A better explanation is offered by the high path coefficient of 0.54 indicating that the non-economic success exerts an important influence on the economic success.

Finally, the predictive relevance of the model, using the Stone-Geisser-criterion (Q<sup>2</sup>) for the two latent endogenous performance constructs, has to be analysed. Both values are positive and larger than zero (see figure 3). Hence, an acceptable degree of predictive validity can be attributed to the model (Chin 1998a, p. 317; Lohmoeller and Wold 1984, p. 511, Wold 1982, p. 34). As a result, the model can not be rejected and the examination of the hypotheses can be conducted by analyzing the path coefficients.

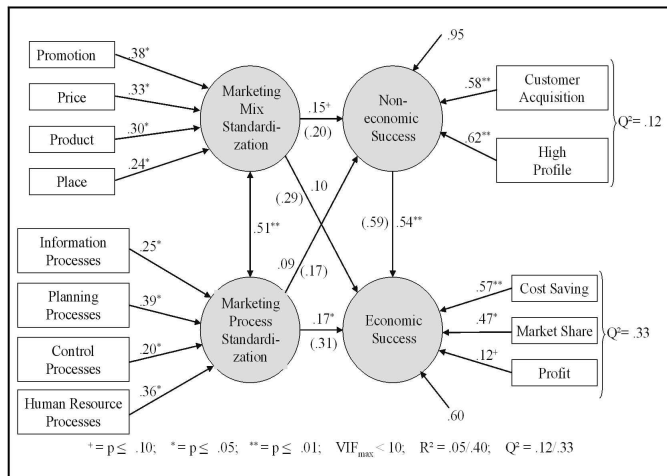


Fig. 3. Structural Equation Model

Table 4. Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects

Effects on	Non-economic Success			Economic Success		
	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects	Direct Effects	Indirect Effects	Total Effects
Standardization						
Marketing Mix Standardization	.15	-	.15	.10	.08	.18
Marketing Process Standardization	.09	-	.09	.17	.05	.22

Some of the path coefficients in the structural model are relatively small and only marginally significant or not significant at all. This may be in part due to the highly significant correlation between the two exogenous constructs (0.51) which probably has created a small problem of multicollinearity within the structural model. The bivariate correlations shown in parentheses indicate that the path coefficients might probably be higher if this multicollinearity would not occur. But the problem does not affect the analysis to a higher degree, because the high intercorrelation does not lead to unreasonable results (e.g. completely opposite signs of the path coefficients within the structural model compared to the signs of the bivariate correlations).

4.4.3. Hypotheses 2 to 4

In order to test the hypotheses 2 to 4, the findings presented in figure 3 and table 4 must be analyzed. Hypothesis 2 assumes a positive general effect of marketing standardization on firm performance in international e-commerce. Although they are not very strong, the total effects showing positive signs support this assumption with regard to both aspects of marketing standardization (see table 4). Thus, hypothesis 2 cannot be rejected empirically.

Hypothesis 3 suggests a positive effect of marketing mix standardization on both performance dimensions that should be stronger than the effect of marketing process standardization. Regarding the total effects in table 4 again, it becomes clear

that the effect of marketing mix standardization on the non-economic success is stronger (0.15) than the effect of process standardization (0.09). However, the total effect of mix standardization on the economic success (0.18) is somewhat smaller than the one caused by process standardization (0.22). But these differences appear as rather small. Consequently, hypothesis 3 is supported only as far as the non-economic success is concerned.

Finally, hypothesis 4, which assumes a positive effect of the non-economic on the economic corporate success, is confirmed highly, since the estimate of the path coefficient (0,54) is highly significant and positive (see figure 3).

V. Discussion

5.1. Major Findings

The results show that companies engaged in international e-commerce standardize in particular brand name, web page design, product positioning, and the product program to a high degree. The companies intend to intensify their efforts for marketing mix standardization in the future. In addition they want to standardize their marketing processes also to a higher degree, especially within the range of information systems, corporate language and online marketing control procedures.

In this study, marketing standardization exerts a positive overall impact on company performance in international e-commerce. Standardization of marketing mix exerts a stronger positive impact on the non-economic success than standardization of marketing processes, which in turn contributes slightly stronger to the economic success. Furthermore, our findings give clear support to the assumption that the non-economic success is highly relevant to the economic success of the firm in international e-commerce.

5.2. Managerial Implications

The empirical findings indicate that marketing standardization is relevant to the companies' success in international e-commerce. But marketing mix and marketing process standardization contribute to the firms' economic and non-economic success in different ways. Since the non-economic success is closely tied to the economic success, it appears necessary that both categories of success and the whole network of causal relationships should be examined if companies consider to standardize their marketing in international e-commerce. Focussing on marketing mix standardization and economic success alone, as it was done in many recent studies (Oezsomer and Simonin 2004, p. 400), is clearly not sufficient. Both process standardization and non-economic success have also to be taken into account.

The findings indicate that companies do standardize numerous elements of their marketing mix on the Internet. This practice is in part contrary to the popular concept of a



“differentiated standardization” which argues that some elements of the marketing mix should be adapted locally and others should be standardized internationally (e.g. Jeannet and Hennessey 1995, pp. 365). Furthermore, the findings suggest that the overall standardization of marketing –rather than the standardization of one particular marketing mix element – is what brings about a positive overall impact on success. Obviously, the Internet-based e-commerce does not necessarily call for local adaptations of central elements of the marketing mix (Han and Son 2001; Kim 2004; Kim et al. 2007; Lee 2008; Park and Kim 2000). This seems to be different in many traditional physical market environments in international marketing. Markets of international e-commerce seem to encourage companies more to pursue traditional strategies of “undifferentiated standardization”.

### 5.3. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research (1)

Limitations of the study might stem from the rather small size of our sample and from the chosen procedure of data collection. A problem might be caused by the selection of the respondents, because their answers might be affected with a key informant bias, although this problem sometimes seems to be overstated. Other methodical problems, e.g. a not observed heterogeneity within the data, are not considered with regard of the small sample size. Furthermore, a test of unobserved heterogeneity for structural equation models with formative indicators only was not available in PLS at the time of the study.

In this study, the basic relationship between marketing standardization and corporate success has been investigated. Studies in the future should also address the question of whether or not this basic relationship will be influenced, or even altered, by certain moderating or contingency factors (e.g. size and industry affiliation of the firm; competitive intensity; structure of the markets; pure-click or brick-and-click character of the firm). Furthermore it would be interesting to compare the degree of marketing standardization between e-commerce firms and traditional companies. Further studies should also analyze the process of the adoption and implementation of marketing standardization within the firm.

Our study was conducted before the fundamental changes of the economic environment took place recently, especially the global economic crisis of the years 2008 and 2009. Further studies should therefore address the question if there is an impact of such changes on the standardization of marketing on the Internet. We have seen in the past that economic downturns, such as the worldwide recessions of the early 1990s and 2000s, have forced many firms to adjust to lower sales and profits by implementing cost-cutting programs. On this background one may assume that the standardization of marketing generally will become more important within a recession. It would not be very surprising if further studies should find out that the global economic crisis has also

enhanced the marketing standardization in international e-commerce.

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Appendix: Questionnaire (Extracts)

10. Please state, to which degree do you standardize the applied marketing mix elements in e-commerce across the country markets treated by your company.										
	Current Standardization					Anticipated Standardization (next 2 years)				
	High Standardization		Low Standardization			High Standardization		Low Standardization		
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
E-Mail/newsletter advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Credit and payment terms	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Service	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Web page design	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Distribution channel organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Payment methods	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Product positioning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Banner advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Complaint management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Price level	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Product program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offline-Advertising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Brand name	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Please state, to which degree do you standardize the applied marketing processes in e-commerce across the country markets treated by your company.										
	Current Standardization					Anticipated Standardization (next 2 years)				
	High Standardization		Low Standardization			High Standardization		Low Standardization		
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Market Research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Channel planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Control figures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Human resource development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information systems (e.g. intranet)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Promotion planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Control methods	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online Recruiting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Corporate language	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

18. Please state, to which degree the following targets of cross-country market treatment in e-commerce were fulfilled by your company in the last two business years.						
		Target overfulfilled +2	+1	0	-1	Target underfulfilled -2
a)	Profit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b)	Market share	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c)	Cost savings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d)	Customer acquisition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e)	High profile	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>