

# Learning processes in early and rapid internationalization – a theoretical journey and future pathways

Emmanuel Kusi Appiah

*School of Marketing and Communication, University of Vaasa, Vaasa, Finland*

Received 6 February 2025  
Revised 10 February 2025  
18 July 2025  
16 November 2025  
26 February 2026  
Accepted 21 March 2026

## Abstract

**Purpose** – This review identifies and categorizes the key theories applied in the extant literature, analyses how those theories contribute to understanding the dynamics and mechanisms of learning in early internationalizing firms (EIFs), highlights theoretical gaps, and proposes directions for future research to advance knowledge in the field international marketing.

**Design/methodology/approach** – It reports on a systematic literature review conducted to collate and synthesize the prior research on the theoretical foundations of learning processes in EIFs.

**Findings** – The review identified new research areas based on existing theories, emphasizing the need to expand and refine established frameworks to explore underdeveloped dimensions. It also highlighted emerging theoretical perspectives, introducing alternative lenses to uncover novel insights and address current knowledge gaps.

**Research limitations/implications** – While this review primarily focuses on EIFs, its findings may not fully capture the factors affecting other firm types. Expanding future research to explore learning mechanisms across diverse internationalization trajectories, such as firms with gradual expansion models or established multinational corporations, would provide deeper insights and broaden the applicability of the theoretical perspectives.

**Practical implications** – International marketers and entrepreneurs could leverage this review to strategically build networks to bolster successful market entry and strengthen learning mechanisms. The strategy could include pre-entry collaboration with experienced international firms that offer critical market insights, regulatory guidance, and operational support, as well as external relationships, such as those with industry partners, mentors or local distributors that help overcome knowledge gaps and mitigate risks in unfamiliar foreign markets.

**Originality/value** – It emphasizes the dynamic nature of learning in EIFs and its critical role in driving market adaptability, innovation, and international performance in global settings.

**Keywords** Early internationalization, Early internationalizing firms, Theoretical foundation, International new venture, Born-global firm

**Paper type** Literature review

## 1. Introduction

The study of early internationalizing firms (EIFs) has garnered significant attention within the field of International Marketing (IM) (Paul and Rosado-Serrano, 2019; Masango and Lassalle, 2020; Romanello and Chiarvesio, 2024). This area intersects with International Entrepreneurship (IE) and International Business (IB), examining how firms leverage their marketing capabilities to achieve swift entry into global markets and establish competitive positions across diverse cultural and economic landscapes (Paul and Rosado-Serrano, 2019). EIFs are ventures that enter the foreign market soon after foundation in pursuit of superior international business performance from the application of knowledge-based resources (Knight and Cavusgil, 2004; De Clercq *et al.*, 2012; Rumyantseva and Welch, 2023). Commonly referred to as international new ventures (INVs) (Oviatt and McDougall, 1994) or born-global firms (Rennie, 1993; Knight and Cavusgil, 1996), we adopt the umbrella term EIFs for theoretical consistency.

© Emmanuel Kusi Appiah. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at [Link to the terms of the CC BY 4.0 licence](#).

*Funding:* This work was supported by Liikesivistysrahasto (award number: 9812-f9a9a).



A key focus in the study of EIFs across the IM, IE, and IB domains is examining how learning supports the strategic processes of EIFs. That includes facilitating network development and enabling opportunity-seeking behaviours that enhance a firm's ability to navigate dynamic and uncertain international markets, ultimately contributing to its survival and growth (Oviatt and McDougall, 1994; Autio *et al.*, 2000; Dimitratos *et al.*, 2016). Research reviewing, assessing, and consolidating the body of knowledge on learning in EIFs has made a significant contribution (e.g. De Clercq *et al.*, 2012; Gulanowski *et al.*, 2018; Tuomisalo and Leppäaho, 2019; Siachou *et al.*, 2022). This contribution has significantly shaped the understanding of learning in EIFs, offering a foundational framework for analyzing knowledge accumulation. The existing literature also presents an array of theoretical perspectives and frameworks aimed at explaining this phenomenon. Notably, scholars have drawn upon established theories such as organizational learning theory, resource-based view, network theory, the dynamic-capabilities view, and the knowledge-based view to elucidate how these firms develop learning mechanisms that enable them to adapt, innovate, and expand into international markets at an accelerated pace (Tuomisalo and Leppäaho, 2019; Weerawardena *et al.*, 2007; De Clercq *et al.*, 2012). These theories collectively provide structural and capability-based explanations for learning but often overlook the cognitive processes that drive entrepreneurial decision-making under uncertainty.

Recent scholarship has introduced cognitive perspectives such as effectuation, causation, imprinting, and improvisation to explain how entrepreneurs think and act in unpredictable environments (Sarasvathy, 2001; Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Mitchell *et al.*, 2007; Knight and Liesch, 2016). However, a systematic synthesis that integrates these emerging views with the revised Uppsala internationalization model (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009) and other established frameworks to better explain how EIFs learn, make decisions, and identify opportunities within complex international environments remains absent. The Uppsala model introduced a network-based perspective that highlights knowledge development, opportunity recognition, and relationship building as key mechanisms. These mechanisms are especially relevant to EIFs, which rely on external networks, rapid learning, and entrepreneurial action to internationalize. As Johanson and Vahlne (2009, p. 1421) note, "there is nothing in our model that indicates that international expansion cannot be done quickly. In fact, it can, as long as there is sufficient time for learning and relationship building". Yet, connections between this model, established theories, and cognitive approaches are underexplored. Combining insights from the Uppsala model with established theoretical frameworks and cognitive approaches offers a multi-level understanding of how EIFs learn. It bridges macro-level network and capability dynamics with micro-level decision-making processes, offering a more comprehensive understanding of learning in early and rapid internationalization.

To address these gaps, the present study conducts a comprehensive systematic review and categorization of the theoretical perspectives used to explain learning in EIFs. It also proposes directions for future research to advance understanding of learning dynamics in this context. Importantly, a systematic literature review provides a structured and transparent approach to identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing existing research, thereby ensuring analytical rigour and clarity in mapping the current state of knowledge (Paul and Rialp-Criado, 2020). It not only consolidates current knowledge but also highlights inconsistencies and gaps, guiding future academic inquiry in the field of IM, IE, and IB. Specifically, this study seeks to: (1) Identify and categorize theoretical perspectives used to explain learning in EIFs, including foundational theories such as the Uppsala internationalization model; established frameworks such as organizational learning theory, the dynamic capabilities view, network theory, and the knowledge-based view; and emerging perspectives such as cognitive-based approaches in entrepreneurship such as effectuation, causation, improvisation, and imprinting. (2) Highlight theoretical gaps and propose directions for future research to advance knowledge on learning dynamics and mechanisms in EIFs.

This review will be beneficial for various interested parties. First, this study enriches the literature on IM by synthesizing existing theories, identifying theoretical gaps, and proposing future research directions. It emphasizes the dynamic nature of learning in EIFs, highlighting its critical role in driving market adaptability, fostering innovation, and enhancing international performance in global settings. Second, this study will furnish international marketers and entrepreneurs with new theory-driven ideas relating to learning in EIFs.

## 2. Method for the literature review

Following previous studies in the field of international marketing (e.g. [Paul and Rosado-Serrano, 2019](#)), this review adopts a theory-based systematic literature review approach. This method is recognized as one of the most effective for synthesizing and advancing a body of literature that applies an underlying theoretical framework ([Paul and Rialp-Criado, 2020](#); [Paul et al., 2021](#)). Systematically analyzing existing research helps reconcile conflicting findings in theoretical applications while identifying new directions for future studies. This approach supports a comprehensive examination of the literature and contributes to the development of theory-driven insights within the field ([Paul and Rialp-Criado, 2020](#)).

Consequently, we followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to conduct this systematic literature review ([McInnes et al., 2018](#)) (See [Appendix 1](#)). PRISMA is widely recognized and extensively used in academic research to ensure transparency and methodological rigour among systematic reviews ([Page and Moher, 2017](#)). The guidelines provide a structured approach, outlining key elements such as resources for conducting systematic reviews, eligibility and exclusion criteria, review process steps (identification, screening, eligibility), and methods for data abstraction and analysis ([Shaffril et al., 2018](#)).

### 2.1 Resources

While there are alternative databases, we harvested articles from the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection database, owing to its wide coverage list of modern sources. That is a robust database providing search access to over 10,000 journals in over 45 different languages spanning the sciences, social sciences, and arts and humanities fields. It includes back files and citation data established by Clarivate Analytics and is searchable using three separate measures: citations, papers, and citations per paper ([Shaffril et al., 2018](#)).

### 2.2 Eligibility and exclusion criteria

The study selection was focused on the business and management category in WoS. We intended our sample to have broad coverage, so decided not to limit the timespan of the article search ([Siachou et al., 2022](#)). Instead, the search was extended to include all available literature till December 2024, which marked the final cut-off of our search period. Our search focused on conceptual and empirical peer-reviewed articles written in English, excluding book chapters and articles in conference proceedings, because knowledge validation in that context can be superficial ([De Clercq et al., 2012](#)). We argue that the extensive use of English and the vast number of outlets and publications in the language make it the most effective criterion for identifying valuable papers. Our criteria required that all selected articles either touch on learning-related themes or explicitly focus on detailed learning processes in the context of EIFs, defined as entrepreneurial firms. That includes firms typically referred to in the literature as INVs or born-global firms, which are entrepreneurial firms that, from inception or shortly thereafter, engage in international operations beyond a single domestic market. These firms are characterized by their ability to leverage a unique combination of market, entrepreneurial, and learning orientations to achieve rapid international expansion and success in various international markets ([Paul and Rosado-Serrano, 2019](#); [Knight and Cavusgil, 2004](#); [Oviatt and McDougall, 1994](#); [Chetty and Campbell-Hunt, 2004](#)). Finally, we considered only published

articles in 3, 4, and 4\* peer-reviewed academic journals on the ABS 2021 List. This criterion is commonly used in systematic reviews to capture scholarly debates and research trends while ensuring the highest quality standards for included studies (Atewologun *et al.*, 2017; Battisti *et al.*, 2022).

### 2.3 Review process

To structure the review process, this study adopted a four-step approach as outlined by Shaffril *et al.* (2018). The approach provides a structured review process while ensuring rigour and transparency. The first step focused on identifying keywords and conducting the initial search for articles. We selected a set of key terms from related studies that were well-established in the research on learning in EIFs, incorporating synonyms and variations to ensure a comprehensive search. In addition, some keywords were informed by the authors' conceptual understanding of the topic. This combination of literature-based and author-driven keywords allowed us to capture both foundational and evolving views on learning in EIFs. Afterwards, we conducted a Boolean search using "and" to connect the main and secondary keywords in the search process and develop a search syntax (See Appendix 2 for the search syntax and Appendix 3 for the related studies from which the keywords were selected). The initial search from WoS yielded 609 records. The second step involved screening, where we assessed 609 articles based on ABS list-level criteria. After applying our selection parameters, 283 articles met the eligibility criteria for review. Specifically, we considered articles ranked ABS 3–4\*, ensuring that only high-quality sources were included in the analysis. The third stage is eligibility, which requires accessing the full articles. We manually screened titles, abstracts, and full texts of the retrieved articles, discarding those that did not directly address the research topic. After careful examination, 112 articles were excluded as they did not focus on or discuss learning in EIFs. Finally, the last stage of the review resulted in a total of 171 articles. To ensure no relevant articles were overlooked, we employed ancestry searching, a method that involves examining reference lists of key articles to identify additional sources. The procedure identified 15 [1] additional studies that contributed to the research (Greenhalgh and Peacock, 2005; Dam *et al.*, 2019), yielding. In total, 186 articles were included in the synthesis. These articles were systematically organized in a table format with columns for author, source title, ABS level, focus, findings, theory, and theoretical fields (See Appendix 4). This organization enabled structured comparison across theoretical lenses and allowed for a thematic synthesis of learning-related insights. We adopted a thematic synthesis approach focused on how different theoretical perspectives have been applied to explain learning in EIFs. Although Huber's (1991) learning categories, one of the most widely applied organizational learning frameworks in the study of early and rapid internationalization (De Clercq *et al.*, 2012; Appiah *et al.*, 2023), were not employed as predefined coding schemes or units of analysis, they were drawn upon during the interpretive phase to synthesize and compare how various forms of learning (e.g. experiential, vicarious, grafting) were represented or overlooked in the reviewed literature.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1 Theoretical foundation

In this review, we define established theoretical perspectives as those appearing with high frequency and recurrence across the reviewed articles, demonstrating strong empirical validation. Foundational perspectives, by contrast, may appear less frequently in recent studies but are widely recognized for their historical significance and enduring conceptual influence. In contrast, emerging theoretical perspectives have limited application but offer novel explanatory insights that traditional frameworks may overlook (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). To address our first research aim, we identify and categorize theoretical perspectives within the existing literature on learning in EIFs, distinguishing among foundational,

established, and emerging frameworks. We examine their respective contributions to understanding the dynamics and mechanisms of learning in these firms. Established theories, such as organizational learning theory, the dynamic capabilities view, network theory, and the knowledge-based view offer widely accepted conceptual foundations supported by substantial empirical validation. In contrast, emerging perspectives, including cognitive-based approaches in entrepreneurship such as effectuation, causation, improvisation, and imprinting, provide novel explanatory insights that complement and extend established frameworks. Foundational theories, such as the Uppsala internationalization model, although not widely applied across the reviewed literature either in earlier or more recent studies, continue to exert significant conceptual influence and serve as enduring theoretical anchors in the field of IB. In what follows, we examine these frameworks and perspectives, highlighting their individual and collective contributions to the broader discourse on learning in such firms.

*3.1.1 2009 Uppsala internationalization model.* The Uppsala internationalization model supports the idea that early experiential learning can be leveraged strategically to build the dynamic marketing capabilities essential for sustained international performance (Zhou *et al.*, 2012). Based on Cyert and March's (1963) behavioural theory of the firm, the Uppsala internationalization model was originally developed to explain the gradual, experience-based internationalization of traditional firms and does not address EIFs (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977). However, the 2009 revision of the Uppsala model introduced a network-based perspective, highlighting the critical role of knowledge development, opportunity recognition, and relationship-building. These aspects are particularly relevant to EIFs, which depend on external networks, rapid learning, and entrepreneurial action to facilitate international expansion. Johanson and Vahlne (2009, p. 1421) stated, "there is nothing in our model that indicates that international expansion cannot be done quickly. In fact, it can, as long as there is sufficient time for learning and relationship building". It is therefore unsurprising that the 2009 Uppsala internationalization model has been applied in some of the reviewed studies (i.e. Zhou *et al.*, 2012; Hilmersson *et al.*, 2022). Zhou *et al.* (2012) integrated the 2009 Uppsala internationalization model with learning and knowledge-based perspectives, particularly the learning advantages of the newness concept and organizational learning theory. The aim was to explain how early international market entry enables EIFs to develop marketing capabilities to mitigate liabilities of foreignness and outsidership. Hilmersson *et al.* (2022) also applied the framework alongside the concepts of learning advantage of newness and compression diseconomies to explore how firms learn through network entry. From an organizational learning perspective, network entry closely aligns with Huber's vicarious learning approach, as firms acquire market knowledge regarding customer preferences, regulatory requirements, and market dynamics from partners, competitors, and industry leaders. Additionally, they build relationships and develop capabilities over time, leveraging external insights to enhance their learning processes.

In summary, studies applying the 2009 Uppsala internationalization model offer valuable insights into the learning dynamics underpinning the internationalization processes of EIFs. They emphasize how these firms engage in network-based learning also known as vicarious learning to navigate uncertainty and develop the capabilities necessary for entering and operating in foreign markets.

*3.1.2 Dynamic capabilities.* The dynamic-capabilities perspective can illustrate how firms attain and sustain competitive advantage in turbulent environments by responding to changing conditions based on what they learn from sources in the market, the choices and actions of the firm's strategic leaders, the firm's network of relationships, and the learning internalized within the firm (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Teece *et al.*, 1997; Cavusgil and Knight, 2015). Studies applying the dynamic-capabilities framework acknowledge the importance of dynamic capabilities in enabling EIFs to enter foreign markets quickly despite resource constraints (Weerawardena *et al.*, 2007; Freixanet and Renart, 2020). However, those reviewed differ in their explanatory mechanisms, providing distinct insights into the internationalization process. First, some studies focused on how learning and knowledge

acquisition enhance competitive advantage by linking dynamic capabilities to organizational learning. That process is particularly important in shaping a firm's ability to acquire, assimilate, and apply knowledge for international growth (Jantunen *et al.*, 2008; Weerawardena *et al.*, 2015). For example, Weerawardena *et al.* (2015) integrate the dynamic-capabilities perspective with the organizational subsystems view to develop a multidimensional learning framework that supports early and rapid internationalization. That study emphasizes how dynamic capabilities emerge from market learning, network learning, and internal knowledge development to foster innovation and strengthen competitive positioning in EIFs. Market learning helps firms respond to customer needs, network learning fosters collaboration and adaptation, and internal knowledge development drives sustained innovation and capability renewal. Firms strengthen their dynamic capabilities through those learning processes, thus acquiring the ability to sense opportunities, seize advantages, and reconfigure resources to successfully navigate volatile international markets.

Second, multiple studies (Vuorio and Torkkeli, 2023; Tiwari and Korneliusen, 2022; Weerawardena *et al.*, 2007, 2019) examine how dynamic capabilities influence early and rapid internationalization in resource-constrained environments, shedding light on the role of the entrepreneur. For instance, Vuorio and Torkkeli (2023) focus on dynamic managerial capabilities, highlighting the interplay between effectuation, causation, and bricolage in resource-constrained settings. The research reveals that early internationalizing SMEs utilize various configurations of these approaches combined with network capabilities to navigate foreign market entry challenges effectively. These capabilities enable firms to reconfigure resources, experiment with strategies, and cultivate partnerships, ultimately facilitating rapid internationalization. Additionally, Weerawardena *et al.* (2019) also adopt a dynamic-capabilities perspective, highlighting how entrepreneurial founders acquire, transform, and apply knowledge resources to overcome challenges associated with early internationalization. Notably, the study found that entrepreneurial founders cultivate a learning-oriented culture within the firm, enabling it to effectively sense, seize, and transform opportunities, which is an essential aspect of dynamic capabilities.

Third, several studies (e.g. Mostafiz *et al.*, 2024; Evers *et al.*, 2012; Li and Deng, 2017) have examined network-based dynamic capabilities, emphasizing the pivotal role of leveraging network ties, stakeholder relationships, and collaborative learning. These capabilities enable EIFs to navigate the dynamic international markets in which they operate effectively. For instance, Evers *et al.* (2012) explored how stakeholder groups influence the development of marketing capabilities. The findings indicate that different stakeholder groups, categorized as allied, cooperative, neutral, and entrepreneurial, affect a firm's learning processes (single-, double-, and triple-loop). These processes shape the nature of the dynamic marketing capabilities (incremental, renewing, and regenerative) necessary to build and sustain competitive advantage in an international context. The results reinforce the idea from the network-theoretical approach that networks shape firm adaptability and strategic decision-making (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009).

Fourth, several studies (e.g. Weerawardena *et al.*, 2020; Monferrer *et al.*, 2021) recognize the crucial role of dynamic capabilities in driving learning, which directly supports a firm's ability to adapt in uncertain and evolving environments. These studies report that EIFs integrate technical and administrative innovations, reinforced by market learning, relational learning, and internal learning, to navigate foreign markets successfully. Market learning emphasizes understanding customer needs and competitor behaviour, involving both active searching to systematically identify relevant market insights, and also vicarious learning, where firms absorb knowledge by observing the actions and outcomes of others (Huber, 1991; Weerawardena *et al.*, 2015; Sinkovics *et al.*, 2013; Pellegrino and McNaughton, 2017). Relational learning involves acquiring knowledge through business relationships, international collaborations, and strategic alliances. It aligns with vicarious learning, as firms leverage insights from their network partners' experiences to mitigate the uncertainties associated with the liabilities of newness and foreignness (Appiah *et al.*, 2023; Prashantham and Floyd, 2019; Ripollés and Blesa, 2020).

Finally, internal knowledge development refers to a firm's ability to refine and expand its knowledge base through internal activities. The process reflects experiential learning, where knowledge is acquired through direct exposure to international markets, allowing firms to make real-time strategic adjustments (Kumar and Sharma, 2018).

Finally, at the post-entry stage of internationalization, EIFs are vulnerable due to their small size, limited resources, and liabilities of foreignness. The situation has prompted scholarly interest in the role of dynamic capabilities in post-entry survival and long-term growth (e.g. Khan and Lew, 2018; Hilmersson *et al.*, 2022). The research acknowledges the importance of the founder's international experience, entrepreneurial orientation, and network development capabilities as critical factors influencing a firm's ability to sustain international operations. Khan and Lew (2018) demonstrated that the post-entry international experience of EIF leadership teams, founders' entrepreneurial orientation, and network development capabilities facilitate the development and maintenance of the dynamic capabilities essential for survival. In this context, entrepreneurial orientation fosters learning by encouraging experimentation with prior experiences and the exploration of new ideas utilizing network resources. The finding aligns with Huber's (1991) learning approaches, particularly experiential learning, searching and vicarious learning, as viewed through the lens of organizational learning theory.

Overall, the dynamic-capabilities perspective provides a valuable theoretical lens for understanding how EIFs systematically build, reconfigure, and refine their learning mechanisms during internationalization. It highlights the importance of the founder's international experience, entrepreneurial orientation, and network development capabilities to a firm's ability to respond effectively to environmental uncertainty. Notably, several studies drawing on the dynamic capabilities view underscore learning processes such as experiential learning, searching, and vicarious learning, indicating a partial alignment with Huber's (1991) typology. However, other forms of learning identified by Huber, such as grafting and congenital learning receive comparatively limited attention in this body of literature.

*3.1.3 Network theory.* Network theory is an overarching framework encompassing various dimensions and applications, including proximity-based social ties promoting trusting relationships (social network theory) and value derived from connections (social capital theory) (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011; Ripollés and Blesa, 2020). A significant number of the reviewed studies applied a broad-perspective form of network theory (e.g. Coviello, 2006; Hughes *et al.*, 2019; Ryan *et al.*, 2019; Loane and Bell, 2006). These studies underscore the vital role of network factors in fostering growth and enhancing the international performance of EIFs. Networks serve as critical conduits for essential resources, including knowledge, market access, and financial capital, all of which are fundamental to the growth and internationalization of EIFs (Coviello, 2006; Freeman *et al.*, 2010). Leveraging these network relationships can enable firms to accelerate their learning processes, enhance their adaptability to foreign markets, and strengthen their competitive positioning in global environments.

Beyond the broader network-theoretical perspective, several studies (e.g. Xiang *et al.*, 2023; Yang *et al.*, 2023; Van Geenhuizen, 2008) have specifically examined the social dimension by applying social network theory to explore various learning mechanisms. These include brokerage network learning (Xiang *et al.*, 2023), entrepreneurs' social-ties-based learning (Yang *et al.*, 2023), and knowledge networks (Van Geenhuizen, 2008). From an organizational learning theoretical perspective, these mechanisms align closely with Huber's (1991) vicarious learning approach, as firms acquire knowledge by engaging with and observing others within their networks. By examining how networks facilitate information exchange, resource access, and experiential learning, these studies highlight the critical role of social connections in enhancing firms' adaptive capabilities and strategic decision-making in international markets. Social networks provide both informational advantages and experiential knowledge, which play a crucial role in mitigating the challenges associated with non-equity cooperative entry modes. Through these networks, EIFs can overcome key liabilities: newness (i.e. knowledge gaps), foreignness (i.e. lack of market legitimacy), and smallness (i.e. resource constraints) in foreign markets (Ripollés and Blesa, 2020).

Finally, several studies (e.g. [Presutti et al., 2007](#); [Ripollés and Blesa, 2020](#); [Prashantham and Birkinshaw, 2015](#)) have examined the social dimension of the network-theoretical perspective, applying social capital theory to highlight two key issues. First, [Ripollés and Blesa \(2020\)](#) explored how social networks influence EIFs' choice of non-equity cooperative entries and their subsequent international performance. Their findings suggest that strong network ties provide access to strategic partnerships, enabling firms to expand globally while preserving flexibility in their entry modes. Second, [Presutti et al. \(2007\)](#), along with [Prashantham and Birkinshaw \(2015\)](#), investigated the role of social capital as a critical mechanism for knowledge acquisition in foreign markets. That research underscores how leveraging social connections allows firms to access valuable market insights, navigate unfamiliar business environments, and strengthen competitive advantage in international settings. Together, these perspectives reinforce the view that social capital plays a fundamental role in supporting EIFs' learning processes, shaping strategic decision-making, and driving long-term success in global markets.

In summary, network theory (drawing on social network and social capital perspectives) explains how EIFs acquire and apply knowledge through external relationships. These relationships help firms overcome the liabilities of smallness and newness, foster innovation, and accelerate international learning processes. It highlights the importance of network learning at the pre-foreign market entry stage, where the firm lacks experiential knowledge to operate in the foreign market ([Bruneel et al., 2010](#); [Pellegrino and McNaughton, 2015](#)) at the initial internationalization stage ([Hennart et al., 2021](#)). Importantly, studies grounded in the network perspective frequently highlight vicarious learning which partially aligns with [Huber's \(1991\)](#) typology of organizational learning.

*3.1.4 Organizational learning theory.* Organizational learning theory focuses on the acquisition, assimilation, and application of knowledge to enhance firm performance and adaptation ([Weerawardena et al., 2015](#); [Huber, 1991](#); [Levitt and March, 1988](#)). A significant number of the reviewed studies have utilized organizational learning theory to examine learning in EIFs. These studies can be categorized into distinct perspectives: some focus on learning as a mechanism driving internationalization, while others explore the dynamics of learning within firms; some emphasize learning and knowledge accumulation, while another stream investigates learning as an outcome of internationalization.

The reviewed studies leaning on organizational learning theory to examine learning as a mechanism driving internationalization unveil the processes that shape EIFs during the entry and post-entry stages ([Evers et al., 2012](#); [Weerawardena et al., 2007](#); [Schwens and Kabst, 2009](#); [Autio, 2017](#); [Zhou et al., 2012](#); [Yeoh, 2004](#)). For example, [Schwens and Kabst \(2009\)](#) applied [Levitt and March's \(1988\)](#) organizational framework to assess how learning from direct experience (i.e. a firm's own experiences of entering and operating in foreign markets), the experience of others, and paradigms of interpretation influence firms' international entry. The study's empirical findings reveal that while learning from direct experience is negatively associated with early internationalization, learning from others and from paradigms of interpretation positively impacts the likelihood of a firm expanding internationally. These results suggest that for firms seeking early internationalization, leveraging external knowledge sources and industry models may be more effective than relying solely on internal experiential learning. A critical comparison indicates that these categories of learning closely resemble those proposed by [Huber \(1991\)](#) as viewed through the lens of organizational learning theory. Specifically, learning from direct experience aligns with Huber's concept of experiential learning, where knowledge is acquired through a firm's own actions and feedback. Similarly, learning from the experience of others corresponds to Huber's vicarious learning, which enables firms to draw on external sources, such as competitors, partners, and industry norms, without incurring the costs and risks associated with direct market entry. In addition to established frameworks, learning cycles, which include single-loop, double-loop, and triple-loop learning, are central to organizational learning theory, offering insights into how different modes of learning influence capability development ([Argyris and Schon, 1978](#)). Building on

this, [Evers et al. \(2012\)](#) extend the framework by demonstrating how different depths of learning shape the strategic refinement and international competitiveness of EIFs. Their study underscores that firms engaging in deeper learning processes, particularly double-loop and triple-loop learning, are better equipped to navigate uncertainties, drive innovation, and achieve sustained success in foreign markets.

The reviewed studies exploring the dynamics of learning within firms (i.e. [Pellegrino and McNaughton, 2017](#); [Bunz et al., 2017](#); [Ciszewska-Mlinaric et al., 2020](#); [Pellegrino and McNaughton, 2015](#)) reveal the evolving nature of learning across different phases of the firm's life cycle. For example, using [Huber's \(1991\)](#) framework, [Pellegrino and McNaughton \(2015\)](#) found that the dominant learning modes and focal areas of learning in EIFs shifted as internationalization progressed. The findings showed that at the time of founding, congenital learning was the primary learning mode, meaning firms relied on their founders' prior background and experience. The result reflects the knowledge-based view, which explains how firms inherit knowledge from their founders' previous experiences ([Zhou et al., 2012](#); [Bruneel et al., 2010](#)). However, as the firms expanded internationally, they increasingly relied on experiential, vicarious, searching, and noticing learning processes. Their learning focus also transitioned from product knowledge in the early stages to knowledge of foreign markets and the internationalization process as they grew. In later stages, experiential learning became more important, along with resource-intensive learning processes such as grafting, which involves hiring local talent or acquiring foreign companies to strengthen market knowledge and operational capabilities.

The reviewed studies provide deeper insights into the critical role of knowledge in successful international expansion ([Kang et al., 2022](#); [Tran et al., 2016](#); [Bruneel et al., 2010](#)). For example, [Tran et al. \(2016\)](#) found that firms primarily relied on cognitive and explicit learning to acquire external, codified knowledge rather than the experiential learning traditionally emphasized in internationalization literature. Similarly, [Kang et al. \(2022\)](#) demonstrate that firms with strong absorptive capacity can leverage organizational learning to gather and apply external knowledge, accelerating their international growth. However, [Kang et al.'s \(2022\)](#) findings contrast with existing research (e.g. [Autio et al., 2000](#); [Zhou et al., 2012](#)), which argues that young firms often lack the absorptive capacity necessary to acquire, assimilate, and utilize new knowledge efficiently. While [Autio et al. \(2000\)](#) and [Zhou et al. \(2012\)](#) provide empirical contributions on this issue, their conceptualization of absorptive capacity aligns with the broader knowledge-based view. That reinforces the conceptual overlap between the knowledge-based view and organizational learning theory, highlighting their interconnected roles in shaping firm learning and internationalization processes. Despite their differences, both perspectives recognize absorptive capacity as a key driver of learning and internationalization.

Finally, one reviewed study offers a distinct perspective, positioning learning as an outcome of internationalization. That view contrasts with other research primarily addressing learning as a driver of early and rapid internationalization ([Burrpitt and Rondinelli, 2000](#)). While organizational learning theory provides a useful lens on this dynamic, the topic has received limited research attention in comparison to studies focussing on learning as a mechanism for international expansion. Nevertheless, its significance is evident in how firms often enter international markets not only to expand their operations but also to gain experience, improve competitiveness, and acquire new knowledge that strengthens their long-term strategic positioning. By operating in foreign environments, firms encounter new market dynamics, business practices, and institutional frameworks that contribute to their organizational learning process. This accumulated knowledge can enhance decision-making, refine competitive strategies, and support sustained international growth, highlighting the integrative role of learning in shaping firms' global trajectories.

In summary, organizational learning theory is particularly important for understanding how resource-limited, early internationalizing, and rapidly internationalizing firms engage in learning processes to build competencies, enhance adaptability, and achieve sustainable growth. By fostering continuous knowledge acquisition and integration, these firms develop

innovative strategies to overcome resource constraints and navigate the complexities of foreign markets.

**3.1.5 Knowledge-based view.** The learning and early internationalization literature considers knowledge an important asset that enables early internationalization and speeds international growth among entrepreneurial firms (Autio *et al.*, 2000; Pellegrino and McNaughton, 2017). Due to their size, early-stage nature, and rapid internationalization, EIFs often face resource constraints, particularly in terms of financial and human capital (Zahra, 2005). The knowledge-based view plays a crucial role in helping these firms overcome such challenges by positioning knowledge as a key strategic asset rather than relying solely on human capital or financial resources (Buccieri and Park, 2022). For example, firms can leverage market intelligence, industry insights, and network-based learning to compensate for scarce financial resources or human capital. By forming strategic alliances and collaborating with experienced industry players, they gain access to valuable knowledge, distribution channels, and funding opportunities, enabling them to navigate international markets more effectively.

The reviewed studies applying the knowledge-based view focus on three different areas. The first significant area focuses on knowledge accumulation and capability development. The studies in this category highlight how EIFs accumulate knowledge through various channels such as networks, co-creation, and the learning advantage of newness for capability development and early mover advantage (Freeman *et al.*, 2010; Tuppara *et al.*, 2008; Autio *et al.*, 2000; Buccieri and Park, 2022). With regard to networks, Freeman *et al.* (2010) presented a model for rapid knowledge development in smaller EIFs, emphasizing the role of networks, partnerships, trust, tacit knowledge, and absorptive capacity. The study's findings highlight how these elements collectively facilitate the efficient acquisition and application of knowledge, enabling firms to adapt swiftly to international market demands. The model presented aligns with core principles of network theory, reinforcing the idea that firms do not learn in isolation but rely on relational ties to navigate uncertainty and build international competitiveness. Concerning co-creation, Buccieri and Park (2022) developed a model linking entrepreneurial marketing and knowledge-based capabilities to post-entry performance in EIFs, highlighting the role of co-creation and market understanding.

Finally, Autio *et al.* (2000) introduced the concept of learning advantage as a counterpoint to the liability of newness among internationalizing firms, enabling the acquisition of knowledge and capability development. A key extract from the article in question is, "as firms get older, they develop learning impediments that hamper their ability to successfully grow in new environments and that the relative flexibility of newer firms allows them to rapidly learn the competencies necessary to pursue continued growth in foreign markets" (p. 919). While the learning advantage of newness is connected to the knowledge-based view, a key difference exists regarding learning speed, knowledge accumulation, and path dependence. A knowledge-based view would consider learning as cumulative and path-dependent, whereas the concept of learning advantage focuses on learning arising from limited or no prior knowledge. The knowledge-based view emphasizes the learning advantage of newness, suggesting that newly internationalizing firms gain a competitive edge by rapidly acquiring and utilizing market knowledge (Zhou *et al.*, 2012; Autio *et al.*, 2000; Hilmersson *et al.*, 2017; Bruneel *et al.*, 2010). This concept aligns with organizational learning theory, particularly congenital learning, which explains how firms inherit market knowledge from their founders' prior experiences and established industry networks (Pellegrino and McNaughton, 2015). By expressly integrating these perspectives, we highlight how EIFs not only benefit from their newness but also leverage organizational learning mechanisms, such as vicarious learning and experiential knowledge, to enhance their adaptive capacity and strategic decision-making in foreign markets.

The second significant area focuses on experiential knowledge and rapid internationalization. The contributing studies examine the *how* and the *consequences* of experiential knowledge (Arte, 2017; Tiwari and Korneliusson, 2022; Zou and Ghauri, 2010; Gassmann and Keupp, 2007). For instance, Tiwari and Korneliusson (2022) explored how

experiential knowledge acquired through prior experience, social networks, and trade fairs enabled resource-poor emerging market micro firms to internationalize rapidly. The findings highlight that such knowledge serves as a vital asset, helping the firms overcome financial and structural constraints that might otherwise hinder their global expansion. Similarly, [Zou and Ghauri \(2010\)](#) conclude that learning in EIFs is shaped by their reliance on networks, experiential knowledge, and the agility evident in absorbing and applying new information. This adaptability allows them to navigate complex international markets effectively, ensuring sustained growth and competitiveness in the global landscape. The knowledge-based view underscores the important role of prior knowledge in shaping firm capabilities and strategic choices. That aligns with the organizational learning perspective, which also suggests founders' prior knowledge is a key enabler of early internationalization, particularly in the context of EIFs.

The third area focuses on the transformation of data into firm knowledge, a concept that has received limited attention in the reviewed articles. [Liu et al. \(2023\)](#) contributed to this field by exploring how firms leverage big data analytics (BDA) on e-platforms to generate business value, emphasizing the conversion of raw data into actionable knowledge that enhances decision-making and competitive advantage. Although this research area remains relatively underexplored, its significance has grown in recent years, particularly as digitalization continues to shape global business strategies ([Appiah et al., 2025](#)). The increasing reliance on BDA and e-platforms underscores the need for firms to develop efficient mechanisms for processing, integrating, and applying digital information. As industries shift towards increasingly data-driven decision-making, the ability to transform digital insights into strategic business advantages will likely become a central focus in future research.

Overall, the knowledge-based view highlights the critical role of knowledge in facilitating the internationalization processes of EIFs ([Autio et al., 2000](#)). Firms with strong market knowledge capabilities can anticipate changes in global markets, enabling them to identify and capitalize on new opportunities ([Buccieri and Park, 2022](#)). This knowledge-based view emphasizes the acquisition, synthesis, and application of knowledge as an essential factor in aligning with customer needs and sustaining competitive advantage in early internationalization. Studies drawing on the knowledge-based view tend to emphasize learning processes such as congenital learning, primarily through the prior knowledge and experience of founders. This emphasis reflects only a partial alignment with [Huber's \(1991\)](#) learning typology, as other mechanisms such as vicarious, grafting, and experiential learning, remain comparatively underexplored.

*3.1.6 Cognitive-based perspectives in entrepreneurship.* The review identified several cognitive-based perspectives in entrepreneurship, that played a significant role in understanding early and rapid internationalization. [Oviatt and McDougall \(1994\)](#) explored entrepreneurial cognition within a model of internationalization speed, emphasizing how decision-making and perception influence global expansion. Learning occurs at both the entrepreneur and firm levels, with the entrepreneur's experience and cognitive processes playing a particularly crucial role ([Prashantham and Floyd, 2019](#)). A significant number of studies have applied cognitive-based perspectives on entrepreneurship to explain the learning process in EIFs (e.g. [Criaco and Naldi, 2024](#); [De Cock et al., 2021](#); [Gabrielsson and Gabrielsson, 2013](#); [Evers and Andersson, 2021](#); [Evers and O'Gorman, 2011](#); [Chetty et al., 2024](#)). However, the distribution of these studies across cognitive-based frameworks varies, spanning imprinting theory, improvisation, effectuation, and causation.

While some studies exemplify a broad approach, examining cognitive-based perspectives in entrepreneurship on a general level (e.g. [Pidduck et al., 2022](#); [Walter et al., 2024](#)), others have adopted a more focused lens. Specifically, imprinting theory has been utilized in studies such as [Criaco and Naldi \(2024\)](#) and [De Cock et al. \(2021\)](#), and improvisation in [Chetty et al. \(2024\)](#). In contrast, effectuation and causation perspectives feature in works such as [Gabrielsson and Gabrielsson \(2013\)](#), [Evers and Andersson \(2021\)](#), [Evers and O'Gorman \(2011\)](#), [Gabrielsson et al. \(2022\)](#), [Nemkova \(2017\)](#), and [Yang and Gabrielsson \(2017\)](#).

This varied application of cognitive-based perspectives highlights the richness of entrepreneurial learning research in the context of EIFs.

With respect to the cognitive-based perspectives in entrepreneurship on a general level, [Walter et al. \(2024\)](#) identify cognitive diversity and cognitive load as crucial mechanisms shaping learning capabilities, internationalization strategies, and adaptive decision-making of EIFs. Cognitive diversity, defined as the variation in beliefs, experiences, and knowledge stemming from pre-founding R&D collaboration, enhances learning by introducing diverse perspectives and fostering innovative problem-solving ([Miller et al., 1998](#); [Walter et al., 2024](#)). From the organizational learning theoretical perspective, the process reflects [Huber's \(1991\)](#) concept of congenital learning, as the knowledge accumulated through early collaboration becomes embedded in the firm at inception, contributing to its initial knowledge base and equipping it with cognitive resources necessary to navigate complex international environments from the outset. In contrast, cognitive load arises when excessive breadth in pre-founding R&D collaboration overwhelms cognitive resources, making it difficult to process and integrate knowledge ([Walter et al., 2024](#)). Given the high levels of uncertainty and time pressure associated with entering foreign markets, cognitive load can hinder quick decision-making and slow learning processes.

With regard to the more focused lens of imprinting, [Criaco and Naldi \(2024\)](#) highlight how entrepreneurial cognition shapes risk-taking and strategic decision-making during internationalization learning efforts. The study's findings suggest that cognition influences how firms assess opportunities, manage uncertainty, and navigate foreign market entry, reinforcing the role of mental frameworks in entrepreneurial strategy. Closely related to this is founder imprinting theory ([Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013](#)), which posits that the personal characteristics and experiences of founders leave a lasting imprint on their ventures' strategic decisions. This imprinting effect extends to key aspects such as market selection, resource allocation, and organizational learning, ultimately shaping the firm's long-term trajectory in international markets. In the context of internationalization, this theory suggests that early international experiences and the cognitive beliefs of founders significantly influence how a firm approaches and navigates foreign markets. [De Cock et al. \(2021\)](#) applied the founder imprinting theory to examine how founders' international experiences and cognitive beliefs shape their ventures' internationalization processes. Their multiple case study approach identified four distinct types of international entrepreneurs. Each had different international experiences and beliefs that affected the strategic decisions made during international expansion. The research underscores the profound impact of individual-level factors on firm-level internationalization strategies.

With regard to the more focused lens of improvisation, [Chetty et al. \(2024\)](#) acknowledge that EIFs often face high levels of uncertainty and time pressure when entering foreign markets ([Acedo et al., 2021](#); [Chetty et al., 2024](#)). Applying the improvisation theoretical perspective, [Chetty et al. \(2024\)](#) suggest that such firms can develop knowledge through improvisation, a spontaneous and creative process that enables them to adapt and learn in real-time without relying on pre-existing routines or extensive planning. This improvisational approach allows firms to rapidly acquire international business knowledge by learning on the go during market entry and execution. As they navigate unfamiliar foreign environments, improvisation helps them respond flexibly to dynamic challenges, fostering agility and innovation in their internationalization efforts. In this way, improvisation complements the learning advantage of newness by offering an alternative explanation for how EIFs develop capabilities and remain competitive in global markets.

Finally, concerning the lens of effectuation and causation, the reviewed studies applying effectuation theory focused on the following important areas. The first was the international commitment decisions made in digital firms ([Gabrielsson et al., 2022](#)). Applying effectuation theory underscores the importance of learning in the accelerated internationalization of digital firms. According to [Gabrielsson et al. \(2022\)](#), learning among inexperienced digital entrepreneurs is an adaptive, network-driven process facilitated by digital tools, networks,

and effectuation logic. Entrepreneurs who can adopt adaptive learning and engage with digital communities can compensate for their lack of international experience and successfully navigate the accelerated internationalization process. When viewed from the organizational learning theoretical perspective, such learning behaviour aligns primarily with Huber's vicarious learning concept; entrepreneurs learn through observation and interaction with others in digital communities. The same behaviour also reflects searching, where the entrepreneurs seek knowledge to compensate for experience gaps and support accelerated internationalization.

The second aspect is foreign market opportunities and customer identification (Evers and O'Gorman, 2011). Evers and O'Gorman (2011) combined effectuation theory with improvisation and the concepts of prior knowledge and network interactions to explain the role of prior knowledge and networks in learning in EIFs. The same study reported that learning in EIFs revolves around the accumulation and application of knowledge acquired through both prior experience and network interactions. This learning process enables EIFs to develop flexible and adaptive internationalization strategies, rather than following a rigid, pre-planned path. Instead, entrepreneurs tend to improvise and adapt based on the resources and knowledge they accumulate along their internationalization journey. The application of prior entrepreneurial experience and insights gained through network engagement, as highlighted in their study, aligns with Huber's (1991) learning approaches, specifically, congenital learning, which stems from knowledge embedded at firm inception, and vicarious learning, which arises from observing and interacting with external actors.

The third aspect is the focus on the process of learning (Yang and Gabrielsson, 2017; Gabrielsson and Gabrielsson, 2013; Evers and Andersson, 2021; Nemkova, 2017). Drawing on the theoretical lens of effectuation enables us to view the reviewed studies as considering learning a key part of the entrepreneurial process in EIFs, especially in high-tech sectors, as it enables firms to co-create solutions, innovate, and reduce uncertainty while entering new markets (Yang and Gabrielsson, 2017; Gabrielsson and Gabrielsson, 2013). Furthermore, a combination of effectuation theory and causation theory shows that learning among EIFs is a continuous process that involves both exploration and exploitation (March, 1991). Explorative learning helps EIFs identify new opportunities, whereas exploitative learning enables them to refine existing capabilities and improve operational efficiency, both of which are essential for growth and survival in foreign markets (March, 1991; Levinthal and March, 1993; Gabrielsson and Gabrielsson, 2013). In this context, effectuation logic reinforces the value of explorative learning, particularly in uncertain and resource-constrained environments where adaptability and opportunity discovery are critical. Conversely, causation logic emphasizes the importance of exploitative learning, as it supports systematic planning and the effective use of established routines to scale and sustain international operations (Gabrielsson and Gabrielsson, 2013). The reviewed studies show that the reinforcement of exploratory learning by effectuation logic occurs at the early growth phases of an EIF (e.g. Gabrielsson and Gabrielsson, 2013; Yang and Gabrielsson, 2017), whereas the reinforcement of exploitative learning happens in the later phases (Gabrielsson and Gabrielsson, 2013; Nummela *et al.*, 2014). Significantly, during the growth phase of an EIF, internal uncertainty is initially stronger but weakens later (Yang and Gabrielsson, 2017).

Cognitive-based perspectives on entrepreneurship offer a nuanced understanding of how entrepreneurial cognition, experience, and decision-making influence learning, strategic adaptation, and the internationalization success of early and rapidly expanding firms. These perspectives emphasize how entrepreneurs and organizations process information, evaluate risks, and draw on prior experience to navigate the complexities of foreign markets. Several studies grounded in cognitive approaches particularly highlight key learning processes such as congenital, exploratory, and exploitative learning. These processes closely align with Huber's (1991) typology of organizational learning. Exploratory learning, characterized by experimentation and the pursuit of novel opportunities, parallels Huber's concepts of searching, vicarious learning, and grafting. Conversely, exploitative learning, which focuses

on refining and applying existing knowledge, aligns with congenital and experiential learning. Overall, cognitive-based perspectives provide a more integrated and multidimensional view of organizational learning, resonating with the diverse mechanisms outlined in Huber's framework.

*3.1.7 Comparative summary of theoretical perspectives.* As illustrated in the table in Appendix 5, our analysis summarizes the theoretical frameworks and their corresponding reviewed articles, demonstrating their application in understanding learning in EIFs. While the theoretical frameworks differ in their fundamental assumptions and explanatory mechanisms, they also reveal both similarities and differences in how learning is conceptualized and operationalized within EIFs.

One such framework is the dynamic capabilities view, which encompasses the ways in which firms actively sense, seize, and reconfigure knowledge from networks to enable adaptation, making it a firm-driven and systematic process. The notion forms the basis of what has been termed network-based dynamic capabilities (Mostafiz *et al.*, 2024; Evers *et al.*, 2012). Although both the dynamic capabilities and network perspectives recognize the value of learning through networks, they differ in emphasis. Network theory explains how relationships and structural connections facilitate access to knowledge, particularly through external interactions. Social ties-based learning, rooted in the network perspective, is typically informal and relational; entrepreneurs acquire knowledge through mentors, peers, and industry connections (e.g. Xiang *et al.*, 2023; Yang *et al.*, 2023; Van Geenhuizen, 2008). In contrast, learning within the dynamic capabilities framework is more structured and firm-centric, emphasizing the strategic integration of network-derived knowledge to support adaptation.

Similarly, while organizational learning theory focuses on the acquisition and assimilation of knowledge, the dynamic capabilities view explains how learning is transformed into strategic action through the development of dynamic capabilities. This transformation is reflected in the reinforcement of market learning, relational learning, and internal learning, corresponding respectively to searching, vicarious learning, and experiential learning (Huber, 1991; Weerawardena *et al.*, 2015; Sinkovics *et al.*, 2013; Pellegrino and McNaughton, 2017).

Additionally, although the cognitive-based entrepreneurship perspective and the dynamic-capabilities view have different focuses, our review shows that they intersect in explaining how EIFs dynamically integrate effectuation, improvisation, and causation approaches. Dynamic capabilities influence effectuation and causation through learning, shaping how firms adapt and make strategic decisions under conditions of uncertainty. This dynamic integration enhances firms' capacity to innovate and remain agile in fast-changing international environments (Vuorio and Torkkeli, 2023).

Although their theoretical roots differ, the knowledge-based view and organizational learning perspectives converge on the centrality of learning and knowledge in driving international performance. The knowledge-based view dovetails with organizational learning theory, which also points to founders' prior knowledge as a catalyst for early internationalization (Tiwari and Korneliusson, 2022; Zou and Ghauri, 2010; Gassmann and Keupp, 2007). Moreover, the knowledge-based view focuses on knowledge accumulation through organizational learning channels such as networks and co-creation, whereas organizational learning theory explains how firms acquire, assimilate, and refine that knowledge to remain adaptive and competitive (Freeman *et al.*, 2010; Tuppara *et al.*, 2008; Buccieri and Park, 2022).

Additionally, there is a conceptual overlap around how absorptive capacity connects organizational learning theory and the knowledge-based view. The reviewed studies applying organizational learning theory emphasize absorptive capacity (the ability to acquire and utilize knowledge) as essential for strategic adaptation (Kang *et al.*, 2022). In contrast, studies grounded in the knowledge-based view highlight the limitations of young firms, suggesting that their weak absorptive capacity hinders effective knowledge assimilation (Autio *et al.*, 2000; Zhou *et al.*, 2012). Despite these differences, both perspectives acknowledge that absorptive capacity is a fundamental driver of learning and internationalization.

Finally, the 2009 Uppsala internationalization model (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009) identifies trust-building, knowledge creation, and commitment as central mechanisms in the internationalization process. In contrast, organizational learning theory focuses more broadly on how EIFs systematically acquire, process, and apply knowledge to enhance their international competitiveness. Despite their different emphases, both perspectives recognize learning as a fundamental driver of internationalization. Studies including Zhou *et al.* (2012) and Hilmersson *et al.* (2022) have integrated the Uppsala model with learning and knowledge-based views, particularly through the lens of learning advantages of newness and organizational learning processes. The 2009 Uppsala internationalization model extends the similarity with the network-theoretical perspective by highlighting the importance of network learning in the internationalization process of firms (Bruneel *et al.*, 2010; Pellegrino and McNaughton, 2015; Hennart *et al.*, 2021).

### 3.2 Theoretical gaps and new areas of research

This section addresses our second research aim: To highlight theoretical gaps and propose directions for future research to advance knowledge on learning dynamics and mechanisms in EIFs. Refer to Appendix 6 for an overview of the key gaps identified in the literature, which offer insights into areas that require further research. The subsequent sections provide a detailed discussion of those gaps.

*3.2.1 The 2009 Uppsala internationalization model.* Johanson and Vahlne (2009, p. 1421) state, “there is nothing in our model that indicates that international expansion cannot be done quickly. In fact, it can, as long as there is sufficient time for learning and relationship building”. Traditionally, the model emphasizes gradual internationalization driven by experiential learning and network relationships. However, the authors’ acknowledgement that rapid international expansion is possible provided firms have sufficient time for learning and relationship-building aligns with the characteristics of EIFs, which frequently internationalize at an accelerated pace. Surprisingly, despite its relevance, few of the reviewed studies have applied this model to the context of EIFs, presenting an opportunity for further research (Zhou *et al.*, 2012; Hilmersson *et al.*, 2022). Future studies could explore how different types of learning, such as the experiential, vicarious, or network-based forms, affect the speed and success of international expansion in these firms.

Additionally, investigating the role of digital platforms in accelerating relationship-building and reducing market entry barriers could unveil how modern firms navigate global markets through the lens of Johanson and Vahlne’s framework. These research gaps underscore the value of longitudinal case studies and process research for empirical inquiry, offering insights into the dynamic evolution of learning in EIFs. Additionally, this aligns with Zucchella’s (2021) call for more process-based studies in early internationalization research.

*3.2.2 Dynamic-capabilities view.* The reviewed studies highlight how learning and knowledge acquisition enhance competitive advantage by linking dynamic capabilities to organizational learning, particularly in shaping firms’ ability to acquire, assimilate, and apply knowledge for international growth (Evers *et al.*, 2012; Khan and Lew, 2018; Weerawardena *et al.*, 2020). The findings extend the theoretical discussion beyond performance outcomes to the micro-foundations of capability formation. However, while these studies establish the broader connection between learning and dynamic capabilities, they do not thoroughly examine the specific learning mechanisms identified by Huber (1991), such as congenital, experiential, vicarious, searching, and grafting, that shape the development of sensing, seizing, and transforming capabilities. This gap in the literature underscores the need for further exploration of how these distinct forms of learning influence dynamic capability formation. Accordingly, the following research question was derived: How do distinct forms of learning, including congenital, experiential, vicarious, searching, and grafting, contribute to the development of sensing, seizing, and transforming capabilities in EIFs? The proposed research question can be examined through various research methodologies, each offering unique

insights into how learning mechanisms shape dynamic capabilities. It also highlights the potential of a longitudinal research approach for empirical enquiry, addressing the call for longitudinal studies on entrepreneurial internationalization (Coviello and McAuley, 1999; Welch and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, 2013). A longitudinal study would provide valuable insights into the development process over time, enabling researchers to examine how learning mechanisms interact and evolve in response to changing internationalization conditions.

In addition, the reviewed studies highlight the strong scholarly interest in dynamic capabilities as critical drivers of post-entry survival and long-term growth in international ventures. Those studies recognize the importance of factors such as the founder's international experience, entrepreneurial orientation, and network development capabilities in sustaining international operations (Falahat *et al.*, 2022; Freixanet and Renart, 2020). Despite that recognition, there remains a notable gap in understanding how those capabilities evolve and interact over time to support learning, adaptation, and sustained internationalization. In particular, there is a need for more systematic investigations into the mechanisms through which capabilities are developed, deployed, and reconfigured. Future research should examine how entrepreneurs leverage and refine those capabilities, especially under resource constraints and environmental uncertainty, to enhance learning outcomes and improve firm survival. This perspective expands the discussion beyond traditional views, emphasizing the dynamic and evolving nature of entrepreneurial capabilities in international markets. It shows the potential of a multi-method approach combining machine-learning-driven text analysis with longitudinal qualitative research and responds to the call by Paul and Rosado-Serrano (2019) to introduce greater diversity in methods and techniques in research on EIFs. That shift would allow researchers to capture both quantitative patterns and deep contextual insights into how entrepreneurial capabilities evolve.

Finally, the findings from the reviewed studies emphasize that the dynamic capabilities of EIFs primarily drive learning to support adaptation in uncertain and evolving environments. While dynamic capabilities are commonly associated with a firm's ability to adjust to changing market conditions, they also play a crucial role in codifying experiential learning and transferring standardized knowledge across markets (Teece, 2007; Weerawardena *et al.*, 2007). However, their contribution to standardization remains underexplored, presenting a critical gap in understanding whether dynamic capabilities enable firms to synthesize localized learning into globally standardized practices that enhance operational scalability while maintaining responsiveness. Furthermore, the trade-offs between standardization and adaptation involved in shaping the learning capabilities and long-term performance of EIFs remain underexplored. Future research could explore how dynamic capabilities mediate those trade-offs, thus shedding light on how EIFs balance efficiency and responsiveness in international markets. A variety of methodological approaches could be employed to address these gaps. However, a mixed-method approach, integrating qualitative interviews with quantitative survey-based analysis, could provide a comprehensive perspective on how firms balance standardization and adaptation while leveraging their dynamic capabilities.

**3.2.3 Network theory.** While network theory provides valuable insights into how EIFs access external knowledge, the reviewed studies tend to emphasize vicarious learning, often overlooking other relevant learning mechanisms such as relational, grafting, and congenital learning (Coviello, 2006; Hughes *et al.*, 2019). This suggests a partial and underdeveloped view of how learning occurs within and through networks. Moreover, limited attention has been paid to the temporal and processual aspects of network-enabled learning, particularly how different learning mechanisms (i.e. congenital, experiential, relational, grafting, and searching) evolve from the pre-entry to post-entry stages of internationalization. Addressing these gaps could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the learning microfoundations that underpin early and rapid international expansion. Longitudinal case studies represent a particularly promising research method for this purpose, as they allow scholars to examine how learning processes evolve over time. This approach is especially

valuable for capturing the dynamics of firms as they transition from initial international market entry to more established global operations.

The reviewed studies have explored the social dimension of network theory by utilizing social network theory to investigate various learning mechanisms, including brokerage network learning, entrepreneurs' social ties-based learning, and knowledge networks (Xiang *et al.*, 2023; Yang *et al.*, 2023; Van Geenhuizen, 2008). Those studies examine how networks facilitate information exchange, resource access, and experiential learning in EIFs. However, while brokerage networks, social ties, and knowledge networks have been studied separately, there is limited understanding of how the mechanisms interact or complement one another in shaping entrepreneurial learning. Future research could explore the synergistic effects of multiple social learning mechanisms. To address this gap, longitudinal case studies offer a promising research method, enabling scholars to examine how social networks evolve, particularly in firms transitioning from early internationalization to more established global operations.

From a social capital theoretical perspective, the reviewed studies show that social capital plays a fundamental role in supporting EIFs' learning processes, shaping strategic decision-making, and driving their long-term success in global markets. While highlighting the benefits of leveraging social connections, existing research has yet to fully explore the nuanced mechanisms through which social capital specifically influences the learning and decision-making processes of EIFs in a range of contexts (Ripollés and Blesa, 2020; Presutti *et al.*, 2007). We argue that exploring this gap would advance the understanding of how social capital functions beyond its general advantages, providing a more contextualized and dynamic perspective. Therefore, we propose the following research questions that future studies could utilize. (1) How does the impact of social capital differ between developed and emerging economies, where institutional environments may vary in terms of regulatory stability and support systems? (2) How do virtual networks compare to traditional face-to-face interactions in shaping international learning and competitiveness among EIFs? (3) How does social capital evolve for EIFs, and what factors influence its persistence or decline as firms expand globally? (4) How do entrepreneurs' cognitive processes and decision-making tendencies influence their ability to leverage social capital effectively? To address these research questions, qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research could prove valuable. Qualitative methods, such as longitudinal case studies and in-depth interviews, can provide refined insights into entrepreneurs' experiences and social capital evolution. Quantitative approaches, including survey-based studies and network analysis, can help measure the impact of social capital on firm-level outcomes. A mixed-method approach would integrate rich narrative insights with empirical validation, offering a holistic understanding of the relationship between social capital and firm internationalization.

*3.2.4 Organizational learning theory.* The relationship between internationalization and learning processes appears to be more complex than the current literature suggests (Vahlne and Bhatti, 2018). This complexity may be a consequence of researchers investigating the phenomenon from different theoretical perspectives. An example is provided by how organizational learning theory has been applied to study the phenomenon. The reviewed studies illustrate that various organizational learning frameworks offer valuable and distinct insights into how learning processes occur in EIFs (see, e.g. Huber's (1991) learning typology, Levitt and March's (1988) organizational learning perspective, and Argyris and Schön's (1978) learning cycles). Each framework emphasizes different dimensions of learning, such as experiential processes, interpretive routines, or reflective depth. However, the fragmentation across these theoretical lenses suggests a need for a more integrated framework that can capture the multi-level, dynamic, and temporal nature of learning in EIFs. Unifying these perspectives would not only enhance theoretical coherence but also provide a more comprehensive understanding of how EIFs develop learning capabilities across different stages and contexts of internationalization.

Furthermore, while the reviewed studies offer plausible explanations for what occurs beyond the initial phase of early growth, highlighting how and why learning modes evolve as

EIFs mature and expand in international markets, there is a need for future research to explore how learning modes evolve over the life cycle of such firms (Ciszewska-Mlinaric *et al.*, 2020; Zhou *et al.*, 2012; Autio *et al.*, 2000). Such investigations could highlight underlying factors (e.g. the structure of a firm's network and psychic distance) influencing learning dynamics as firms grow in international markets and adapt to them (Ciszewska-Mlinaric *et al.*, 2020). A study investigating this research gap with the aid of organizational learning theory using a longitudinal case study approach could enhance scholars' understanding of how EIFs adapt their learning strategies during growth, build relationships, and navigate increasingly complex international markets.

*3.2.5 Knowledge-based view.* Although the knowledge-based view provides a strong foundation for understanding the role of knowledge in EIFs, most of the reviewed studies emphasize congenital learning, focussing on pre-existing knowledge embedded in founders (Arte, 2017; Tiwari and Korneliusson, 2022; Bucciari and Park, 2022; Autio *et al.*, 2000). This emphasis leads to a partial and static interpretation of learning, overlooking how knowledge is acquired, recombined, and expanded through vicarious, grafting, and experiential learning. To address this gap, future research, particularly longitudinal studies could explore how EIFs dynamically develop and apply knowledge in environments characterized by uncertainty and resource constraints.

Furthermore, while the reviewed studies have explored how knowledge is developed, there remains limited understanding of the long-term benefits and performance implications of such knowledge (Autio *et al.*, 2000). This gap becomes increasingly critical as firms now operate in highly dynamic environments shaped by rapid technological advancements, including digitalization, Industry 4.0 tools, and Artificial Intelligence, as well as intensifying globalization and market uncertainty. These conditions demand continuous learning, adaptation, and innovation, making it essential to understand how knowledge contributes not only to short-term agility but also to sustained competitive advantage over time (Behl *et al.*, 2023; Yang and Gabrielsson, 2017; Gabrielsson *et al.*, 2022; Jean *et al.*, 2020). In light of these gaps, future research could adopt the knowledge-based view to explore the following questions: (1) What are the long-term implications of the influence of digitalization on the acquisition and utilization of knowledge in EIFs? (2) How does knowledge development influence firm performance (e.g. profitability, market share, innovation) in the long term, particularly in smaller EIFs with limited resources? (3) How do the international performance implications of knowledge acquisition in small EIFs differ from those in larger firms?

Given the existence of contextual differences between economies, it would also be important to compare the long-term performance implications of knowledge acquisition in firms from developed and emerging economies using a comparative case study analysis. Doing so could provide nuanced insights into how knowledge acquisition influences long-term performance. Generally, SMEs from emerging markets and small open economies face unique challenges, making it important to explore how knowledge helps them adapt and compete internationally (Bucciari and Park, 2022). SMEs from larger or developed countries may have less incentive to expand abroad (Hilmersson *et al.*, 2017; Freixanet and Renart, 2020). Therefore, conducting similar studies with samples from other locations presents an interesting avenue for future research. Such studies would enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide a broader understanding of the phenomena across different contexts.

Finally, although the knowledge-based view has been the prevalent theoretical perspective informing research on the development of the learning advantage of newness, its explanatory power could be enhanced by considering cultural and institutional forces. Scholars drawing on the knowledge-based view can explore several key aspects of the learning advantage of newness in EIFs, including the influence of culture on its development, the role of institutional forces in shaping it, and its longevity over time (Appiah *et al.*, 2023). Longitudinal case studies provide a valuable research methodology for examining these questions, allowing researchers to track EIFs over time to assess how cultural and institutional influences contribute to the evolution and sustainability of their learning advantage of newness.

*3.2.6 Cognitive-based perspectives in entrepreneurship.* The reviewed studies have provided valuable insights into how the imprint of founder characteristics appears in their ventures' internationalization processes. In particular, [De Cock et al. \(2021\)](#) highlight how various sources of imprint stemming from differences in international experience, networks, and entrepreneurs' cognitive beliefs contribute to early internationalization. While the study primarily focuses on the early phase of internationalization, future research could explore the longitudinal effects of imprinting, examining how these imprints evolve over time and whether they persist or diminish as firms grow. Additionally, imprinting theory could serve as a multi-level framework for investigating how EIFs develop a learning advantage of newness at both the individual and collective levels. This advantage may become permanently imprinted onto the business as firms transition from a state of sensitivity (i.e. no established foreign operation) to stable internationalization. Future studies could also examine the outcomes, benefits, and challenges faced by EIFs due to imprinting and its subsequent path dependency. Applying imprinting theory in this context would enrich our understanding of the dynamics of the learning advantage of newness and its broader implications for firms' internationalization strategies.

As highlighted in the reviewed studies, learning in EIFs is a continuous process involving both exploration and exploitation ([Gabrielsson and Gabrielsson, 2013](#); [Yang and Gabrielsson, 2017](#)). Within this context, effectuation logic supports explorative learning, helping firms navigate uncertainty and discover new opportunities. In contrast, causation logic emphasizes exploitative learning, enabling firms to pursue efficiency and scalability through structured planning ([Gabrielsson and Gabrielsson, 2013](#)). This distinction reveals that the two logics complement learning processes. Despite growing interest in effectuation and causation, there remains a notable gap in understanding the cognitive mechanisms that guide how entrepreneurs apply and switch between these logics as they learn and adapt, and how learning unfolds in this dual-logics context ([Gabrielsson and Gabrielsson, 2013](#); [Yang and Gabrielsson, 2017](#); [Nummela et al., 2014](#)). That gap can be refined as encompassing how decision-makers process information, frame uncertainty, and navigate the tension between flexibility and structure during early internationalization. Addressing that gap would provide important insights into how EIFs develop capabilities under conditions of uncertainty and resource constraints. In light of this, we propose that future research apply the effectuation–causation framework to explore the following questions: (1) How do cognitive processes influence the balance between effectuation and causation in EIFs? (2) To what extent do cognitive mechanisms shape firms' learning processes during the early stages of internationalization? These questions call for research designs that can unpack cognitive processes in context. Those designs might include qualitative, process-oriented studies or quantitative research that measures the cognitive dimensions of entrepreneurial decision-making across firms.

#### **4. Discussion and conclusion**

This systematic review explores how various theoretical perspectives have shaped research on learning mechanisms and dynamics in EIFs. Synthesizing existing studies provides valuable insights into how firms, and particularly EIFs, develop learning processes that enhance their success in foreign markets.

It highlights the gradual theoretical evolution of research on learning mechanisms within firms, demonstrating how scholars have continuously refined the key concepts. Over time, perspectives within the overlapping fields of IM, IB, and IE, as well as related disciplines such as strategic management, entrepreneurship, psychology, economics, and innovation studies, have evolved to capture the complexity and multidimensional nature of learning processes in internationalizing firms. This theoretical progression reflects the heightened recognition of how firms develop, apply, and adapt their learning mechanisms to navigate global uncertainties, enhance competitive advantage, and sustain long-term international success. Despite theoretical advancements, our findings highlight substantial unexplored areas.

Appendix 6 outlines specific research gaps in various theoretical domains, reinforcing the need for deeper enquiries into learning mechanisms and dynamics in EIFs. Addressing these gaps could offer valuable theoretical contributions for EIFs navigating complex global environments.

In response to Brunsson's (2021) call for theoretical discussions to be more relevant to practice, in that they are not purely abstract but connected to meaningful social and strategic issues, this review bridges theoretical insights with real-world applications in the context of EIFs. Specifically, EIFs operate in environments characterized by high uncertainty, resource constraints, and institutional complexity (Xiang *et al.*, 2023; Chetty *et al.*, 2024). Those that can develop innovative strategies leveraging learning mechanisms, dynamic capabilities, and network relationships will be best placed to navigate those challenges. These elements critically shape how such firms adapt their business activities, select non-equity cooperative entry modes, make strategic decisions, and position themselves in international markets (McDougall *et al.*, 1994; Ripollés and Blesa, 2020; Weerawardena *et al.*, 2015). By synthesizing insights from multiple theoretical perspectives on learning mechanisms and dynamics in EIFs, this review offers a more integrated and practically relevant theoretical foundation that reflects the complex realities of global business operations.

Finally, this review outlines future research directions and methodological approaches that could hone theoretical perspectives within the overlapping fields of IM, IB, and IE, as well as related disciplines such as strategic management, entrepreneurship, and psychology. In response to Paul and Rosado-Serrano's (2019) call for greater methodological diversity in research on EIFs, future studies could bridge existing gaps by integrating interdisciplinary insights and employing diverse research methodologies, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method forms. Moreover, as theory development is an evolutionary process where new research builds on existing knowledge (Brunsson, 2021), we encourage researchers to conduct periodic systematic reviews, meta-analyses, or bibliometric analyses to track theoretical developments, identify emerging trends, and highlight future research areas. These efforts would provide a comprehensive understanding of the field, reveal gaps and inconsistencies, and offer opportunities to refine or integrate new perspectives into unified frameworks. The approach would ensure the research on learning in EIFs remains dynamic and responsive to contemporary challenges.

This review offers valuable insights that can support international marketers and entrepreneurs developing learning-based strategies for early internationalization. Firms applying these findings could enhance strategic decision-making, market positioning, and operational success. First, international marketers and entrepreneurs could leverage this review to strategically build networks to bolster successful market entry and strengthen learning mechanisms. The strategy could include pre-entry collaboration with experienced international firms that offer critical market insights, regulatory guidance, and operational support, as well as external relationships, such as those with industry partners, mentors, or local distributors that help overcome knowledge gaps and mitigate risks in unfamiliar foreign markets. Second, given the importance of learning in EIFs, as well as the various forms of learning identified in this review, international marketers and entrepreneurs could leverage its insights to make strategic investments in learning mechanisms. Firms that prioritize continuous learning through structured processes and apply the appropriate learning modes at different stages of internationalization could enhance their adaptability, improve their decision-making, and strengthen their global competitiveness. Third, as industries increasingly adopt data-driven decision-making, BDA and digital platforms have become essential tools facilitating knowledge acquisition in EIFs. International marketers and entrepreneurs could leverage the insights from this review to optimize how they integrate those technologies into their learning mechanisms, ensuring more effective strategic planning and market adaptation.

The present review has some limitations. First, while this review primarily focuses on EIFs, its findings may not fully capture the factors affecting other firm types. Expanding future

research to explore learning mechanisms across diverse internationalization trajectories, such as firms with gradual expansion models or established multinational corporations, would provide deeper insights and broaden the applicability of the theoretical perspectives. Given that context remains a critical issue in internationalization research (Nummela *et al.*, 2014; Knight and Liesch, 2016; Welch *et al.*, 2022), an extension of this review could examine how applicable these theories are in different institutional environments, industries, and market conditions. By integrating contextual factors into the analysis, future studies can offer a more comprehensive understanding of how learning mechanisms evolve in different organizational and competitive settings, particularly in response to technological advancements and shifting global dynamics.

Moreover, while the research on learning during early and rapid internationalization draws on several theoretical perspectives, this review focused on a subset of them to ensure analytical depth and coherence. As a result, certain theoretical lenses may have been underrepresented or excluded, potentially narrowing the conceptual diversity captured in the synthesis. Future research could broaden the theoretical horizon by incorporating a wider range of perspectives, allowing for richer cross-theoretical integration and the identification of novel intersections between established and emerging frameworks.

Lastly, while this review provides valuable managerial implications, the absence of direct input from practitioners presents an opportunity for future research to enhance its real-world applicability. Actively engaging managers in discussions and integrating their insights could refine learning mechanisms and ensure closer alignment with industry challenges and decision-making processes.

#### **About the author**

Dr Emmanuel Kusi Appiah is a postdoctoral researcher at the School of Marketing and Communication, specializing in International Business at the University of Vaasa, Finland. His research interests span a variety of areas, including digitalization, international business, international entrepreneurship, the circular economy, and sustainable business model innovation.

Dr Emmanuel has presented his research at prestigious scientific conferences, such as the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS), the Academy of International Business, the McGill International Entrepreneurship Conference, and the European International Business Academy (EIBA). His scholarly contributions have been published in respected journals, including the *Journal of Business Research*, *International Business Review*, and *Industrial Marketing Management*.

Beyond academia, Dr Emmanuel has consulting experience in digital and social media marketing, showcasing his ability to bridge theory and practice. He has also contributed to the academic community by serving as a reviewer for *International Marketing Review*, *Journal of Business Research*, *International Business Review*, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change Journal*, several conference proceedings, and academic books.

His extensive expertise and active involvement in research and professional practice make Dr Emmanuel a notable contributor to the fields of international business and marketing.

#### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to acknowledge the Finnish Foundation for Economic Education (Liikesivistysrahasto) for its generous research grant support. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the Associate Editor of *International Marketing Review* and the three anonymous reviewers for their insightful and intellectually stimulating comments, which substantially strengthened the quality and clarity of this manuscript. Their guidance throughout the review process is deeply appreciated.

#### **Note**

1. See [Appendix 4](#).

#### **Supplementary material**

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

---

**References**

- Acedo, F.J., Coviello, N. and Agusti, M. (2021), "Caution ahead! The long-term effects of initial export intensity and geographic dispersion on international new venture development", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 56 No. 6, 101260, doi: [10.1016/j.jwb.2021.101260](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2021.101260).
- Appiah, E.K., Galkina, T. and Gabriellson, P. (2023), "Liminality and the developmental process of learning advantage of newness of early internationalizing firms", *International Business Review*, Vol. 32 No. 1, 102043.
- Appiah, E.K., Gabriellson, P. and Criado, A.R. (2025), "The role of digitalization in early internationalization research: a systematic literature review and future research directions", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 186, 115043, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115043](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115043).
- Argyris, C. and Schon, D. (1978), *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.
- Arte, P. (2017), "Role of experience and knowledge in early internationalisation of Indian new ventures: a comparative case study", *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, Vol. 23 No. 6, pp. 850-865, doi: [10.1108/ijeb-07-2017-0210](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijeb-07-2017-0210).
- Atewologun, D., Kutzer, R., Doldor, E., Anderson, D. and Sealy, R. (2017), "Individual-level foci of identification at work: a systematic review of the literature", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 19 No. 3, pp. 273-295, doi: [10.1111/ijmr.12148](https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12148).
- Autio, E. (2017), "Strategic entrepreneurial internationalization: a normative framework", *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 211-227.
- Autio, E., Sapienza, H.J. and Almeida, J.G. (2000), "Effects of age at entry, knowledge intensity, and imitability on international growth", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 43 No. 5, pp. 909-924, doi: [10.2307/1556419](https://doi.org/10.2307/1556419).
- Battisti, E., Alfiero, S., Quaglia, R. and Yahiaoui, D. (2022), "Financial performance and global start-ups: the impact of knowledge management practices", *Journal of International Management*, Vol. 28 No. 2, 101001.
- Behl, A., Kamboj, S., Sharma, N., Pereira, V., Salwan, P., Chavan, M. and Pathak, A.A. (2023), "Linking dynamic absorptive capacity and service innovation for born global service firms: an organizational innovation lens perspective", *Journal of International Management*, Vol. 29 No. 1, 101002.
- Borgatti, S.P. and Halgin, D.S. (2011), "On network theory", *Organization Science*, Vol. 22 No. 5, pp. 1168-1181, doi: [10.1287/orsc.1100.0641](https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1100.0641).
- Bruneel, H., Yli-Renko, H. and Clarysse, B. (2010), "Learning from experience and learning from others: how congenital and interorganizational learning substitute for experiential learning in young firm internationalization", *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, Vol. 4 No. 2, pp. 164-182, doi: [10.1002/sej.89](https://doi.org/10.1002/sej.89).
- Brunsson, K. (2021), "The use and usefulness of theory", *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, Vol. 37 No. 2, 101155, doi: [10.1016/j.scaman.2021.101155](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2021.101155).
- Buccieri, D. and Park, J. (2022), "Entrepreneurial marketing and reconfiguration towards post-entry performance: moderating effects of market dynamism and entry mode", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 146, pp. 359-373.
- Bunz, T., Casulli, L., Jones, M.V. and Bausch, A. (2017), "The dynamics of experiential learning: microprocesses and adaptation in a professional service international new venture", *International Business Review*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 225-238, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2016.07.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2016.07.001).
- Burpitt, W.J. and Rondinelli, D.A. (2000), "Small firms' motivations for exporting: to earn and learn?", *Journal of Small Business Management*, Vol. 38 No. 4, pp. 1-14.
- Cavusgil, S.T. and Knight, G. (2015), "The born-global firm: an entrepreneurial and capabilities perspective on early and rapid internationalization", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 46 No. 1, pp. 3-16.

- Chetty, S. and Campbell-Hunt, C. (2004), "A strategic approach to internationalization: a traditional versus a born-global approach", *Journal of International Marketing*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 57-81, doi: [10.1509/jimk.12.1.57.25651](https://doi.org/10.1509/jimk.12.1.57.25651).
- Chetty, S., Gabrielsson, P. and Gabrielsson, M. (2024), "Dynamic improvisation capabilities as a learning mechanism in early internationalizing firms", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 59 No. 1, 101404, doi: [10.1016/j.jwb.2024.101531](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2024.101531).
- Ciszewska-Mlinaric, M., Wójcik, P. and Oblój, K. (2020), "Learning dynamics of rapidly internationalizing ventures: beyond the early stage of international growth in a CEE context", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 108, pp. 417-430.
- Coviello, N.E. (2006), "The network dynamics of international new ventures", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 37 No. 5, pp. 713-731, doi: [10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400219](https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400219).
- Coviello, N.E. and McAuley, A. (1999), "Internationalisation and the smaller firm: a review of contemporary empirical research", *Management International Review*, Vol. 39 No. 3, pp. 223-256.
- Criaco, G. and Naldi, L. (2024), "A chip off the old block: founders' prior experience and the geographic diversification of export sales in international new ventures", *Journal of Business Venturing*, Vol. 39 No. 1, 106184, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusvent.2023.106343](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2023.106343).
- Cyert, R.M. and March, J.G. (1963), *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Dam, N.A.K., Dinh, T.L. and Menvielle, W. (2019), "A systematic literature review of big data adoption in internationalization", *Journal of Marketing Analytics*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 182-195, doi: [10.1057/s41270-019-00054-7](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41270-019-00054-7).
- De Clercq, D., Sapienza, H.J., Yavuz, R.I. and Zhou, L. (2012), "Learning and knowledge in early internationalization research: past accomplishments and future directions", *Journal of Business Venturing*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 143-165, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusvent.2011.09.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2011.09.003).
- De Cock, R., Andries, P. and Clarysse, B. (2021), "How founder characteristics imprint ventures' internationalization processes: the role of international experience and cognitive beliefs", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 56 No. 5, 101189, doi: [10.1016/j.jwb.2020.101163](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2020.101163).
- Dimitratos, P., Johnson, J.E., Plakoyiannaki, E. and Young, S. (2016), "SME internationalization: how does the opportunity-based international entrepreneurial culture matter?", *International Business Review*, Vol. 25 No. 6, pp. 1211-1222, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2016.03.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2016.03.006).
- Edmondson, A.C. and McManus, S.E. (2007), "Methodological fit in management field research", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 1155-1179, doi: [10.5465/amr.2007.26586086](https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2007.26586086).
- Eisenhardt, K.M. and Martin, J.A. (2000), "Dynamic capabilities: what are they?", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 21 Nos 10-11, pp. 1105-1121, doi: [10.1002/1097-0266\(200010/11\)21:10<1105::aid-smj133>3.0.co;2-e](https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-0266(200010/11)21:10<1105::aid-smj133>3.0.co;2-e).
- Evers, N. and Andersson, S. (2021), "Predictive and effectual decision-making in high-tech international new ventures – a matter of sequential ambidexterity", *International Business Review*, Vol. 30 No. 3, 101793, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2019.101655](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2019.101655).
- Evers, N. and O'Gorman, C. (2011), "Improvised internationalization in new ventures: the role of prior knowledge and networks", *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, Vol. 23 Nos 7-8, pp. 549-574.
- Evers, N., Andersson, S. and Hannibal, M. (2012), "Stakeholders and marketing capabilities in international new ventures: evidence from Ireland, Sweden, and Denmark", *Journal of International Marketing*, Vol. 20 No. 4, pp. 46-71, doi: [10.1509/jim.12.0077](https://doi.org/10.1509/jim.12.0077).
- Falahat, M., Soto-Acosta, P. and Ramayah, T. (2022), "Analysing the importance of international knowledge, orientation, networking, and commitment as entrepreneurial culture and market orientation in gaining competitive advantage and international performance", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 39 No. 5, pp. 1060-1079.

- Freeman, S., Hutchings, K., Lazaris, M. and Zyngier, S. (2010), "A model of rapid knowledge development: the smaller born-global firm", *International Business Review*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 70-84, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2009.09.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2009.09.004).
- Freixanet, J. and Renart, G. (2020), "A capabilities perspective on the joint effects of internationalization time, speed, geographic scope, and managers' competencies on SME survival", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 55 No. 2, 101073, doi: [10.1016/j.jwb.2020.101110](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2020.101110).
- Gabrielsson, M. and Gabrielsson, P. (2013), "A dynamic model of growth phases and survival in international business-to-business new ventures: the moderating effect of decision-making logic", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 42 No. 8, pp. 1357-1373, doi: [10.1016/j.indmarman.2013.07.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2013.07.011).
- Gabrielsson, P., Raatikainen, M. and Julkunen, S. (2022), "Accelerated internationalization among inexperienced digital entrepreneurs: toward a holistic entrepreneurial decision-making model", *Management International Review*, Vol. 62 No. 2, pp. 157-193, doi: [10.1007/s11575-022-00469-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-022-00469-y).
- Gassmann, O. and Keupp, M.M. (2007), "The competitive advantage of early and rapidly internationalising SMEs in the biotechnology industry: a knowledge-based view", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 350-366, doi: [10.1016/j.jwb.2007.04.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2007.04.006).
- Greenhalgh, T. and Peacock, R. (2005), "Effectiveness and efficiency of search methods in systematic reviews of complex evidence: audit of primary sources", *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 331 No. 7524, pp. 1064-1065, doi: [10.1136/bmj.38636.593461.68](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.38636.593461.68).
- Gulanowski, D., Papadopoulos, N. and Plante, L. (2018), "The role of knowledge in international expansion: toward an integration of competing models of internationalization", *Review of International Business and Strategy*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 35-60, doi: [10.1108/ribs-09-2017-0077](https://doi.org/10.1108/ribs-09-2017-0077).
- Hennart, J.F., Majocchi, A. and Hagen, B. (2021), "What's so special about born globals, their entrepreneurs, or their business model?", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 52 No. 9, pp. 1671-1692, doi: [10.1057/s41267-021-00427-0](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-021-00427-0).
- Hilmersson, M., Johanson, M., Lundberg, H. and Papaioannou, S. (2017), "Time, temporality, and internationalization: the relationship among point in time of, time to, and speed of international expansion", *Journal of International Marketing*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 22-45, doi: [10.1509/jim.16.0013](https://doi.org/10.1509/jim.16.0013).
- Hilmersson, M., Schweizer, R. and Chetty, S. (2022), "The relationship between timing, speed, and performance in foreign market network entry", *Management International Review*, Vol. 62 No. 3, pp. 325-349, doi: [10.1007/s11575-022-00470-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-022-00470-5).
- Huber, G.P. (1991), "Organizational learning: the contributing processes and the literature", *Organization Science*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 88-115, doi: [10.1287/orsc.2.1.88](https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2.1.88).
- Hughes, M., Cesinger, B., Cheng, C.F., Schuessler, F. and Kraus, S. (2019), "A configurational analysis of network and knowledge variables explaining born globals' and late internationalizing SMEs' international performance", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 82, pp. 102-115.
- Jantunen, A., Nummela, N., Puumalainen, K. and Saarenketo, S. (2008), "Strategic orientations of born globals: do they really matter?", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 43 No. 2, pp. 158-170.
- Jean, R.J., Kim, D. and Cavusgil, E. (2020), "Antecedents and outcomes of digital platform risk for international new ventures' internationalization", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 55 No. 3, 101052, doi: [10.1016/j.jwb.2019.101021](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2019.101021).
- Johanson, J. and Vahlne, J.-E. (1977), "The internationalization process of the firm—a model of knowledge development and increasing foreign market commitments", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 8 No. 1, pp. 23-32, doi: [10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490676](https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490676).
- Johanson, J. and Vahlne, J.-E. (2009), "The Uppsala internationalization process model revisited: from liability of foreignness to liability of outsidership", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 40 No. 9, pp. 1411-1431, doi: [10.1057/jibs.2009.24](https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2009.24).
- Kang, Y.F., Zhao, C. and Battisti, M. (2022), "Organizational learning in SMEs' internationalization: a moderated mediating effect of absorptive capacity", *Long Range Planning*, Vol. 55 No. 6, 102202, doi: [10.1016/j.lrp.2022.102220](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2022.102220).

- Khan, Z. and Lew, Y.K. (2018), "Post-entry survival of developing economy international new ventures: a dynamic capability perspective", *International Business Review*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 149-160, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2017.06.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2017.06.001).
- Knight, G. and Cavusgil, S.T. (1996), "The born global firm: a challenge to traditional internationalization theory", in Cavusgil, S.T. and Madsen, T. (Eds), *Advances in International Marketing*, JAI Press, Greenwich, CT, Vol. 8, pp. 11-26.
- Knight, G.A. and Cavusgil, S.T. (2004), "Innovation, organizational capabilities, and the born-global firm", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 124-141, doi: [10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400071](https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400071).
- Knight, G.A. and Liesch, P.W. (2016), "Internationalization: from incremental to born global", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 51 No. 1, pp. 93-102, doi: [10.1016/j.jwb.2015.08.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2015.08.011).
- Kumar, N. and Sharma, D.D. (2018), "The role of organisational culture in the internationalisation of new ventures", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 35 No. 6, pp. 971-993, doi: [10.1108/imr-09-2014-0299](https://doi.org/10.1108/imr-09-2014-0299).
- Levinthal, D.A. and March, J.G. (1993), "The myopia of learning", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 14 No. S2, pp. 95-112, doi: [10.1002/smj.4250141009](https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.4250141009).
- Levitt, B. and March, J.G. (1988), "Organizational learning", *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 319-338, doi: [10.1146/annurev.so.14.080188.001535](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.14.080188.001535).
- Li, Q. and Deng, P. (2017), "From international new ventures to MNCs: crossing the chasm effect on internationalization paths", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 70, pp. 92-100.
- Liu, Y., Zheng, Y., Wei, J. and Yang, Y. (2023), "The use of inside-out and outside-in big data analytics on e-platforms: performance impacts and heterogeneity analysis", *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, Vol. 27 No. 1, pp. 36-65, doi: [10.1080/10864415.2022.2158595](https://doi.org/10.1080/10864415.2022.2158595).
- Loane, S. and Bell, J. (2006), "Rapid internationalisation among entrepreneurial firms in Australia, Canada, Ireland, and New Zealand – an extension to the network approach", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 23 No. 5, pp. 467-485, doi: [10.1108/02651330610703409](https://doi.org/10.1108/02651330610703409).
- March, J.G. (1991), "Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning", *Organization Science*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 71-87, doi: [10.1287/orsc.2.1.71](https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2.1.71).
- Marquis, C. and Tilcsik, A. (2013), "Imprinting: toward a multilevel theory", *The Academy of Management Annals*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 195-245, doi: [10.5465/19416520.2013.766076](https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2013.766076).
- Masango, S.G. and Lassalle, P. (2020), "What entrepreneurs do? Entrepreneurial action guided by entrepreneurial opportunities and entrepreneurial learning in early internationalising firms", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 37 No. 6, pp. 1083-1119, doi: [10.1108/imr-10-2018-0273](https://doi.org/10.1108/imr-10-2018-0273).
- McDougall, P.P., Shane, S. and Oviatt, B.M. (1994), "Explaining the formation of international new ventures: the limits of theories from international business research", *Journal of Business Venturing*, Vol. 9 No. 6, pp. 469-487.
- McInnes, M.D., Moher, D., Thoms, B.D., McGrath, T.A., Bossuyt, P.M., Clifford, T., Cohen, J.F., Deeks, J.J., Gatsonis, C., Hooft, L., Hunt, H.A., Hyde, C.J., Korevaar, D.A., Leeflang, M.M.G., Macaskill, P., Reitsma, J.B., Rodin, R., Rutjes, A.W.S., Salameh, J.P., Stevens, A., Takwoingi, Y., Tonelli, M., Weeks, L., Whiting, P. and Willis, B.H. (2018), "Preferred reporting items for a systematic review and meta-analysis of diagnostic test accuracy studies: the PRISMA-DTA statement", *JAMA*, Vol. 319 No. 4, pp. 388-396, doi: [10.1001/jama.2017.19163](https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2017.19163).
- Miller, C.C., Burke, L.M. and Glick, W.H. (1998), "Cognitive diversity among upper-echelon executives: implications for strategic decision processes", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 39-58, doi: [10.1002/\(sici\)1097-0266\(199801\)19:1<39::aid-smj932>3.0.co;2-a](https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1097-0266(199801)19:1<39::aid-smj932>3.0.co;2-a).
- Mitchell, R.K., Busenitz, L., Bird, B., Gaglio, C., McMullen, J.S., Morse, E.A. and Smith, J.B. (2007), "The central question in entrepreneurial cognition research 2007", *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 1-27, doi: [10.1111/j.1540-6520.2007.00161.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2007.00161.x).
- Monferrer, D., Moliner, M.A., Irún, B. and Estrada, M. (2021), "Network market and entrepreneurial orientations as facilitators of international performance in born globals: the mediating role of ambidextrous dynamic capabilities", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 130, pp. 130-142.

- Mostafiz, M.I., Ahmed, F.U., Ibrahim, F. and Tarba, S.Y. (2024), "Innovation and commercialisation: the role of international dynamic marketing capability in Malaysian international entrepreneurial firms", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 41 No. 1, pp. 199-236, doi: [10.1108/imr-10-2022-0241](https://doi.org/10.1108/imr-10-2022-0241).
- Nemkova, E. (2017), "The impact of agility on the market performance of born-global firms: an exploratory study of the 'tech city' innovation cluster", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 80, pp. 257-265, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.04.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.04.017).
- Nummela, N., Saarenketo, S., Jokela, P. and Loane, S. (2014), "Strategic decision-making of a born global: a comparative study from three small open economies", *Management International Review*, Vol. 54 No. 4, pp. 527-550, doi: [10.1007/s11575-014-0211-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-014-0211-x).
- Oviatt, B.M. and McDougall, P.P. (1994), "Toward a theory of international new ventures", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 45-64, doi: [10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490193](https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490193).
- Page, M.J. and Moher, D. (2017), "Evaluations of the uptake and impact of the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) statement and extensions: a scoping review", *Systematic Reviews*, Vol. 6, pp. 1-14, doi: [10.1186/s13643-017-0663-8](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-017-0663-8).
- Paul, J. and Rialp-Criado, A. (2020), "The art of writing literature review: what do we know and what do we need to know?", *International Business Review*, Vol. 29 No. 4, 101717, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2020.101717](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2020.101717).
- Paul, J. and Rosado-Serrano, A. (2019), "Gradual internationalization vs born-global/international new venture models: a review and research agenda", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 36 No. 6, pp. 830-858, doi: [10.1108/imr-10-2018-0280](https://doi.org/10.1108/imr-10-2018-0280).
- Paul, J., Merchant, A., Dwivedi, Y.K. and Rose, G. (2021), "Writing an impactful review article: what do we know and what do we need to know?", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 133, pp. 337-340, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.05.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.05.005).
- Pellegrino, J.M. and McNaughton, R.B. (2015), "The co-evolution of learning and internationalization strategy in international new ventures", *Management International Review*, Vol. 55 No. 5, pp. 671-704, doi: [10.1007/s11575-015-0246-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-015-0246-7).
- Pellegrino, J.M. and McNaughton, R.B. (2017), "Beyond learning by experience: the use of alternative learning processes by incrementally and rapidly internationalizing SMEs", *International Business Review*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 614-627, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2016.12.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2016.12.003).
- Pidduck, R.J., Shaffer, M.A., Zhang, Y. and Clark, D.R. (2022), "Unpacking the emergence of born global founders: a careers perspective", *Journal of Small Business Management*, Vol. 60 No. 6, pp. 1247-1287, doi: [10.1080/00472778.2020.1816432](https://doi.org/10.1080/00472778.2020.1816432).
- Prashantham, S. and Birkinshaw, J. (2015), "Choose your friends carefully: home-country ties and new venture internationalization", *Management International Review*, Vol. 55 No. 2, pp. 207-234, doi: [10.1007/s11575-015-0244-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-015-0244-9).
- Prashantham, S. and Floyd, S.W. (2019), "Navigating liminality in new venture internationalization", *Journal of Business Venturing*, Vol. 34 No. 5, pp. 105916-527, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusvent.2019.01.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2019.01.001).
- Presutti, M., Boari, C. and Fratocchi, L. (2007), "Knowledge acquisition and the foreign development of high-tech start-ups: a social capital approach", *International Business Review*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 23-46, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2006.12.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2006.12.004).
- Rennie, M.W. (1993), "Born global", *The McKinsey Quarterly*, No. 4, pp. 45-53.
- Ripollés, M. and Blesa, A. (2020), "And yet, non-equity cooperative entries do improve international performance: uncovering the role of networks' social capital", *Small Business Economics*, Vol. 55 No. 2, pp. 383-398, doi: [10.1007/s11187-019-00186-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-019-00186-1).
- Romanello, R. and Chiarvesio, M. (2024), "The evolution of early internationalization: a systematic literature review", in *Early Internationalizing Firms. International Series in Advanced Management Studies*, Springer, Cham, doi: [10.1007/978-3-031-80128-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-80128-0_2).

- Rumyantseva, M. and Welch, C. (2023), "The born global and international new venture revisited: an alternative explanation for early and rapid internationalization", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 54 No. 7, pp. 1193-1221, doi: [10.1057/s41267-023-00613-2](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-023-00613-2).
- Ryan, P., Evers, N., Smith, A. and Andersson, S. (2019), "Local horizontal network membership for accelerated global market reach", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 36 No. 5, pp. 662-682.
- Sarasvathy, S.D. (2001), "Causation and effectuation: toward a theoretical shift from economic inevitability to entrepreneurial contingency", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 243-263, doi: [10.2307/259121](https://doi.org/10.2307/259121).
- Schwens, C. and Kabst, R. (2009), "How early opposed to late internationalizers learn: experience of others and paradigms of interpretation", *International Business Review*, Vol. 18 No. 5, pp. 509-522, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2009.06.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2009.06.001).
- Shaffril, H.A.M., Krauss, S.E. and Samsuddin, S.F. (2018), "A systematic review on Asian's farmers' adaptation practices towards climate change", *Science of the Total Environment*, Vol. 644, pp. 683-695, doi: [10.1016/j.scitotenv.2018.06.349](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2018.06.349).
- Shane, S. and Venkataraman, S. (2000), "The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 217-226, doi: [10.5465/amr.2000.2791611](https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2000.2791611).
- Siachou, E., Papisolomou, I., Trichina, E. and Thrassou, A. (2022), "Market knowledge acquisition and transfer in international SMEs: peculiarities, specifications and linkages to market success", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 39 No. 3, pp. 529-567, doi: [10.1108/imr-02-2021-0095](https://doi.org/10.1108/imr-02-2021-0095).
- Sinkovics, N., Sinkovics, R.R. and Jean, R.J. (2013), "The internet as an alternative path to internationalization?", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 130-155, doi: [10.1108/02651331311314556](https://doi.org/10.1108/02651331311314556).
- Teece, D.J. (2007), "Explicating dynamic capabilities: the nature and microfoundations of (sustainable) enterprise performance", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 28 No. 13, pp. 1319-1350, doi: [10.1002/smj.640](https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.640).
- Teece, D.J., Pisano, G. and Shuen, A. (1997), "Dynamic capabilities and strategic management", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 18 No. 7, pp. 509-533, doi: [10.1002/\(sici\)1097-0266\(199708\)18:7<509::aid-smj882>3.0.co;2-z](https://doi.org/10.1002/(sici)1097-0266(199708)18:7<509::aid-smj882>3.0.co;2-z).
- Tiwari, S.K. and Korneliusson, T. (2022), "Entrepreneurial internationalisation of Nepalese artisanal firms: a dynamic capabilities perspective", *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, Vol. 28 No. 4, pp. 972-995, doi: [10.1108/ijeb-09-2020-0635](https://doi.org/10.1108/ijeb-09-2020-0635).
- Tran, Y., Yonatan, M. and Mahnke, V. (2016), "Crowdsourced translation for rapid internationalization in cyberspace: a learning perspective", *International Business Review*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 679-688, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2015.08.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2015.08.001).
- Tuomisaalo, T. and Leppäaho, T. (2019), "Learning in international new ventures: a systematic review", *International Business Review*, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 463-481, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2018.11.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2018.11.005).
- Tuppura, A., Saarenketo, S., Puumalainen, K., Jantunen, A. and Kyläheiko, K. (2008), "Linking knowledge, entry timing, and internationalization strategy", *International Business Review*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 473-487, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2008.02.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2008.02.003).
- Vahlne, J.-E. and Bhatti, W.A. (2018), "Relationship development: a micro-foundation for the internationalization process of the multinational business enterprise", *Management International Review*, Vol. 59 No. 2, pp. 203-228, doi: [10.1007/s11575-018-0373-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-018-0373-z).
- Van Geenhuizen, M. (2008), "Knowledge networks of young innovators in the urban economy: biotechnology as a case study", *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp. 161-183, doi: [10.1080/08985620701748318](https://doi.org/10.1080/08985620701748318).
- Vuorio, A. and Torkkeli, L. (2023), "Dynamic managerial capability portfolios in early internationalizing firms", *International Business Review*, Vol. 32 No. 2, 102050.
- Walter, A., Coviello, N., Sienknecht, M. and Ritter, T. (2024), "Leveraging the lab: how pre-founding R&D collaboration influences the internationalization timing of academic spin-offs", *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, Vol. 48 No. 1, pp. 71-103.

- Weerawardena, J., Mort, G.S., Liesch, P.W. and Knight, G. (2007), "Conceptualizing accelerated internationalization in the born global firm: a dynamic capabilities perspective", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 294-306, doi: [10.1016/j.jwb.2007.04.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2007.04.004).
- Weerawardena, J., Mort, G.S., Salunke, S., Knight, G. and Liesch, P.W. (2015), "The role of the market sub-system and the socio-technical sub-system in innovation and firm performance: a dynamic capabilities approach", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 43 No. 2, pp. 221-239, doi: [10.1007/s11747-014-0382-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-014-0382-9).
- Weerawardena, J., Mort, G.S. and Liesch, P.W. (2019), "Capabilities development and deployment activities in born global B-to-B firms for early entry into international markets", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 78, pp. 122-136, doi: [10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.06.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.06.004).
- Weerawardena, J., Salunke, S., Knight, G., Mort, G.S. and Liesch, P.W. (2020), "The learning subsystem interplay in service innovation in born global service firm internationalization", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 89, pp. 443-455, doi: [10.1016/j.indmarman.2019.05.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2019.05.012).
- Welch, C. and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, E. (2013), "Putting process (back) in: research on the internationalization process of the firm", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 2-23, doi: [10.1111/ijmr.12006](https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12006).
- Welch, C., Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, E., Piekkari, R. and Plakoyiannaki, E. (2022), "Reconciling theory and context: how the case study can set a new agenda for international business research", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 53 No. 1, pp. 4-26, doi: [10.1057/s41267-021-00484-5](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-021-00484-5).
- Xiang, Q., Lin, D.M. and Wang, J.J. (2023), "The formation, consolidation, and transition of international brokerage networks: the case of an international new venture in an emerging market", *Journal of International Management*, Vol. 29 No. 1, 101010, doi: [10.1016/j.intman.2022.100995](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2022.100995).
- Yang, M. and Gabrielsson, P. (2017), "Entrepreneurial marketing of international high-tech business-to-business new ventures: a decision-making process perspective", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 64, pp. 147-159, doi: [10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.01.007](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2017.01.007).
- Yang, M., Gabrielsson, P. and Andersson, S. (2023), "Entrepreneurs' social ties and international digital entrepreneurial marketing in small and medium-sized enterprise internationalization", *Journal of International Marketing*, Vol. 31 No. 2, pp. 107-128, doi: [10.1177/1069031x231178220](https://doi.org/10.1177/1069031x231178220).
- Yeoh, P.L. (2004), "International learning: antecedents and performance implications among newly internationalizing companies in an exporting context", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 21 Nos 4/5, pp. 511-535.
- Zahra, S.A. (2005), "A theory of international new ventures: a decade of research", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 20-28, doi: [10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400118](https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400118).
- Zhou, L.X., Wu, A.Q. and Barnes, B.R. (2012), "The effects of early internationalization on performance outcomes in young international ventures: the mediating role of marketing capabilities", *Journal of International Marketing*, Vol. 20 No. 4, pp. 25-45, doi: [10.1509/jim.12.0076](https://doi.org/10.1509/jim.12.0076).
- Zou, H.A. and Ghauri, P.N. (2010), "Internationalizing by learning: the case of Chinese high-tech new ventures", *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 223-244, doi: [10.1108/02651331011037539](https://doi.org/10.1108/02651331011037539).
- Zucchella, A. (2021), "International entrepreneurship and the internationalization phenomenon: taking stock, looking ahead", *International Business Review*, Vol. 30 No. 2, 101800, doi: [10.1016/j.ibusrev.2021.101800](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2021.101800).

### Further reading

- Fernhaber, S.A., McDougall-Covin, P.P. and Shepherd, D.A. (2009), "International entrepreneurship: leveraging internal and external knowledge sources", *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, Vol. 3 No. 4, pp. 297-320, doi: [10.1002/sej.76](https://doi.org/10.1002/sej.76).

Jones, M.V., Coviello, N. and Tang, Y.K. (2011), "International entrepreneurship research (1989-2009): a domain ontology and thematic analysis", *Journal of Business Venturing*, Vol. 26 No. 6, pp. 632-659, doi: [10.1016/j.jbusvent.2011.04.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2011.04.001).

Reuber, A.R., Knight, G.A., Liesch, P.W. and Zhou, L. (2018), "International entrepreneurship: the pursuit of entrepreneurial opportunities across national borders", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 49 No. 4, pp. 395-406, doi: [10.1057/s41267-018-0149-5](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-018-0149-5).

**Corresponding author**

Emmanuel Kusi Appiah can be contacted at: [appiah.kusi@uwasa.fi](mailto:appiah.kusi@uwasa.fi)