
Comparative Analysis of Internationalization Strategies in Hospitality Education: An Institutional Theory and Resource-Based View Approach

Abstract

The internationalization of hospitality education has gained prominence in recent years, with institutions expanding beyond their home countries through various strategies, including International Branch Campuses (IBCs), collaborative programs, and digital expansion. This article explores the specificities of hospitality schools' internationalization, drawing on academic literature to analyze the strategies used by these institutions. By integrating theoretical perspectives, particularly institutional isomorphism and the resource-based view framework (RBV), with empirical case studies, this research provides insights into how hospitality schools navigate international expansion while maintaining academic excellence and industry relevance.

Key Words *hospitality, education, internationalization, branch campus, isomorphism, RBV*

Track *Operational Innovations*

Focus of the Paper *Theoretical/Academic*

Type of submission: Paper

Introduction

Internationalization in hospitality education encompasses a range of initiatives, including the establishment of International Branch Campuses (IBCs), joint degree programs, digital learning expansion, and industry-driven collaborations across borders. These strategies allow institutions to diversify their student base, strengthen brand reputation, and respond to the growing demand for skilled professionals in the global hospitality sector (Altbach & de Wit, 2020; Chathoth & Olsen, 2007; Goh & Sandars, 2020; Knight, 2014; Wilkins, 2022). Research highlights that hospitality schools leveraging multi-campus models and joint partnerships have experienced enhanced brand equity and industry relevance, particularly in markets with rapid tourism development (Li & Ni, 2020). This study analyzes and compares the internationalization strategies of leading hospitality management schools through the dual lenses of Institutional Theory and RBV, exploring how external institutional pressures and internal strategic resources shape the expansion models, competitive positioning, and global relevance of four European private institutions.

Literature Review

Institutional Theory and Internationalization of Hospitality Schools

Institutional Theory provides a critical lens for understanding how hospitality firms and educational institutions adapt to external pressures as they expand into international markets. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) introduced the concept of institutional isomorphism, which explains how organizations conform to societal expectations and industry norms to gain legitimacy and remain competitive. These pressures manifest in three forms: coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. This framework helps explain why hospitality firms and hospitality schools adopt standardized global strategies when expanding internationally (Wilkins, 2022; Zhang, et al., 2023).

Coercive Isomorphism: Regulatory and Accreditation Pressures

Coercive isomorphism arises from government regulations, accreditation standards, and policy frameworks that dictate how hospitality firms and schools must operate in international markets (Scott, 2008; Sigala, 2021).

Legal and regulatory compliance is a key factor in international hospitality expansion. Firms must adapt to different regulatory environments related to labor laws, taxation, environmental sustainability, and franchising agreements (Altinay, 2007; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Accreditation standards play a crucial role in hospitality education. International accreditations such as THE-ICE, AACSB, and NECHE set global quality benchmarks, pushing institutions to align their programs with these standards to enhance their international reputation (Knight, 2014; Morrison, 2021). Les Roches, Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL), and Glion have pursued these accreditations to ensure global recognition and legitimacy, while research highlights that accreditation enhances institutional credibility and student employability (Prayag, 2020).

Government incentives, such as Singapore's Economic Development Board (EDB) funding, actively support international expansion. Conversely, strict visa policies and foreign investment restrictions remain significant barriers.

Mimetic Isomorphism: Copying Best Practices from Global Leaders

Mimetic isomorphism occurs when hospitality institutions replicate the successful internationalization strategies of industry leaders to maintain competitiveness and reduce uncertainty (Engwall & Kipping, 2013; Zhang et al., 2023).

Franchising and brand replication have been a dominant strategy in hospitality expansion. Many hospitality firms adopt the franchising model pioneered by leading hotel chains such as Accor, as it reduces financial risk while ensuring brand consistency across international markets (Brookes & Roper, 2012; Sigala & Gretzel, 2018).

Multi-campus models in hospitality education have also been influenced by leading institutions. Schools such as EHL and Les Roches have expanded internationally by imitating successful multi-campus strategies. EHL's expansion into Singapore has influenced other institutions, such as Les Roches and Glion, to enter the Asian market due to the region's increasing demand for hospitality education (Marginson, 2006; Zhang, et al., 2023).

Normative Isomorphism: Industry Professionalization and Standardization

Normative isomorphism is driven by the increasing professionalization of the hospitality industry, the standardization of faculty training, and the emphasis on industry-academia collaboration (Kim et al., 2022; Teixeira & Maccari, 2018).

Global accreditation and curriculum alignment contribute to the standardization of hospitality education. Hospitality schools seek membership in international networks such as the UNWTO TedQual Certification to reinforce best practices and align their curriculum with global industry standards (Knight, 2014; Morrison, 2021).

Faculty mobility and exchange programs enhance cross-cultural knowledge sharing in hospitality education. For instance, Les Roches and partner universities in China and the UAE have implemented faculty mobility programs to share best practices and enhance cross-cultural learning (Wilkins, 2022; Zhang et al., 2023).

Industry collaboration in hospitality training strengthens institutional legitimacy and aligns curricula with industry demands. Many international hospitality schools partner with global hotel chains to integrate real-world learning into their curricula. EHL's Innovation Hub and Glion's internship program with luxury hotel brands exemplify how industry collaboration enhances education quality and aligns schools with professional standards (Doherty & Dickmann, 2012; Zhang et al., 2023).

Resource-Based View (RBV) and Hospitality

RBV provides a valuable framework for understanding how hospitality firms and institutions leverage their internal resources to sustain a competitive advantage, particularly in the context of internationalization. Originally proposed by Barney (1991), RBV posits that organizations must develop and protect valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources to maintain a strong market position. Within the hospitality industry, firms and academic institutions alike use RBV principles to expand internationally, differentiate themselves from

competitors, and align their strategies with the evolving demands of the global market (Božič & Knežević Cvelbar, 2016; Kim, et al., 2022).

The hospitality sector relies heavily on both tangible and intangible resources to create sustained competitive advantages. According to Božič and Knežević Cvelbar (2016), intangible resources, particularly knowledge-based assets, brand equity, and managerial expertise, are significant drivers of performance in the hotel industry. Their research highlights that hotels and hospitality institutions that effectively leverage these intangible resources—such as proprietary service protocols, executive leadership training, and cross-cultural management practices—tend to achieve superior performance and long-term sustainability (Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Kim et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Alrouسان et al. (2021) emphasize the growing importance of Information Technology (IT) capabilities in shaping competitive advantage within hospitality firms. Their study highlights that strategic investments in digital transformation, artificial intelligence-driven guest services, and advanced reservation systems can significantly enhance operational efficiency and customer satisfaction, particularly in an increasingly technology-driven hospitality landscape (Sigala, 2021; Morrison, 2021). This study supports the idea that IT-related innovations have become a crucial element of RBV-driven competitive strategies in the hospitality industry.

RBV and Internationalization Strategies in Hospitality

For instance, a study by Mulet-Forteza et al. (2024) examines the impact of expansion strategies and operational attributes on hotel performance, offering a perspective on the role of internal capabilities in international growth. Further research highlights that firms with distinctive competencies in service excellence, operational efficiency, and customer relationship management are better positioned to succeed in foreign markets, as these resources are difficult for competitors to replicate (Zhang, et al., 2023). Similarly, Knox and Guar (2007) found that hospitality firms that invest in internal brand equity—by fostering strong corporate identity and service quality—enhance their ability to expand internationally while maintaining consistency in brand experience.

Sustaining Competitive Advantage through VRIN Resources

To sustain their competitive advantage, hospitality firms and institutions must continuously identify, develop, and protect their VRIN resources. These resources span several dimensions:

- **Physical Resources:** State-of-the-art facilities in hospitality education enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. A study by Bae et al. (2022) highlights the positive impact of modern facilities on student satisfaction and academic performance in hospitality programs.
- **Financial Resources:** Effective financial management is crucial for sustaining and expanding hospitality institutions. By leveraging substantial financial resources, hospitality institutions can invest in innovative practices, adapt to market fluctuations, and maintain a competitive edge in the industry. (Yfantidou,2022)
- **Human Resources:** Investing in human resources through comprehensive training programs fosters innovation and service excellence in the hospitality industry. Research by Adams et al. (2019) demonstrates that continuous professional development for staff leads to improved customer satisfaction and operational efficiency.
- **Organizational Resources:** Collaborations with esteemed organizations create competitive advantages for hospitality institutions. As noted by Johnson and Smith (2018), partnerships with luxury brands and international tourism bodies enhance institutional reputation and attract high-caliber clientele.

Accreditations such as THE-ICE, AACSB, and NECHE enhance institutional legitimacy and reinforce global reputation. Wilkins (2019) emphasizes that these recognitions significantly boost competitiveness, while Oskam et al. (2018) highlight the role of curriculum innovation in ensuring continued relevance.

Similarly, Oskam et al. (2018) explore the evolution of hospitality education and underscore the necessity for continuous curriculum innovation to meet the changing demands of the profession. They argue that redefining the hospitality curriculum is essential for institutions to remain relevant and competitive in a rapidly evolving industry.

Institutional Theory and the RBV together provide a complementary lens to explore how hospitality schools expand internationally—balancing external pressures for conformity with internal resources that drive differentiation. These frameworks guide the study's empirical approach.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to analyze the internationalization strategies of leading hospitality institutions through the lenses of the Institutional Theory and RBV. The methodology encompasses a multiple case study approach, comprehensive secondary data collection, and a rigorous comparative analysis framework.

Research Design

A multiple case study approach was adopted to examine four prominent private European hospitality schools—EHL, Les Roches, Vatel, and Glion. This method facilitates an in-depth exploration of diverse internationalization models and allows for the identification of unique institutional strategies (Yin, 2003). The multiple case study design enables an in-depth understanding of diverse internationalization strategies within the hospitality education sector, offering rich contextual insights rather than statistical generalizability (Stake, 1995).

Data Collection

Data was collected from a variety of secondary sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of each institution's internationalization strategy:

- Publicly available institutional reports: These documents provide insights into the specific internationalization models employed by each hospitality school.
- Accreditation frameworks and regulatory policies: An examination of accreditation standards and regulatory policies governing branch campuses, multi-campus networks, and franchise agreements was conducted to understand the institutional pressures and compliance requirements (Altbach & Knight, 2007).
- Academic literature: Scholarly articles on higher education internationalization and strategic management in the hospitality industry were reviewed to contextualize the institutions' strategies within broader academic discourse (Huang, 2021; Knight, 2014; Kim, Lee, & Fairhurst, 2017).

Employing multiple data sources enhances the depth and breadth of the analysis, contributing to the study's overall rigor (Creswell, 2013).

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using a comparative framework grounded in Institutional Theory and RBV. A cross-case comparative matrix was developed to identify patterns, challenges, and best practices in the internationalization of hospitality education. This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of each institution's strategic positioning (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Enhancing Reliability and Validity

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were implemented:

- Triangulation: Data triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying information from multiple sources, including institutional reports, academic literature, and industry insights. This approach mitigates potential biases and enhances the validity of the results (Patton, 1990).
- Audit Trail: A detailed audit trail was maintained, documenting all research decisions and processes. This transparency allows for the replication of the study and assessment of its confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

By integrating these methodological enhancements, the study aims to provide a robust and credible analysis of the internationalization strategies employed by leading hospitality institutions, contributing valuable insights to the field of hospitality education.

In the following part, the study will focus on the internationalization of four hospitality schools, EHL, Les Roches, Glion and Vatel.

Internationalization Strategies of Hospitality Schools

This section examines the internationalization strategies of four leading hospitality schools—EHL, Les Roches, Glion, and Vatel—focusing on their global positioning, partnerships, and digital initiatives. Institutional Theory and RBV are applied to analyze how internal strengths, and external pressures influence their global expansion.

Internationalization Strategies of Leading Hospitality Schools

The internationalization strategies of top hospitality schools such as EHL, Les Roches, Glion, and Vatel demonstrate a blend of global expansion, digital innovation, and local adaptability. EHL recognized as the world’s first hospitality management school, leverages its Swiss brand identity and academic excellence to expand globally through a branch campus in Singapore, strategic partnerships (e.g., HEC Paris), and a virtual campus (Delval, 2024; EHL, 2025; Menida, 2021). Les Roches follows a multi-campus model across Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, fostering cross-cultural adaptability and regional curriculum customization (Delval, 2022; Les Roches, 2025). Glion adopts a selective internationalization strategy, operating high-prestige campuses in Switzerland and the UK, while promoting mobility through exchange programs and online executive education (Glion Institute of Higher Education, 2025; Journal des Palaces, 2024). Vatel implements a franchise-based model across more than 30 countries, combining standardized core curricula with local adaptation and partnerships with global hotel chains such as Accor and Hilton (Vatel, 2025; LinkedIn Rankings, 2023).

Digital internationalization is a common strategy across institutions. Initiatives such as EHL’s virtual campus, Glion’s online executive programs, and Vatel’s hybrid delivery model reflect a shift toward accessible, lifelong hospitality education (Kim, et al., 2022; Sigala & Gretzel, 2018).

Institutional Theory Analysis

Table 1 illustrates how four leading hospitality institutions—EHL, Les Roches, Glion, and Vatel—respond to external institutional environments by conforming to formal regulations, mimicking successful models, and aligning with professional norms.

Table 1. Isomorphic Pressures

Institution	Coercive Isomorphism (Regulatory and Government Pressures)	Mimetic Isomorphism (Imitating Successful Models)	Normative Isomorphism (Professionalization and Industry Standards)
EHL (Singapore Expansion)	Compliance with EduTrust certification requirements, support from the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB)	Modeled after INSEAD’s expansion into Singapore, ensuring adherence to global business school standards	Industry-aligned curriculum, partnerships with Marriott, Banyan Tree, and Accor to integrate professional training
Les Roches (Multi-Campus Model)	Adherence to Swiss and host country accreditation standards	Replicates successful multi-campus models employed by business schools such as NYU and Hult	Integration with Michelin-starred restaurants, Four Seasons, and Accor for practical industry experience
Vatel (Franchise Model)	Navigates regulatory variations across over 50 franchise locations, necessitating standardized curricula	Adopts a franchising strategy akin to McDonald’s to ensure global standard	

While Institutional Theory explains how hospitality schools align with external pressures, the RBV framework shifts the focus inward. Table 2 compares how each institution builds competitive advantage by leveraging unique, inimitable internal resources.

Table 2. VRIN Resources

Institution	Key VRIN Resources	Competitive Advantage from RBV Perspective
EHL (Singapore Expansion)	Prestige of Swiss hospitality education, distinguished faculty expertise, financial support from the Singapore government, partnerships with leading hospitality brands	Leverages Swiss heritage to establish a high-end hospitality education model in Asia, offering a unique curriculum and industry partnerships
Les Roches (Multi-Campus Model)	Diverse campus locations, comprehensive student mobility programs, robust brand reputation, extensive industry collaborations	Provides students with exposure to multiple markets, ensuring adaptability and seamless integration into the global hospitality industry
Vatel (Franchise Model)	Scalable franchise framework, expansive global presence, localized curriculum adaptations, partnerships with international hotel chains such as Accor, Hilton, and Four Seasons	Facilitates rapid expansion with minimized investment risks, ensuring accessibility to emerging hospitality markets
Glion (Elite Hospitality Training Focus)	Specialization in luxury hospitality, extensive alumni network, research-driven curriculum	Targets the ultra-luxury hospitality segment, emphasizing exclusive industry partnerships and executive education

Each internationalization model presents unique strengths and trade-offs, shaped by the institution’s target market, growth strategy, and regulatory environment. EHL has established itself as a leader in brand equity and industry partnerships, ensuring a strong reputation within the global hospitality sector. However, its exclusivity and high tuition fees limit accessibility, positioning it as a premium institution catering to a niche market. Les Roches offers unparalleled global mobility through its multi-campus model, allowing students to gain diverse international exposure. Despite this advantage, maintaining consistency in academic quality and student experience across multiple campuses remains a challenge.

Vatel’s franchise-based expansion model enables rapid international growth, providing accessibility to hospitality education across a broad geographical range. However, ensuring standardized quality control across franchise institutions poses a significant hurdle, as the decentralized model can lead to variations in educational delivery. Glion, in contrast, specializes in catering to the ultra-luxury hospitality segment, positioning itself as a premier institution for high-end service education. While this focus strengthens its alignment with luxury hospitality brands, it also limits its appeal to a broader audience seeking general hospitality management education.

Determining the most effective internationalization model depends on the institution’s long-term vision. Institutions such as EHL and Glion prioritize exclusivity and high-end differentiation, while Les Roches ensures adaptability through its international mobility framework. Vatel, with its franchise model, focuses on making hospitality education more accessible across diverse regions.

Managerial Implications

Regulatory compliance and accreditation processes must be factored into international expansion plans. Institutions expanding into regions with stringent government regulations must develop strategies for accreditation recognition and ensure compliance with local higher education policies. Industry collaborations also play a crucial role in strengthening global presence by fostering connections with hospitality brands and enabling practical learning experiences that enhance employability.

Directions for Future Research

While this study provides a comparative analysis of hospitality education internationalization strategies, further research is needed to explore the long-term impacts of different models on student outcomes and industry engagement. Future studies could examine how digital transformation and hybrid education models affect the scalability and accessibility of hospitality programs.

Another key area for future research is the sustainability of international branch campuses and franchise operations. Understanding how institutions balance standardization with localization in curriculum development,

faculty training, and student experience could provide deeper insights into the challenges and best practices of global hospitality education. Finally, given the increasing role of artificial intelligence and technology-driven learning in hospitality education, future research should investigate how digitalization impacts international expansion strategies and industry partnerships.

This study focuses exclusively on European private hospitality schools, which may limit the transferability of findings to public institutions or non-European contexts. Future research will aim to broaden the sample to include a more diverse range of institutions across different regions and ownership models, enhancing the study's applicability and comparative depth.

Conclusion

This study highlights the diverse internationalization strategies adopted by leading hospitality schools and the theoretical frameworks that explain their success. By applying RBV and Institutional Theory, we gain insights into how institutions leverage unique resources and align with external pressures to achieve global expansion. While EHL and Glion differentiate through exclusivity, Les Roches emphasizes adaptability, and Vatel prioritizes accessibility, the effectiveness of each model depends on the institution's long-term strategic objectives. Understanding these dynamics enables institutions to make informed decisions in an increasingly competitive and globalized education market.

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