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Internationalization through social networks: A systematic review and future research agenda

Xiaomin Han^a, François Goxe^a, Susan Freeman^{b,*}

^a Université Paris-Saclay, UVSQ, Larequoi, 78000 Versailles, France

^b Business School, University of South Australia, City West Campus, North Terrace, Adelaide, 5001 South Australia, Australia

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a systematic review of 210 papers on social networks and firm internationalization published between 2010 and 2022. It presents a comprehensive analysis of how social networks influence firm internationalization, following the concept of “insidership”. We classify social networks into individual, organizational, and national levels, and link these network levels and their characteristics with internationalization behavior, degree, and performance. We find that social networks promote internationalization through resources, trust, knowledge, and capabilities but can also have negative effects. In addition, we integrate boundary conditions from individual, firm, and environmental levels. In particular, we show that few theories focus on the impact of decision makers’ psychological and cognitive mechanisms on firms’ internationalization through social networks. Additionally, limited studies pursue dynamic and comparative research designs, with few adopting quasi-experimental and longitudinal qualitative methods. Therefore, we call for more creativity in exploring managerial roles and strategic decisions in internationalization through extended social network syntheses and reflective methodologies.

1. Introduction

In recent years, research on social networks and internationalization has been extended from the organizational (e.g., [Eduardsen et al., 2022](#)) to the individual (e.g., [Pruthi & Tasavori, 2022](#)) and the national (e.g., [Wang et al., 2021](#)) levels of networks. Scholars have recognized the remarkable impacts of social networks on internationalization behavior (e.g., market choice, [Useche et al., 2020](#); entry mode, [Zhao et al., 2021](#)), internationalization degree (e.g., intensity, [Tian et al., 2021](#); speed, [Hennart et al., 2021](#)), and performance (e.g., financial performance, [Morgan et al., 2021](#)). Social networks affect firms’ internationalization by giving them access to resources ([Lindstrand & Hånell, 2017](#)), building trust ([Kwok et al., 2019](#)), enhancing knowledge ([Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021](#)), and developing capabilities ([Moschieri et al., 2022](#)). Recent studies of social networks and internationalization extend to new, emerging contexts (e.g., digital platforms, [Balachandran & Hernandez, 2021](#); sovereign wealth funds, [Wang et al., 2021](#), [Zeng et al., 2019](#)) and to some of the dark effects of such networks. For example, domestic interfirm networks increase the opportunity cost for foreign divestment decisions ([Iurkov & Benit, 2020](#)), while relying on local partners reduces firms’ alertness and responsiveness to political hostility, which is

characterized as the “liability of insidership” ([Moschieri et al., 2022](#); based on [Johanson & Vahlne, 2009](#)).

Notwithstanding the considerable progress made in studying the role of social networks in internationalization, several important limitations remain. Firstly, levels of analysis on the impacts of social networks on firm internationalization show considerable diversity—from the individual to the national level, but some levels remain understudied. In particular, studies at the individual level remain scarce and neglect the role of psychological and cognitive mechanisms. For example, using interviews, [Pruthi and Tasavori \(2022\)](#) studied second-generation immigrant entrepreneurs, while [Goxe et al. \(2022\)](#) explored the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful international entrepreneurs, but with little or no analysis of individual decision-making mechanisms. Secondly, studies have explored the impacts of social networks on firms’ entry (e.g., [Williams et al., 2020](#)), post-entry (e.g., [Tian, 2022](#); [Morgan et al., 2021](#)), and exit (e.g., [Vissak et al., 2020](#); [Mohr et al., 2016](#)) to a foreign market. Although some studies adopted dynamic perspectives to investigate the evolution ([Bathelt & Li, 2020](#); [Vasilchenko & Morrish, 2011](#); [Prashantham & Dhanaraj, 2010](#)) and dynamic roles of social networks ([Tian et al., 2018](#)), they focus on the initial stage of internationalization. Consequently, further work would benefit from

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: susan.freeman@unisa.edu.au (S. Freeman).

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comparisons of the role of networks throughout the different phases of firms' internationalization process (Zahoor et al., 2020). Thirdly, most studies adopt quantitative snap-shot methods but rarely quasi-experiments and fieldwork (Donbesuur et al., 2022), suggesting that the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods might overcome current research limitations. Finally, some new issues which should be considered are emerging from the growth of populism, nationalism, and political hostility (Tian, 2022; Moschieri et al., 2022; Cannizzaro, 2020), sustainable development and climate change, digital technologies (Brouthers et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2019), and changing power relationships (Nippa & Reuer, 2019; Lunnan & McGaughey, 2019).

To identify the themes and gaps and articulate potential areas for a future research agenda, we review, critique, and synthesize the relevant literature, offering new pathways for research on the role of social networks in internationalization. We focus primarily on research published in the last thirteen years (2010–2022), after the publication of the seminal Network Uppsala Model article (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009) that proposed the concepts of 'insidership' and 'liability of outsidership' in international business (IB) (Vahlne & Johanson, 2020). By doing so, we aim to provide a synthesis of ongoing themes and the most recent directions for research at different levels of analysis. We map out an overarching framework of social networks in internationalization that specifies the key antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes,

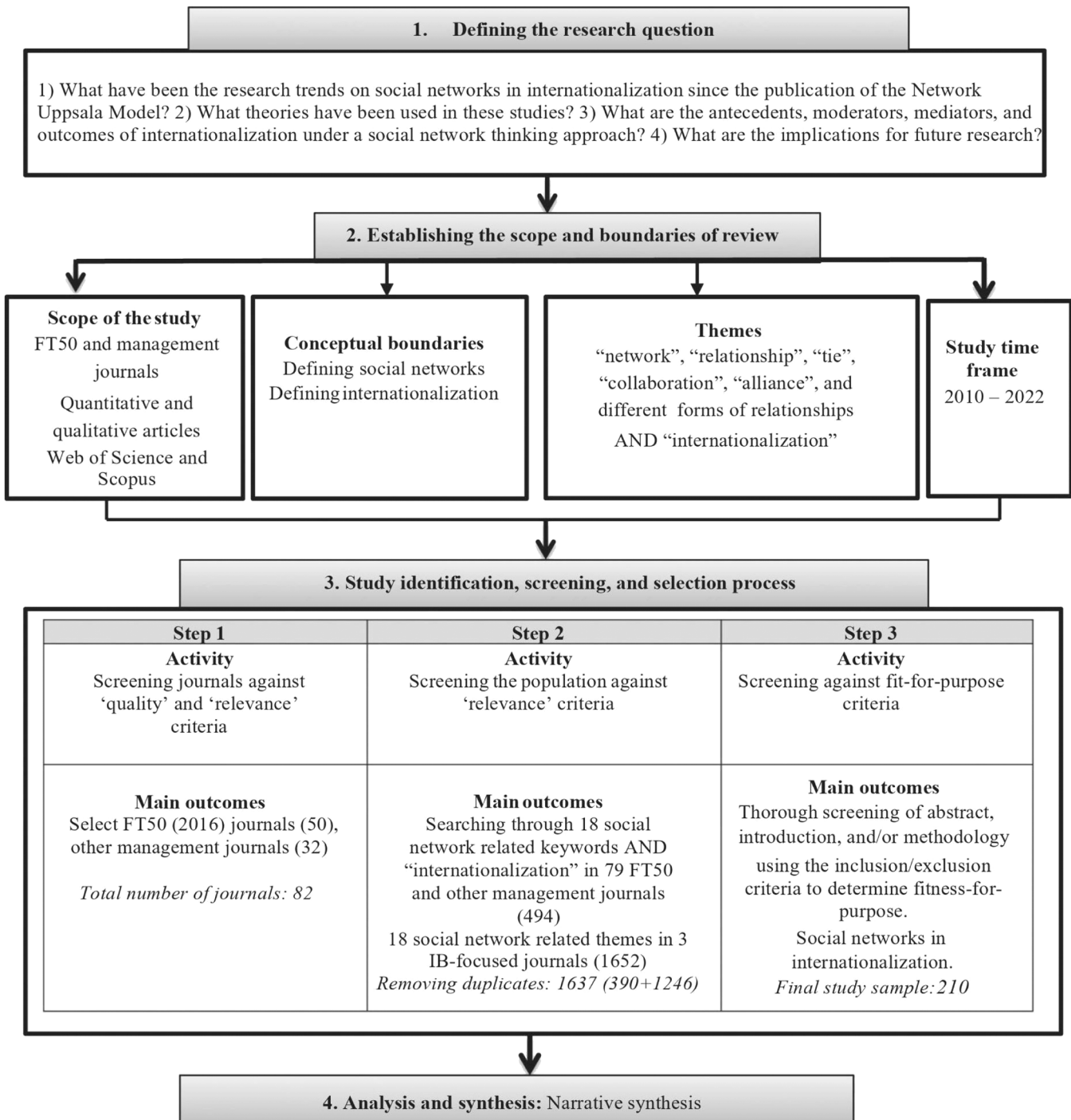


Fig. 1. Summary of the systematic review methodology.

explaining the connections among them. We then outline our methodology, followed by a critique and synthesis of major trends, theories, and viewpoints on social networks and internationalization. Finally, we provide detailed findings together with a future research agenda.

2. Methodology

We adopted a four-step iterative process to ensure objectivity and robustness (see Fig. 1; Zahoor et al., 2020; originally, Denyer & Tranfield, 2009). These four steps involve defining the review question, establishing the research boundaries, selecting the sample, and synthesizing the studies.

2.1. Defining the review question

Social networks have been a major focus for IB scholars, at least since the publication of the influential Network Uppsala Model (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009). This model was proposed at a time “when international markets were in upheaval in the midst of the global financial crisis in 2008–2009” (Hult et al., 2020, p. 47). The model combined nuanced revisions and logical changes based on the needs at the time (Hult et al., 2020). The model has been applied to the study of various issues, including institutional shortcomings (Eduardsen et al., 2022), complexity (Vahlne & Johanson, 2021), and the multinationality of family firms (Cesinger et al., 2016). It has been further developed by recognizing the psychological characteristics of managers (Vahlne & Johanson, 2020), mutual trust and internationalization speed (Oliveira & Johanson, 2021), compatibility between business network theory and entrepreneurship (Forsgren, 2016), and generalization to rapid internationalization (Chen et al., 2021) and born digital firms (Monaghan et al., 2020).

Although there have been systematic literature reviews (SLRs) discussing the roles of social networks in SMEs’ internationalization, there are few SLRs of social networks in internationalization for all types of firms at different social network levels (Appendix A). In 1954, Barnes used the concept of ‘the social network’ to analyze the ties that cut across kinship groups and social classes in a Norwegian fishing village. In 1957, Bott (1957) explained the mutual relationships and influences between family members and other members of society based on social network theory. “These analysts defined a network as a set of ties linking social system members across social categories and bounded groups” (Wellman, 1988, p. 21). The impact of the social network perspective in the academic community rapidly expanded in the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1985, Granovetter (1985) further elaborated on Polanyi’s concept of ‘embeddedness’ (1944). He believed that economic behavior is embedded in social structure, and the core of social structure is the social networks in people’s lives, with trust being the mechanism embedded in the network. Therefore, people’s economic behavior is embedded in the trust structure of social networks. Conventional organizational management theories lack the link between individual behavior and its transformation into organizational behavior. However, the embeddedness perspective based on social networks can fill this gap. Thus, organizations can be viewed as social networks composed of individuals. “The social network approach views organizations in society as a system of objects [entities] (e.g., people, groups, organizations) joined by a variety of relationships” (Tasselli et al., 2015, p. 1364; originally, Tichy et al., 1979, p. 507).

In the structural embeddedness approach, Uzzi (1996, p. 675) “combined organization theory with social network theory” and argued that the structure and quality of social ties among firms shape economic action by creating unique opportunities and access to those opportunities. Burt (1992, p. 5) pointed out that: “people and organizations are not the source of action so much as they are the vehicles for structurally induced action”. Indeed, organizational network research “has been characterized as part of a general movement away from individualist, essentialist and atomistic explanations toward more relational,

contextual and systemic understandings” (Tasselli et al., 2015, p. 1364; originally, Borgatti & Foster, 2003, p. 991). The concept of social networks has now surpassed the scope of interpersonal relationships. As analyzed by Wellman (1988, p. 43): “the nodes in a network do not have to be individual persons. They can be sets of nodes, groups, nation-states, or other discriminable units (Friedmann, Chapter 11; White, Chapter 9)”.

Johanson and Mattsson (1987) introduced network approaches into internationalization theory. Johanson and Vahlne (2009) proposed the concept ‘liability of outsidership’ capturing the uncertainty and difficulties associated with being an outsider in relation to a certain network. Their Network Uppsala Model, awarded the *Journal of International Business Studies* 2019 Decade Award, has had a significant impact on the topic of social networks in IB. Therefore, in this SLR, we seek to identify, critique, and analyze relevant strands of the extant literature, aiming to build an overarching framework of relationships between social networks at all levels and internationalization for all firms, and to identify the fundamental components, potential challenges, and remaining gaps. To this end, our investigation addresses four key questions: (1) What have been the research trends on social networks in internationalization since the publication of the Network Uppsala Model? (2) What theories have been used in these studies? (3) What are the antecedents, moderators, mediators, and outcomes of internationalization under a social network thinking approach in these studies? (4) What are the implications for future research?

2.2. Establishing the scope and boundaries of the review

We first referred to the *Financial Times* (2016) ranking (FT50) and the Journal Quality List (Harzing, 2022) to select journals. FT50 provides the top 50 business school journals rated by the *Financial Times*. The Journal Quality List (JQL) (Harzing, 2022) combines the most up-to-date rankings including FT 2016, ABDC 2019, CNRS 2020, ABS 2021, and Scopus 2021. To search for articles, we used Web of Science and Scopus, two internationally recognized databases including all journals listed in FT50 and JQL.

We then defined the key conceptual boundaries of the two key terms — ‘network’ and ‘internationalization’. The meaning of the term ‘network’ is specific to the context. When discussing network analysis in the social sciences, Borgatti et al. (2009, p. 894) pointed out that “in the physical sciences, a key research goal has been formulating universal characteristics of nonrandom networks, such as the property of having a scale-free degree distribution”. “In the social sciences, however, researchers have tended to emphasize variation in structure across different groups or contexts, using these variations to explain differences in outcomes” (Borgatti et al., 2009, p. 894). When discussing theoretical mechanisms, they also suggest that “perhaps the most common mechanism for explaining consequences of social network variables is some form of direct transmission from node to node”. “Whether this is a physical transfer, as in the case of material resources such as money, or a mimetic (imitative) process, such as the contagion of ideas, the underlying idea is that something flows along a network path from one node to the other” (Borgatti et al., 2009, p. 894).

In management studies, some scholars use the term ‘network’ to denote the application of networks in the social world, such as Sedzinauskienė et al. (2019, p. 782), who use the term ‘network’ to encompass “a collection of relationships between international new venture (and/or its’ entrepreneurs) and different external independent partners”. Some scholars use the term ‘social network’ to specifically refer to the application of networks in the social world, as Moliterno and Mahony (2011, p. 445) advocate: “social network analysis concerns how actors (e.g., individuals, groups, organizations, etc.) are tied by some sort of social relationship (e.g., advice giving, resource sharing, alliance partnership, etc.)”. Some studies refer specifically to the term of ‘social network’ as relationships among individuals, such as the definition used by Pinho and Prange (2016, p. 2), which states that: “social networks

refer to the ability of certain individuals to extract benefits from their social structures, connections, and memberships (Davidsson & Honig, 2003) through privileged connections”.

However, we adopt a refined approach and couple the multilevel and social network theoretical perspectives to integrate different perspectives on social networks. Whether among individuals or firms, we take a ‘people-oriented’ perspective to regard that firms are networks composed of people, as Wellman (2001, p. 2031) states that “a group is only one special type of a social network; one that is heavily interconnected and clearly bounded”. Therefore, we adopt a ‘multilevel social network’ view (Moliterno & Mahony, 2011) to conduct this review. This view suggests that “the missing link between multilevel and social network perspectives on organizations is the graph theoretic perspective on systems of nested networks (Harary & Batell, 1981), which suggests that each node in a network at a given level of analysis is, itself, a network at a lower level of analysis” (Moliterno & Mahony, 2011, p. 444). “There can be dyads, triads, and global networks of individuals, or of units, or of organizations” (Moliterno & Mahony, 2011, p. 445; originally, Borgatti & Foster, 2003).

Social network analysis is used not only “as a tool for analyzing data about organizations” but also for “understanding organizations [emphasis added]” (Moliterno & Mahony, 2011, p. 444). For example, Network Uppsala Model (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009), which won the 2019 JIBS Decade Award, views markets as networks of relationships and then reveals internationalization of firms which interact with other actors in various network patterns.

Serving as a review, our paper adopts an open and inclusive perspective towards social networks, while also adhering to the definitions of social networks outlined in other IB literature. For example, Zhou et al. (2007, p. 674) mentioned that “in organizational settings, social networks may involve social relationships among individuals embedded in a formal structure of business connections, such as buyer–supplier relationships or strategic alliances (Björkman and Kock, 1995)”. Kurt and Kurt (2020, p. 2) incorporated social network analysis (SNA) with IB research. They followed the definition of SNA, “which refers to a set of analytical tools for mapping and measuring relationships among social entities, such as individuals, organizations or any social units” (originally, Cross et al., 2003; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). To accommodate diverse perspectives on social networks, we adopt the broader definition by Cuyper et al. (2020, p. 715), that “a social network, at any level, can be defined as a set of nodes as well as the connections and the absence of connections among these nodes”. We thereby employ the more inclusive term ‘network’ to search literature (since under this definition, social networks encompass interpersonal, inter-subsidiary, inter-firm, and inter-location networks, Cuyper et al., 2020). To maintain consistency with previous review papers (Zahoor et al., 2020), we considered keywords such as collaboration, alliance, tie, and relationship. We also considered equivalent terms for ‘network’ in different countries (Guanxi (China), Yongso (South Korea), Jinmyaku (Japan), Wasta (Middle East), etc. see Appendix B for their definitions).

The second term, ‘internationalization’ is defined as “the process through which a firm moves from operating solely in its domestic marketplace to international markets” (Amdam et al., 2020, p. 1; originally, Javalgi et al., 2003, p. 185). Using this definition, we captured distinct dimensions of internationalization, including behavior, degree, and performance. In IB-focused journals such as *Journal of International Business Studies* (JIBS), *Journal of World Business* (JWB), and *International Business Review* (IBR), we used only social network-related keywords. We established several criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of studies when selecting sample papers (see Appendix C).

Johanson and Vahlne’s Network Uppsala Model has been one of the most influential models in IB since its publication in JIBS in December 2009, affecting a broad set of topical research streams (Li & Fleury, 2020). The authors’ main argument was that “markets are networks of relationships in which firms are linked to each other in various, complex and, to a considerable extent, invisible patterns” (Johanson & Vahlne,

2009, p. 1411). They proposed a meaningful expression of “insidership” in IB (Vahlne & Johanson, 2020), which “is best understood as a driver of the evolution of the multinational business enterprise” (Vahlne & Johanson, 2020). Following this seminal research, as our starting point, our review then goes on to span the last thirteen years, from January 2010 to December 2022.

2.3. Study identification, screening, and selecting process

This step aims to identify, screen, and select suitable studies to help answer the review questions. First, we selected 50 journals in general management from the *FT50 Research Ranking* (2016) and 32 journals from the *Journal Quality List* (Harzing, 2022) (see Appendix D for selection criteria and a detailed list).

Second, we adopted the Web of Science and Scopus databases to search papers between 2010 and 2022. With the Boolean logic *AND*, we searched for papers published in 79 non-IB-focused journals through 18 social network-related themes and *INTERNATIONALIZATION* in the *title, abstract, and keywords*. We then searched for papers from 3 IB-focused journals (JIBS, JWB, and IBR) using the same 18 social network-related themes (see Appendix D for search strings). This process identified 1637 articles after eliminating duplicates (see Appendix E for search results).

Finally, we scrutinized the 1637 studies against the fit-for-purpose criteria. Fit-for-purpose criteria concern the validation of studies to meet the purpose of the review (Boaz & Ashby, 2003). As this review aims to identify, categorize, and synthesize literature on the influence of social networks on internationalization, we included studies on: (1) the influence of social networks, and (2) the behavior or performance of a firm in a foreign market. We reviewed titles and abstracts at this stage. Where aims and variables could not be identified, the introductions, methods, and/or conclusions were examined (Zahoor et al., 2020). This process produced 210 papers that constituted our final sample, a number adequate for the SLR (e.g., Cuyper et al., 2022, n=140; n = 140; Zahoor et al., 2020, n = 105; see Appendix F for methods in latest SLRs).

2.4. Analysis and synthesis

To avoid undue emphasis on one study over another (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006), we adopted a transparent process using a narrative synthesis, which is effective in identifying the story underpinning a disparate body of evidence, as it allows researchers to construct themes that add consistency to the data (Zahoor et al., 2020).

We began by identifying differences in firm types, data sources, industries, methods, and models in these studies (see Appendix G-I). We designed a worksheet to record all information and mapped the emergent trends (Zahoor et al., 2020). Next, to categorize and synthesize the review findings at different levels, we used the antecedents-mediators-outcomes (AMO) framework. Antecedents are defined as something that happens or occurs before something else (Agostini & Nosella, 2017). The AMO framework helps distinguish the main components of the process under scrutiny (Ghezzi et al., 2018), allowing researchers to study the complexity of the middle ground that connects antecedents to outcomes (Zahoor et al., 2020). We conducted line-by-line coding to identify and categorize the concepts, links between concepts, theories, contributions and limitations of sample studies. We deductively coded and clustered the articles’ findings. As shown in Fig. 2, network characteristics were grouped under “antecedents”, and internationalization variables under “outcomes”. The findings were then inductively segmented into similar themes using line-by-line analysis. Thus, we were able to assess completeness in antecedents, mediators (endogenous), moderators (exogenous), and outcomes using deductive and inductive techniques (Zahoor et al., 2020).

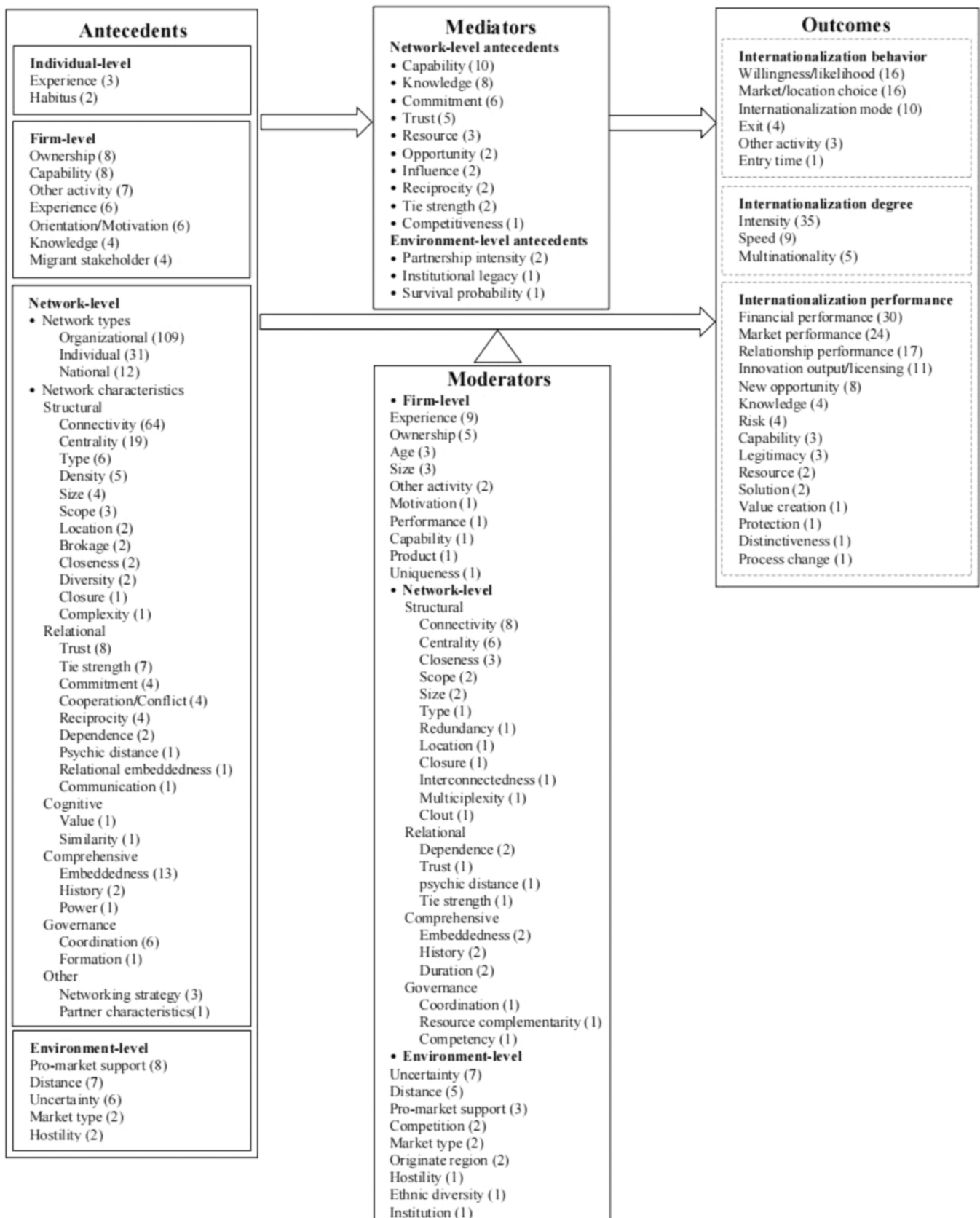


Fig. 2. Social networks in internationalization: An integrative framework.

3. Results

To review these articles, we used bibliometric methodologies for the statistical description of patterns in publications (Pritchard, 1969), and content analysis to identify prevalent themes and sub-themes (Altheide, 1996). The same methods have been used in previous studies in strategic management (Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004) and international business (Luo et al., 2019), particularly in research on international networks and the internationalization of SMEs (Dekel-Dachs et al., 2021; Zahoor et al., 2020). The goal is to synthesize cumulative and collective knowledge to provide a compendious picture of social networks in internationalization.

3.1. Key trends of social networks in internationalization

We analyze the trends from five aspects: year, journal, methodology, context, and theory.

Year trend (see Fig. 3). The publication activity was stable between 2010–2014, with a primary focus on knowledge, opportunity, subsidiary, and SMEs. Although the publication count dropped in 2015, it rose significantly in 2016, potentially due to heightened global economic challenges, including slow growth in major economies and uncertainties surrounding international trade. Publications peaked in 2020 with a focus on political activities which help reduce institutional risks (Wu & Ang, 2020). Although publications gradually decreased after this peak, the number of articles on social networks in internationalization has remained at a relatively high level since 2016.

Journal trend (see Appendix G). The journal distribution shows that 23 % (n = 49/210) of publications are from non-IB-focused journals, indicating that the study of social networks in internationalization has crossed the boundary of IB, interacting with marketing,

entrepreneurship, and organizational behavior fields.

Methodology trend (see Appendix I). Specifically, 57 % (n = 120/210) of selected studies are quantitative. Only 3 % (n = 7/210) use both quantitative and qualitative methods. Among them, Kumar et al. (2021), Balachandran and Hernandez (2021), and Ganso and Nelson (2019) combine secondary data and interviews to further validate their findings. Reichstein-Scholz et al. (2021) and Prashantham et al. (2015) combine interviews and surveys to conduct text and regression analyses. Gupta et al. (2016) deal with survey data using fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) and structural equation modeling (SEM). Saranga et al. (2019) deploy qualitative and quantitative analyses of primary and secondary data to conduct comparative studies. Two studies adopt quasi-experimental approaches: Tian et al. (2021) capture the 2012 anti-Japanese social movement in China, while Darendeli and Hill (2016) analyze the Arab Spring in Libya.

Context trends (see Appendix I) include aspects such as firm size, industrial sectors, and geographical context. Most studies focus on small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (n = 42), and a few focus on specific types of firms, such as social firms (Veronica et al., 2020), family firms (Cesinger et al., 2016), entrepreneurial firms (Fraccastoro et al., 2021), and nascent firms or startups (Goxe et al., 2022; Hennart et al., 2021; Wormald et al., 2021; Aharonson et al., 2020; Ojala et al., 2018). Additionally, there is a noticeable increase in studies in the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) industries (n = 12; e.g., Kumar et al., 2021; Balachandran & Hernandez, 2021; Iurkov & Benito, 2020). Regarding geographical contexts, most research focuses on emerging economies (n = 39) such as China (as home country: n = 28; as host country: n = 18) and India (as home country: n = 7; as host country: n = 3), while limited studies focus on underdeveloped countries (n = 2; Narula, 2019; Darendeli & Hill, 2016).

Theory trend (see Table 1 and Appendix K for theory distribution and

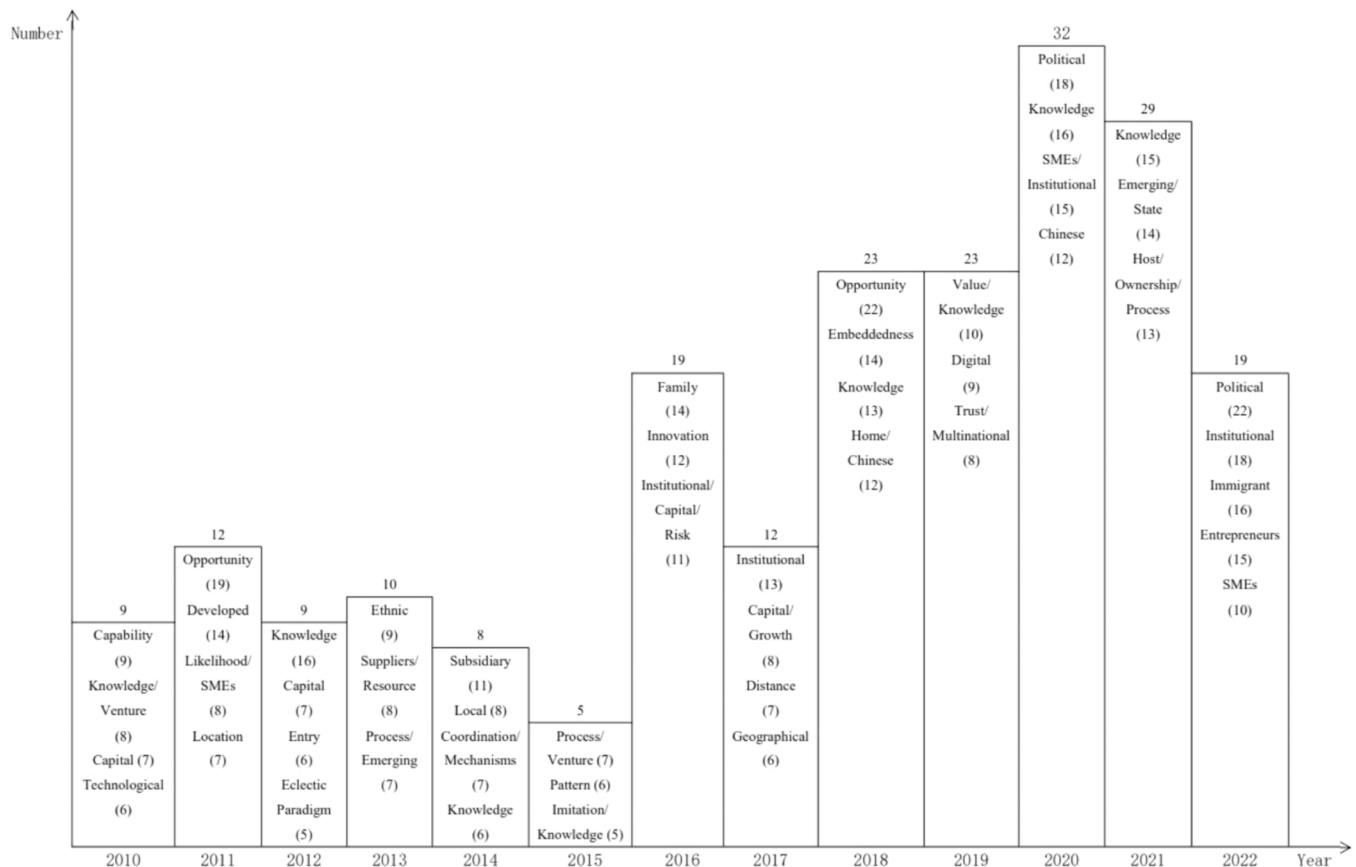


Fig. 3. Year and word frequency distributions of publications. Note: Word frequency distribution is derived from the abstract.

Table 1
Theory distribution.

Theory	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10
Individual-level													
Social capital theory (5)		1						1			1	1	1
Cognitive theory (2)	1				1								
Resource dependence theory (2)					1		1						
Agency theory (2)						1	1						
Practice theory (1)	1												
Entrepreneurship theory (1)									1				
Firm-level													
Learning theory (8)	1	1	3					1	1		1		
Social capital theory (7)				1	1		1	1		2			1
Transaction cost theory (7)		1		2		3	1						
Resource-based view (6)	1	1	1	1								1	1
Resource dependence theory (6)	1		1		1		3						
knowledge-based view (5)		2	1		1								1
Effectuation theory (4)	1	1	2										
Contingency theory (3)	1		1		1								
Real option theory (2)				1									1
Exchange theory (2)		1						1					
Innovation theory (2)							2						
Complexity theory (2)						1	1						
Obsolescing bargain theory (2)	1			1									
Attention-based view (2)			1							1			
Opportunity theory (2)					1		1						
OLI theory (2)		1	1										
Capability-based view (1)		1											
Loose coupling theory (1)		1											
Signaling theory (1)		1											
Opportunity cost theory (1)			1										
Behavioral theory (1)			1										
Reference theory (1)			1										
Firm-specific advantage theory (1)													1
Strategic choice theory (1)					1								
Optimum disclosure theory (1)				1									
Communication-information and expectancy-valence theories (1)						1							
Environmental-level													
Institutional theory (19)	4	5	4		1	3		1	1				
Neo-institutional theory (4)		1				1	1				1		
Comparative advantage theory (2)		1							1				
Location-based theory (2)		1					1						
Entrepreneurship theory (1)			1										

Notes: Number in brackets represents the number of occurrences in selected studies.

Appendix J for details). We categorized theories into three levels, excluding network and internationalization theories (i.e., Network Uppsala Model), commonly used in studies on social networks in internationalization.

1. Individual level. Studies discuss the role of top managers. For example, based on cognitive theory, [Morgan et al. \(2018\)](#) find that when making internationalization decisions, immigrant owners are more prone to overconfidence because “such owners are likely to have privileged access to international networks and social capital”. Drawing on agency theory, firms that are more central in the network of director interlocks are more likely to pursue growth in international markets ([Singh & Delios, 2017](#)).
2. Firm level. Learning theory (8), knowledge-based view (5), social capital theory (7), resource-based view (6), and resource dependence theory (6) are widely used with the perception that social networks provide access to broad resources, promoting firms’ internationalization. Some theories from other fields of research are introduced and developed. For example, [Veronica et al. \(2020\)](#) use different behavioral theory dimensions to emphasize the importance of entrepreneurial skills and external networks in developing a new IB model. [Amdam et al. \(2020\)](#) argue that cluster identity provides imperatives and shapes the motivation of firms to internationalize, extending reference theory. Drawing upon complexity theory, [Chandra and Wilkinson \(2017\)](#) propose a network-centric, complex-systems internationalization perspective of firm internationalization. In addition, some researchers adopt multiple perspectives to

discuss the antecedents of internationalization. Combining trade theory with comparative advantage theory, [Cai et al. \(2021\)](#) show that the extent of integration of migrants into the host country and the current exporting opportunities at home significantly explain the extent to which migrants affect export intensity. Supported by communication-information theory, expectancy-valence theory, and resource-based view, [Cui et al. \(2017\)](#) use the awareness-motivation-capability framework to identify the comparative institutional advantages for foreign entrants.

3. Environmental level. Most studies adopt institutional or neo-institutional theory to explore the influence of government and market, with the majority conducted in China (e.g., [Li et al., 2022](#); [Tian et al., 2021](#)). Additionally, some theories are related to geographical factors, such as geopolitics ([Wang et al., 2021](#)) and economic geography ([Blevins et al., 2016](#)).

In summary, our scrutiny of theories suggests two issues are inadequately covered. First, more studies at the individual level are required. It is valuable to explore the general psychological characteristics of employees, top managers, and CEOs in internationalization. For instance, what makes them tend to shy away from radical change and prefer an incremental approach? What does this mean for internationalization ([Vahlne & Johanson, 2020](#))? Second, more diverse types of firms should be discussed, such as social firms ([Veronica et al., 2020](#)), family firms ([Cesinger et al., 2016](#)), and second-generation immigrant firms ([Pruthi & Tasavori, 2022](#)). Research on these firms requires the introduction of different theories. For example, [Veronica et al. \(2020\)](#)

use behavioral theory to explore the internationalization of social enterprises; Cesinger et al. (2016) employ the socioemotional wealth perspective to explain the multinationality of family firms; and Fraccastoro et al. (2021) investigate how international entrepreneurial ventures use social media to internationalize based on internalization theory.

3.2. Literature on social networks in internationalization: a critical narrative

This section develops a narrative interpretation of the literature. It is based on the analysis presented in Fig. 2, which provides a multi-level framework of the social networks in internationalization, and considers its variations among antecedents, mediators, moderators, and outcomes.

3.2.1. Social networks in internationalization: outcomes

The internationalization outcomes reveal three categories: internationalization behavior, degree, and performance.

First, internationalization behavior relates to decisions in markets beyond firms' national boundaries, such as internationalization willingness/likelihood, market/location choice, entry, exit, and re-entry (Ganotakis et al., 2022). A large number of studies discuss the effect of social networks on the willingness to internationalize, most finding positive effects. Focusing on personal networks, Wu et al. (2021) examine the promotional role of the formal network centrality of managers in foreign expansion. Focusing on organizational networks, Du et al. (2021) explore the role of insidership in home market networks in facilitating outward foreign direct investment (OFDI). Vedula and Matusik (2017) find syndicate partner actions drive focal firm internationalization decisions.

In addition to market entry (e.g., Makino & Tsang, 2011), many researchers have also studied market selection (e.g., Yan et al., 2020). Firms tend to enter markets to which they are connected through partnership ties (Makarevich & Kim, 2019) or countries that have good diplomatic relations with their home country (Li et al., 2018). Most studies find positive effects of social networks on firm internationalization, including an inhibiting influence on exit and a facilitating impact on re-entry (Yayla et al., 2018). However, some also expose the dark-side effects of social networks on internationalization. For example, domestic network embeddedness traps firms into operating within their home regions (Laursen et al., 2012), and the effect is stronger under higher firm-specific and home market uncertainty (Iurkov & Benit, 2020). In addition, social networks can be hostile to newcomers who are assessed as "incompatible" by incumbents in the networks (Goxe et al., 2022).

Second, internationalization degree concerns firms' activities in a foreign market. Internationalization degree includes internationalization intensity, speed, and multinationality. Internationalization intensity is widely explored. For example, Morgan et al. (2018) find that immigrant owners promote export intensity of firms based on a resource-based perspective. Considering the dark-side effect, Eduardsen et al. (2022) show that business groups can be a double-edged sword for international sales intensity and diversification. Based on national relationships, Hu et al. (2021) find that MNEs have higher FDI intensity in host countries with a greater number of sister cities in their home country. Zhang et al. (2016) investigate how network ties at home moderate the relationships between different international entrepreneurship characteristics and the degree of firm internationalization. Internationalization speed captures the time between firms' international activities. Zahoor and Al-Tabba (2021) empirically prove that relational mechanisms facilitate post-entry internationalization speed through foreign market knowledge. International market knowledge can also mediate the relationship between collaboration intensity and firm multinationality (Cesinger et al., 2016).

Finally, internationalization performance relates to firms' overall

profitability and has received much attention. Performance includes not only financial, market, relational, and innovation outputs (e.g., Papanastassiou et al., 2020) but also the opportunities and capabilities acquired. Most studies support the positive effect of social networks on financial performance (Obadia & Robson, 2021; Brache & Felzensztein, 2019; Pinho & Prange, 2016; Presutti et al., 2016). Social networks make a positive contribution across various dimensions of market performance, including market reaction (Li & Reuer, 2022; Li et al., 2020), user adoption (Kumar et al., 2021; Brouthers et al., 2016), customer breadth, and responsiveness (Luo & Bu, 2018).

Relational performance (Robson et al., 2019) includes the changes in alliance scope (Yan et al., 2022; Aharonson et al., 2020; Kandogan & Hiller, 2018; Montoro-Sánchez et al., 2018), alliance intensity (Shijaku et al., 2020), and partner numbers (Zhang & Pezeshkan, 2016). Antecedents such as organizational ties (Aharonson et al., 2020), national ties (Kandogan & Hiller, 2018), network centrality (Shijaku et al., 2020; Zhang & Pezeshkan, 2016), network intensity (Montoro-Sánchez et al., 2018), and mutual trust (Robson et al., 2019) show significant positive effects on relational performance.

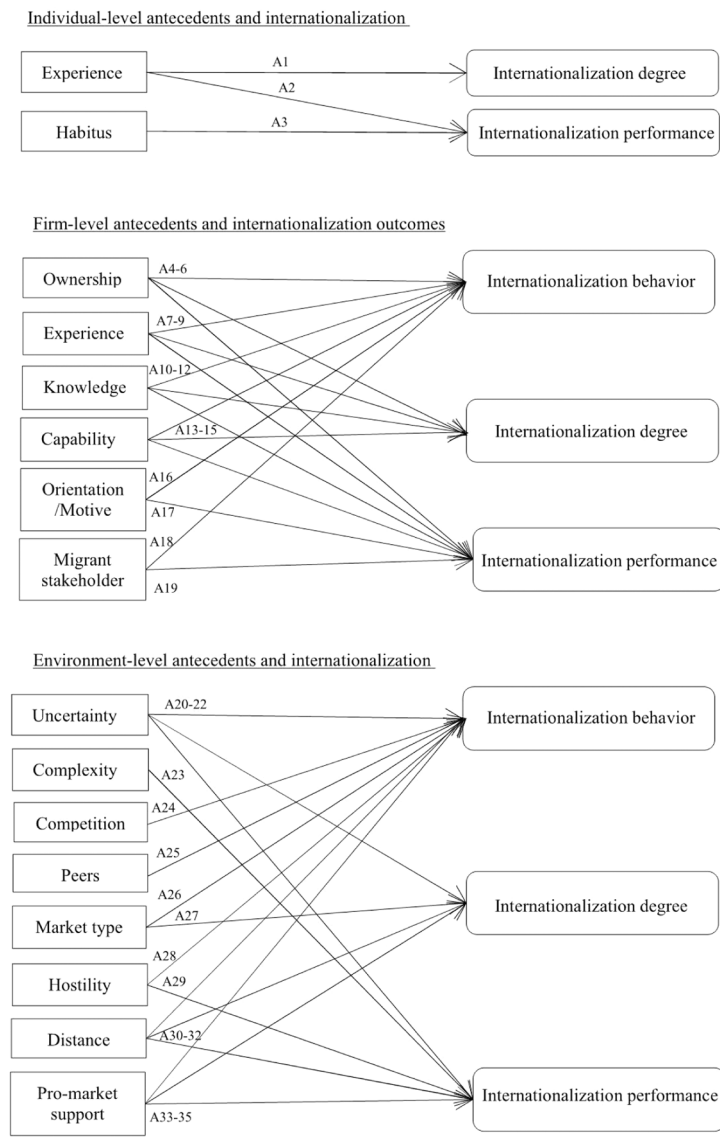
There are also other performance outcomes, such as IB opportunity exploitation. Lindstrand and Hånell (2017) focus on international social capital, while Kim et al. (2021) concentrate on ethno-national ties, both indicating positive effects on international opportunity exploitation.

Although extant research focuses on the impact of external networks, few studies have explicitly investigated the effect of internal networks. Notably, Asakawa et al. (2018) examine the impact of internal networks within multinational enterprises (MNEs). They find that vertical administrative embeddedness inhibits global knowledge sourcing, while vertical knowledge embeddedness promotes it. Interestingly, using natural experimental studies occasioned by the Arab Spring in Libya, Darendeli and Hill (2016) identify that the relationships among influential social groups contributes to resilience during political change and upheaval.

3.2.2. Stream 1: antecedents - outcomes (direct effect)

Antecedents set the platform for onward internationalization (Martineau & Pastoriza, 2016). Kahiya (2020) categorized the antecedents of internationalization into three categories: managerial, firm, and environmental level factors. As suggested by Zahoor et al. (2020), combinations of multiple perspectives "can contribute complementary insights at different levels" (originally, Frynas & Stephens, 2015, p. 502). Multi-level analysis has also been adopted in many literature reviews. For instance, Srivastava et al. (2020) clustered the literature into individual -, firm -, country -, and multi - level analysis. Busch (2022) screened the literature for the antecedents of serendipity on both the individual and organizational levels. Zahoor et al. (2020) reviewed collaborative internationalization literature by clustering the factors into individual, firm, network, and environmental levels. To untangle the complexity of factors in our samples, we clustered them into various analytical levels, including the individual, firm, network, and environmental levels (see Figs. 4–6). The individual-, firm-, and environment-level antecedents contribute to understanding how to incorporate other factors into internationalization research under a social network thinking approach.

Individual-level antecedents have received limited attention. These antecedents involve stakeholders' characteristics. For example, Chen et al. (2016) explore the relationship between independent directors' industry-specific and international experience, tenure overlap, interlocking directorate ties, these human and social capital indicators, and internationalization intensity. Goxe et al. (2022) identify entrepreneurs' habitus formed within various forms of capital and their "fit" with the network they are entering to, showing how social networks can strengthen or weaken the entrepreneurs' internationalization path. Pedersen et al. (2019) study the effects of global impact, expertise, and collaborative networking orientation of employees in MNEs on their likelihood to span intraorganizational boundaries.



Key studies

- A1: (Chen et al., 2016);
- A2: (Pedersen et al., 2019);
- A2: (Goxe et al., 2022; Pedersen et al., 2019);
- A4: (Mohr et al., 2016; Lei & Chen, 2011);
- A5: (Cai et al., 2021; Singh & Delios, 2017);
- A6: (Buttice & Useche, 2022; Gregoric et al., 2021; Sun, 2021);
- A7: (Khurshed et al., 2020; Verbeke et al., 2019; Li & Bathelt, 2018; Giarratana & Torrissi, 2010);
- A8: (Li & Bathelt, 2018; Fletcher & Harris, 2012);
- A9: (Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2021; Prashantham & Dhanaraj, 2010);
- A10: (Williams et al., 2020; Vissak et al., 2020);
- A11: (De Prijcker et al., 2012);
- A12: (Chetty et al., 2018);
- A13: (Li & Bathelt, 2018; Sun et al., 2018; Su, 2013; Giarratana & Torrissi, 2010);
- A14: (Li & Bathelt, 2018; Kim & Hemmert, 2016);
- A15: (Fraccastoro et al., 2021; Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2021; Chetty et al., 2018);
- A16: (Angulo-Ruiz et al., 2020; Yayla et al., 2018; Cui et al., 2017; Lei, & Chen, 2011);
- A17: (Prashantham & Birkinshaw, 2020; Chung et al., 2010);
- A18: (Useche et al., 2020; Chung & Tung, 2013);
- A19: (Liu et al., 2015; Prashantham & Dhanaraj, 2010)
- A20: (Cannizzaro, 2020; Sun et al., 2018; Blevins et al., 2016);
- A21: (Tian et al., 2021; Shi et al., 2017);
- A22: (Srivastava et al., 2018);
- A23: (Marano & Tashman, 2012);
- A24: (Sun et al., 2018);
- A25: (Oehme & Bort, 2015);
- A26: (Iurkov & Benito, 2018; Li & Bathelt, 2018);
- A27: (Li & Bathelt, 2018);
- A28: (Tian, 2022);
- A29: (Darendeli & Hill, 2016);
- A30: (Yan et al., 2020; Verbeke et al., 2019; Mingo et al., 2018; Pinto et al., 2017; Makino & Tsang, 2011);
- A31: (Buckley et al., 2012);
- A32: (Liou & Rao-Nicholson, 2017);
- A33: (Zhang, 2020; Yan et al., 2020; Pinto et al., 2017);
- A34: (Cai et al., 2021; Zhang, 2020; Fletcher & Harris, 2012);
- A35: (Yan et al., 2021; Veronica et al., 2020; Dau, 2018)

Fig. 4. Stream 1 linking antecedents-outcomes (direct effect 1). Buttice, Useche (2022); Giarratana, Torrissi (2010); De Prijcker et al. (2012); Su (2013); Giarratana, Torrissi (2010); Chung, Tung (2013); Liu et al. (2015); Srivastava et al. (2018); Buckley et al. (2012).

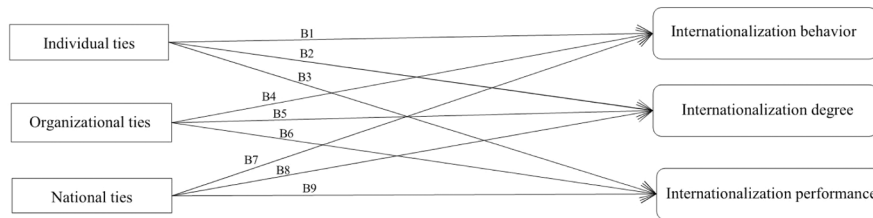
Firm-level antecedents encompass the inherent properties of firms that play roles in influencing internationalization, including, for example, firm ownership, experience, capability, and orientation. Research has explored the effects of diverse ownership on firm internationalization. For example, Deng et al. (2018) study state ownership, an ascribed political connection, and discover its negative effect on OFDI commitment. Singh and Delios (2017) find a positive relationship between family ownership and new foreign investments. Further, both the interaction of family ownership and board independence and the interaction of network centrality (based on director interlocks) and board independence strength the positive relationship between board independence and foreign investments. Gregorič et al. (2021) find a facilitating effect of diaspora ownership on international technology licensing, as diasporans’ ethnic ties allow the development of network relationships and greater insights into available information than foreign investors. Firms’ capabilities and experience can influence internationalization behaviors (i.e., location choice) and degree (i.e., intensity). For example, Li and Bathelt (2018) use the subsidiary network size at the global scale as an indicator to measure the combinative capabilities of firms to integrate knowledge within their organizational networks across different sites. They find that firms with large subsidiary network size are less likely to

choose similarly specialized clusters for their investment affiliates. Building on the resource-based view and network theory, Kim and Hemmert (2016) test the relationship between resources, capabilities, and customer networks and subcontracting SMEs’ export performance. When studying market exit and re-entry decisions, Yayla et al. (2018) find that market-oriented firms are more flexible in their exit decisions, and close ties with partners in the host country increase the propensity to re-enter the market.

Network-level antecedents relate to diverse networks and their characteristics that may influence firm internationalization.

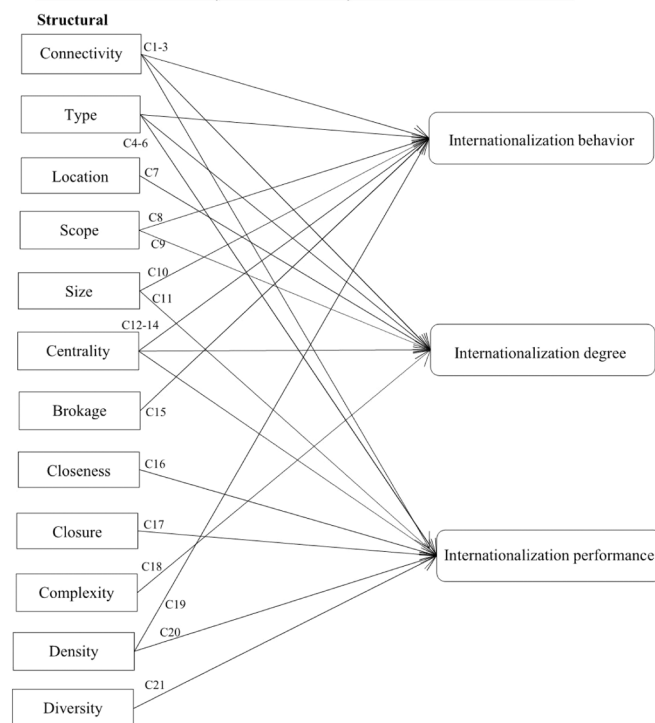
Scholars have explored the influence of various *social ties* on internationalization. Networks can be categorized as domestic (home-country) networks (Du et al., 2021; Amdam et al., 2020), foreign (including host-country) networks (Hennart et al., 2021; Wormald et al., 2021; Verbeke et al., 2019; Blevins et al., 2016), and both domestic and foreign networks (e.g., Wu & Ang, 2020; Li & Bathelt, 2018; Idris & Saridakis, 2018; Brouthers et al., 2016). To simply summarize networks, we classified them as individual ties (e.g., Pruthi & Tasavori, 2022; Röell et al., 2022), organizational ties (e.g. Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2022), and national ties (e.g. among countries, Wang et al., 2021; among cities, Hu et al., 2021; ethnic ties, Duanmu, & Guney, 2013; colonial ties, Witte

Network-level antecedents (network types) and internationalization outcomes



B1: (Li et al., 2022; Pruthi & Tasavori, 2022; Wu et al., 2021; Wu & Ang, 2020; Verbeke et al., 2019; Idris & Saridakis, 2018; Connelly et al., 2011; Ibeh & Kasem, 2011; Jean et al., 2011);
B2: (Wormald et al., 2021; Hennart et al., 2021; Singh & Delios, 2017; Francioni et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2016; Prashantham et al., 2015; Eberhard & Craig, 2013; Laursen et al., 2012; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Ibeh & Kasem, 2011; Musteen et al., 2010; Manolova et al., 2010; Freeman et al., 2010);
B3: (Wormald et al., 2021; Guo et al., 2018; Pinho & Prange, 2016; Horak & Yang, 2016; Zaeferian et al., 2016; Musteen et al., 2014; Ciravegna et al., 2014; Vasilchenko & Morrish, 2011; Ellis, 2011; Kontinen & Ojala, 2011; Jean et al., 2011; Lindstrand et al., 2011; Musteen et al., 2010; Freeman et al., 2010);
B4: (Zhao et al., 2021; Du et al., 2021; Lurkov et al., 2020; Shijaku et al., 2020; Amdam et al., 2020; Vissak et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2020; Makarevich & Kim, 2019; Strange & Humphrey, 2019; Iurkov et al., 2018; Yayla et al., 2018; Deng et al., 2018; Baraldi et al., 2018; Cui et al., 2017; Vedula & Matusik, 2017; Baum et al., 2015; Meschi & Wassmer, 2013; Su, 2013; Lei & Chen, 2011);
B5: (Sharma et al., 2022; Eduardsen et al., 2022; Shirodkar et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021; Hennart et al., 2021; Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021; Oliveira & Johanson, 2021; Shijaku et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2020; Brache & Felzensztein, 2019; Deng et al., 2018; Fortwengel & Jackson, 2016; Presutti et al., 2016; Cesinger et al., 2016; Lewandowska et al., 2016; Kim & Hemmert, 2016; Prashantham et al., 2015; Milanov & Fernhaber, 2014; Patel et al., 2014; Hatani & McGaughey, 2013; Eberhard & Craig, 2013; Lee et al., 2012; De Prijcker et al., 2012; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Richardson et al., 2012; Guercini & Runfola, 2010; Manolova et al., 2010; Freeman et al., 2010);
B6: (Li & Reuer, 2022; Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2022; Donbesuur et al., 2022; Röell et al., 2022; Ong et al., 2022; Pypers et al., 2022; Moschieri et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022; Su et al., 2022; Obadia & Robson, 2021; Nambisan & Luo, 2021; Riviere & Romero-Martinez, 2021; Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2021; Reichstein-Scholze et al., 2021; Aharonson et al., 2020; Li & Fleury, 2020; Kurt et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2020; Li et al., 2019; Benito et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2019; Ganso & Nelson, 2019; Robson et al., 2019; Zeng et al., 2019; Saranga et al., 2019; Urzelai & Puig, 2019; Kwok et al., 2019; Isaac et al., 2019; Kano, 2018; Asakawa et al., 2018; Luo & Bu, 2018; Montoro-Sanchez et al., 2018; Bai & Johanson, 2018; Chetty et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018; Lindstrand & Hänel, 2017; Leonidou et al., 2017; Eriksson et al., 2017; Brourthers et al., 2016; Darendeli & Hill, 2016; Presutti et al., 2016; Müllner, 2016; Zhang & Pezeshkan, 2016; Gupta et al., 2016; Elg et al., 2015; Ciravegna et al., 2014; Ciabuschi et al., 2014; Ritvala et al., 2014; Nordman & Tolstoy, 2014; Zorzini et al., 2014; Fernhaber & Li, 2013; Lev et al., 2013; Castro & Roldan, 2013; Bloemer et al., 2013; Gammelgaard et al., 2012; Kalinic & Forza, 2012; Yu et al., 2011; Vasilchenko & Morrish, 2011; Leonidou et al., 2011; Kontinen & Ojala, 2011; Hallin et al., 2011; Sun et al., 2010; Lu et al., 2010; Freeman et al., 2010);
B7: (Wang et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2021; Witte et al., 2020; Li et al., 2018; Blevins et al., 2016; Makino & Tsang, 2011);
B8: (Wang et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2021; Cai et al., 2021; Duanmu & Guney, 2013; Buckley et al., 2012);
B9: (Li et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2020; Kandogan & Hiller, 2018)

Network-level antecedents (network dimensions) and internationalization outcomes



C1: (Li et al., 2022; Pruthi & Tasavori, 2022; Wang et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2021; Amdam et al., 2020; Wu & Wang, 2020; Yan et al., 2020; Makarevich & Kim, 2019; Li et al., 2018; Idris & Saridakis, 2018; Cui et al., 2017; Vedula & Matusik, 2017; Blevins et al., 2016; Ibeh & Kasem, 2011; Jean et al., 2011; Giarratana & Torrisi, 2010);
C2: (Eduardsen et al., 2022; Shirodkar et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2022; Chen et al., 2021; Hennart et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2020; Brache & Felzensztein, 2019; Francioni et al., 2017; Singh & Delios, 2017; Fortwengel & Jackson, 2016; Lewandowska et al., 2016; Prashantham et al., 2015; Hatani & McGaughey, 2013; Eberhard & Craig, 2013; Laursen et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2012; Richardson et al., 2012; Buckley et al., 2012; Ibeh & Kasem, 2011; Guercini & Runfola, 2010; Manolova et al., 2010; Freeman et al., 2010);
C3: (Singh et al., 2022; Su et al., 2022; Moschieri et al., 2022; Ong et al., 2022; Röell et al., 2022; Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2022; Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2021; Obadia & Robson, 2021; Nambisan & Luo, 2021; Sharma et al., 2020; Li & Fleury, 2020; Zeng et al., 2019; Urzelai & Puig, 2019; Ganso & Nelson, 2019; Chetty et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2018; Kandogan & Hiller, 2018; Lindstrand & Hänel, 2017; Zaeferian et al., 2016; Horak & Yang, 2016; Pinho & Prange, 2016; Müllner, 2016; Darendeli & Hill, 2016; Ciravegna et al., 2014; Fernhaber & Li, 2013; Yu et al., 2011; Vasilchenko & Morrish, 2011; Jean et al., 2011; Lu et al., 2010; Freeman et al., 2010; Sun et al., 2010);
C4: (Du et al., 2021; Vissak et al., 2020; Deng et al., 2018; Connelly et al., 2011);
C5: (Deng et al., 2018);
C6: (Kontinen & Ojala, 2011);
C7: (Prashantham et al., 2015; Patel et al., 2014);
C8: (Lurkov et al., 2018; Su, 2013);
C9: (De Prijcker, 2012);
C10: (Verbeke et al., 2019; Baum et al., 2015);
C11: (Chen et al., 2019; Brourthers et al., 2016);
C12: (Zhao et al., 2021; Du et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021; Iurkov & Benito, 2020; Shijaku et al., 2020; Meschi & Wassmer, 2013; Lei & Chen, 2011; Connelly et al., 2011);
C13: (Wormald et al., 2021; Shijaku et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2016; Kim & Hemmert, 2016; Milanov & Fernhaber, 2014; De Prijcker et al., 2012; Fletcher & Harris, 2012);
C14: (Wormald et al., 2021; Aharonson et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2019; Montoro-Sanchez et al., 2018; Zhang & Pezeshkan, 2016; Castro & Roldan, 2013);
C15: (Zhao et al., 2021; Du et al., 2021);
C16: (Aharonson et al., 2020; Montoro-Sanchez et al., 2018);
C17: (Bai & Johanson, 2018);
C18: (Sharma et al., 2022);
C19: (Lurkov et al., 2018; Meschi & Wassmer, 2013);
C20: (Sharma et al., 2019; Montoro-Sanchez et al., 2018; Musteen et al., 2014);
C21: (Montoro-Sanchez et al., 2018; Musteen et al., 2014)

Fig. 5. Stream 1 linking antecedents-outcomes (direct effect 2). Bai, Johanson (2018); Baraldi et al. (2018); Bloemer et al. (2013); Buckley et al. (2012); Buttice, Useche (2022); Chung, Tung (2013); Ciabuschi et al. (2014); Connelly et al. (2011); De Prijcker et al. (2012); Eberhard, Craig (2013); Ellis (2011); Fortwengel, Jackson (2016); Francioni et al. (2017); Gammelgaard et al. (2012); Giarratana, Torrisi (2010); Guercini, Runfola (2010); Guo et al. (2018); Hallin et al. (2011); Hatani, McGaughey (2013); Ibeh, Kasem (2011); Isaac et al. (2019); Jean et al. (2011); Kalinic, Forza (2012); Kontinen, Ojala (2011); Kurt et al. (2020); Lee et al. (2012); Leonidou et al. (2017); Leonidou et al. (2011); Liu et al. (2015); Makarevich, Kim (2019); Meschi, Wassmer (2013); Nordman, Tolstoy (2014); Pohlanyi (1944); Richardson et al. (2012); Ritvala et al. (2014); Sharma et al. (2019); Singh et al. (2022); Srivastava et al. (2018); Su et al. (2022); Su (2013); Zorzini et al. (2014).

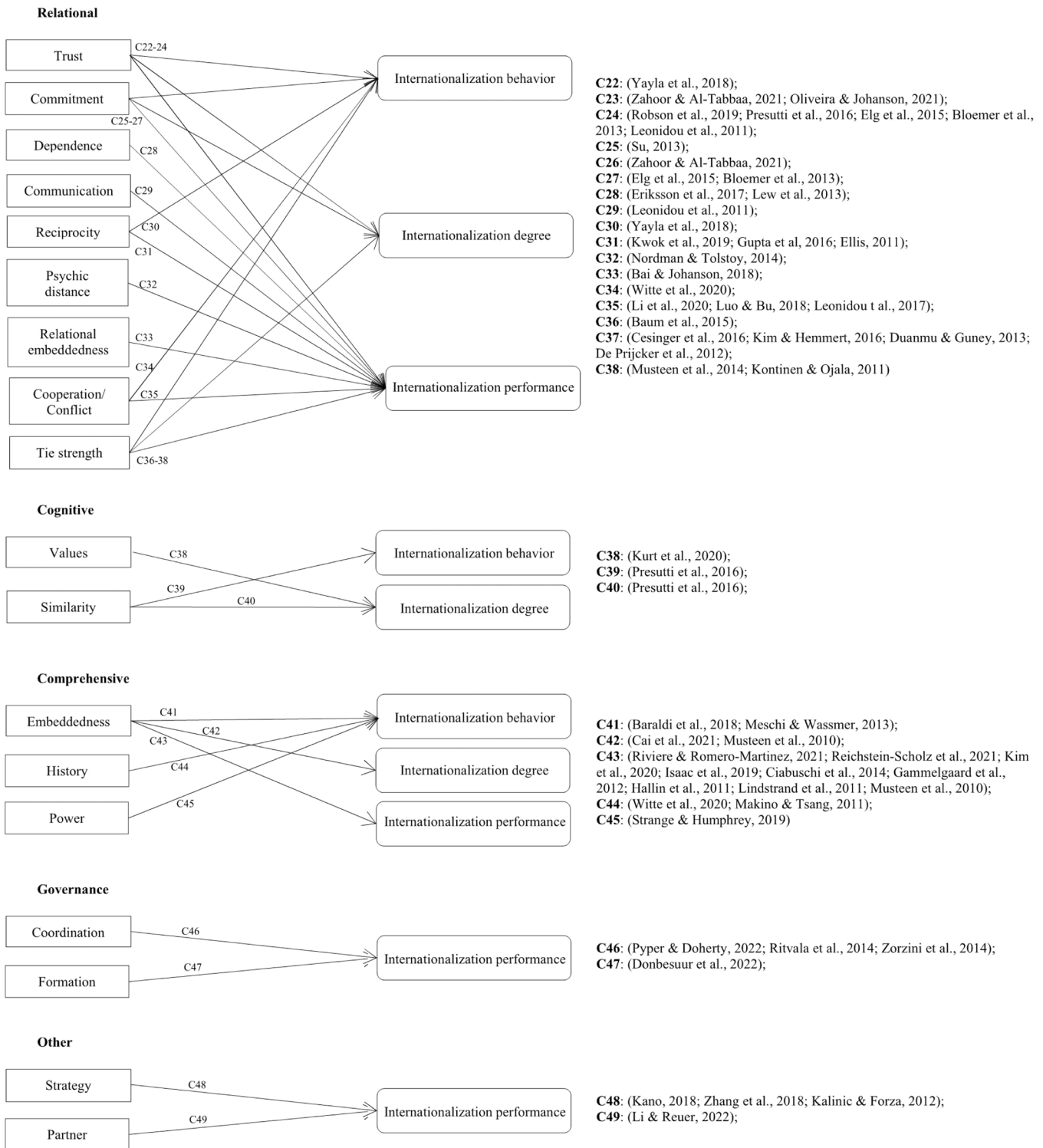


Fig. 6. Stream 1 linking antecedents-outcomes (direct effect 3).

et al., 2020).

Characteristics of networks include not only structure such as centrality, intensity, and betweenness, but also mutual trust and network governance (see Figs. 5–6). Network centrality is widely discussed. It works through access to broad knowledge flows and higher social status (Zhao et al., 2021), promoting firms’ engagement in OFDI (Du et al., 2021). However, a network is a double-edged sword. Moderate embeddedness leads to more non-location-bound firm-specific advantages (FSAs), which reduces the liability of foreignness and hence

motivates MNEs to widen their geographical scope. In contrast, strong embeddedness drives more location-bound FSAs, which may narrow down MNEs’ geographic scope (Iurkov & Benito, 2018).

Environment-level antecedents concern industry and market characteristics, with institutional factors attracting attention. For example, Pinto et al. (2017) suggest that pro-market reforms and three government support mechanisms—financing, stock participation, and political ties—may lead to increased levels of ownership negotiated by firms, particularly in situations involving greater institutional distance and

access to knowledge.

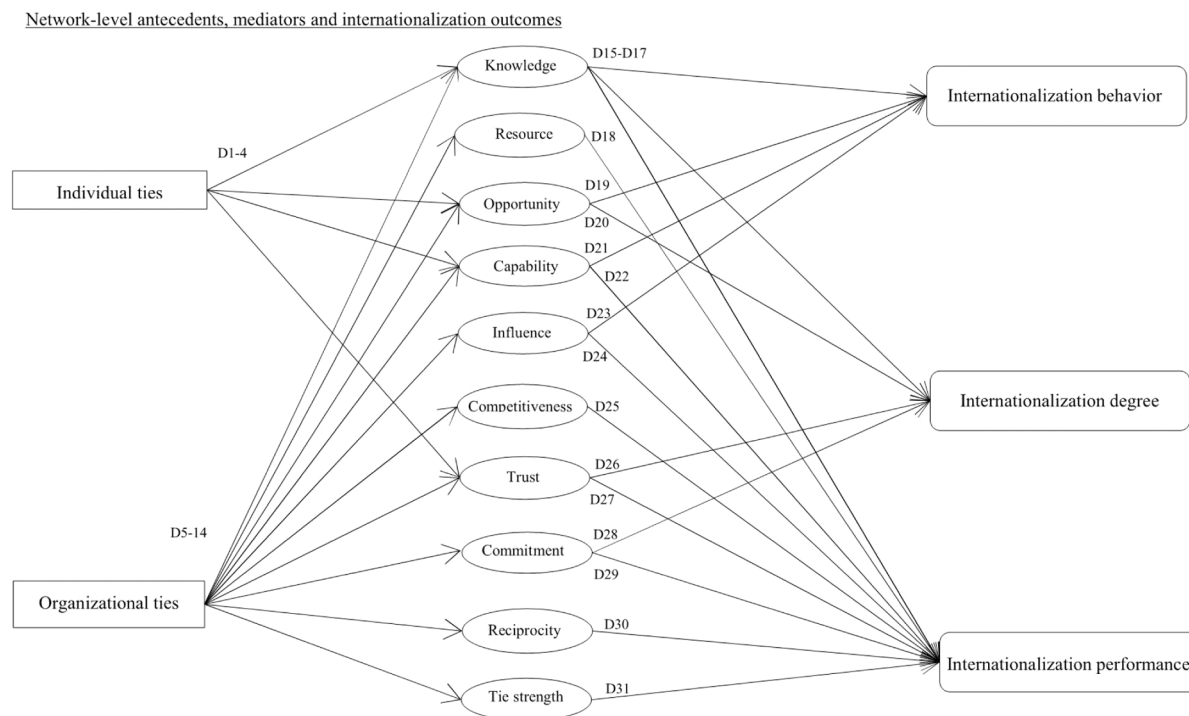
3.2.3. Stream 2: antecedents - activity - outcomes (mediation and moderating effects)

Our review reveals the factors that mediate and moderate the relationships between social networks and internationalization (see Fig. 2).

We analyze mediating mechanisms from the network- and environment-level (see Figs. 7–8).

Individual ties influence internationalization behaviors through self-perceived status and capabilities (Li et al., 2022), while

internationalization capabilities can also positively affect financial performance (Pinho & Prange, 2016). Organizational ties help firms acquire social capital and investments and thus promote internationalization performance (Obadia & Robson, 2021; Lindstrand & Hånell, 2017). Moreover, network characteristics such as cooperation intensity help firms acquire market knowledge (Nyamrunda & Freeman, 2021), which deepens the degree of internationalization (Cesinger et al., 2016) and improves internationalization performance (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021). The most prominent relational mechanisms are mutual trust (Nyamrunda & Freeman, 2021), relational embeddedness, and relational commitment. They can influence firms' entrepreneurial

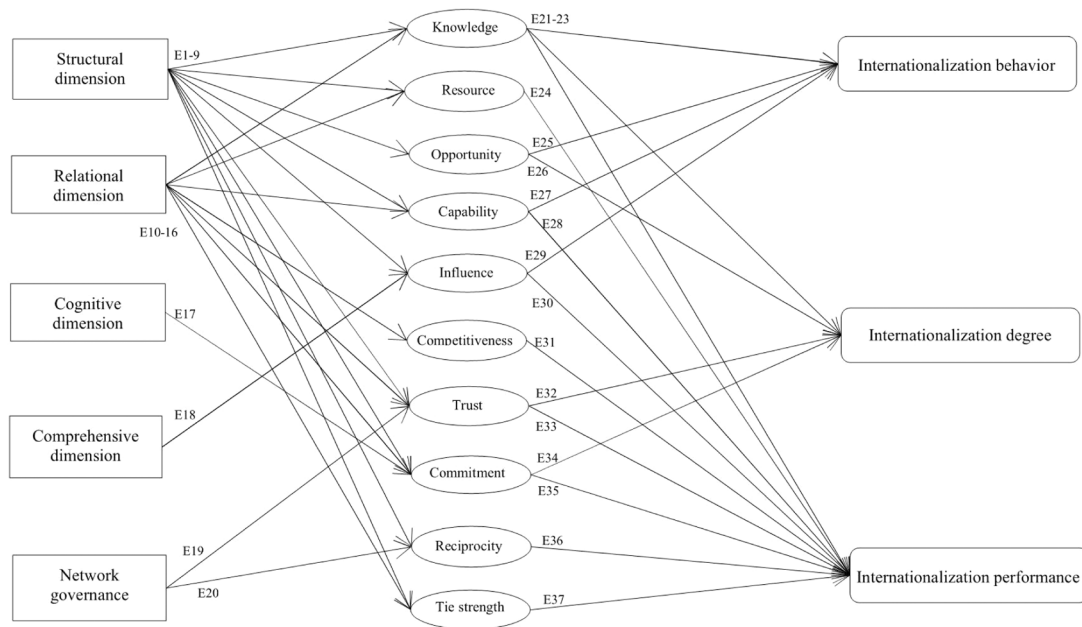


Key studies

- D1: (Francioni et al., 2017);
- D2: (Francioni et al., 2017);
- D3: (Li et al., 2022; Pinho & Prange, 2016);
- D4: (Guo et al., 2018; Freeman et al., 2010);
- D5: (Ong et al., 2022; Oliveira & Johanson, 2021; Zhao et al., 2021; Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021; Cesinger et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2012; Richardson et al., 2012);
- D6: (Ong et al., 2022; Kurt et al., 2020; Lindstrand & Hånell, 2017);
- D7: (Zhao et al., 2021);
- D8: (Moschieri et al., 2022; Su et al., 2022; Nambisan & Luo, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Bai & Johanson, 2018; Lew et al., 2013; Bloemer et al., 2013; Lu et al., 2020);
- D9: (Zhao et al., 2021; Ciabuschi et al., 2014);
- D10: (Gupta et al., 2016);
- D11: (Freeman et al., 2010);
- D12: (Kurt et al., 2020; Kwok et al., 2019; Leonidou et al., 2017; Bloemer et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2012; Leonidou et al., 2011);
- D13: (Li et al., 2019; Castro & Roldan, 2013);
- D14: (Nordman & Tolstoy, 2014);
- D15: (Zhao et al., 2021);
- D16: (Oliveira & Johanson, 2021; Zhao et al., 2021; Cesinger et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2012; Richardson et al., 2012);
- D17: (Ong et al., 2022);
- D18: (Ong et al., 2022; Kurt et al., 2020; Lindstrand & Hånell, 2017);
- D19: (Zhao et al., 2021);
- D20: (Francioni et al., 2017);
- D21: (Li et al., 2022);
- D22: (Moschieri et al., 2022; Su et al., 2022; Nambisan & Luo, 2021; Li et al., 2020; Bai & Johanson, 2018; Pinho & Prange, 2016; Lew et al., 2013; Bloemer et al., 2013; Lu et al., 2020);
- D23: (Zhao et al., 2021);
- D24: (Ciabuschi et al., 2014);
- D25: (Gupta et al., 2016);
- D26: (Freeman et al., 2010);
- D27: (Benito et al., 2019; Kwok et al., 2019; Guo et al., 2018; Lew et al., 2013; Freeman et al., 2010);
- D28: (Lee et al., 2012);
- D29: (Kurt et al., 2020; Kwok et al., 2019; Leonidou et al., 2017; Bloemer et al., 2013; Leonidou et al., 2011);
- D30: (Li et al., 2019; Castro & Roldan, 2013);
- D31: (Castro & Roldan, 2013)

Fig. 7. Stream 2 linking antecedents–mediators–outcomes (mediation effect 1).

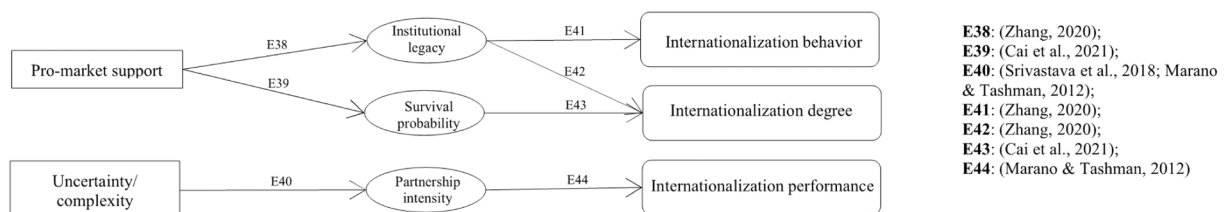
Network-level antecedents, mediators and internationalization outcomes



Key studies

- E1: (Ong et al., 2022; Zhao et al., 2021; Francioni et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2012; Richardson et al., 2012);
- E2: (Ong et al., 2022; Lindstrand & Hånell, 2017);
- E3: (Zhao et al., 2021; Francioni et al., 2017);
- E4: (Li et al., Moschieri et al., 2022; Su et al., 2022; Nambisan & Luo, 2021; Li & Fleury, 2020; Bai & Johanson, 2018; Pinho & Prange, 2016; Lu et al., 2010);
- E5: (Zhao et al., 2021);
- E6: (Guo et al., 2018; Freeman et al., 2010);
- E7: (Lee et al., 2012);
- E8: (Castro & Roldan, 2013);
- E9: (Castro & Roldan, 2013);
- E10: (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021; Oliveira & Johanson, 2021; Cesinger et al., 2016);
- E11: (Kurt et al., 2020);
- E12: (Bai & Johanson, 2018; Lew et al., 2013; Bloemer et al., 2013);
- E13: (Gupta et al., 2016);
- E14: (Kwok et al., 2019; Lew et al., 2013);
- E15: (Kwok et al., 2019; Leonidou et al., 2017; Bloemer et al., 2013; Leonidou et al., 2011);
- E16: (Nordman & Tolstoy, 2014);
- E17: (Kurt et al., 2020);
- E18: (Ciabuschi et al., 2014);
- E19: (Benito et al., 2019);
- E20: (Li et al., 2019);
- E21: (Zhao et al., 2021);
- E22: (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021; Oliveira & Johanson, 2021; Francioni et al., 2017; Cesinger et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2012; Richardson et al., 2012)
- E23: (Ong et al., 2022)
- E24: (Ong et al., 2022; Kurt et al., 2020; Lindstrand & Hånell, 2017);
- E25: (Zhao et al., 2021);
- E26: (Francioni et al., 2017);
- E27: (Li et al., 2022)
- E28: (Moschieri et al., 2022; Su et al., 2022; Nambisan & Luo, 2021; Li & Fleury, 2020; Bai & Johanson, 2018; Pinho & Prange, 2016; Lew et al., 2013; Bloemer et al., 2013);
- E29: (Zhao et al., 2021);
- E30: (Ciabuschi et al., 2014);
- E31: (Gupta et al., 2016);
- E32: (Freeman et al., 2010);
- E33: (Benito et al., 2019; Kwok et al., 2019; Guo et al., 2018; Lew et al., 2013; Freeman et al., 2010);
- E34: (Lee et al., 2012);
- E35: (Kurt et al., 2020; Kwok et al., 2019; Leonidou et al., 2017; Bloemer et al., 2013; Leonidou et al., 2011);
- E36: (Li et al., 2019; Castro & Roldan, 2013);
- E37: (Nordman & Tolstov, 2014; Castro & Roldan, 2013)

Environment-level antecedents, mediators and internationalization



- E38: (Zhang, 2020);
- E39: (Cai et al., 2021);
- E40: (Srivastava et al., 2018; Marano & Tashman, 2012);
- E41: (Zhang, 2020);
- E42: (Zhang, 2020);
- E43: (Cai et al., 2021);
- E44: (Marano & Tashman, 2012)

Fig. 8. Stream 2 linking antecedents–mediators–outcomes (mediation effect 2).

orientation (Riviere & Romero-Martinez, 2021) and market knowledge (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021) and thus influence post-entry financial performance (Riviere & Romero-Martinez, 2021) and internationalization speed (Zahoor & Al-Tabbaa, 2021). At the environmental level, pro-market policies provide an institutional legacy, stimulating FDI (Zhang, 2022).

Moderators. We grouped moderators at individual, firm, network, and environmental levels (see Fig. 9).

Firm-level moderators appear in various studies. Aside from the factors being studied as independent variables, such as firm ownership (e.g., Tu et al., 2021; Dau, 2018; Shi et al., 2017) and firm experience (Yan et al., 2022), there are other factors including interdependence (Obadia & Robson, 2021) or host-market dependence (Sun et al., 2021), philanthropic contributions (Darendeli & Hill, 2016), and motivations (Luo & Bu, 2018), that change the dependence of firms on networks for internationalization.

Network-level factors are also studied as moderators. They include various networks and their characteristics. Most studies discuss the moderating role of national and government relations (e.g., Tian et al., 2021; Kandogan & Hiller, 2018; Li et al., 2018; Liou & Rao-Nicholson, 2017), while others examine personal, business, and political networks at home (Shirodkar et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2016). Sharma et al. (2022) indicate that collaboration is a network orchestration mechanism, enabling an MNE to leverage the benefits of complex relationships. Studying network characteristics, Chen et al. (2019) adopt a different indicator, clout, which reflects the external influence of one country over others, that can mitigate liabilities of outsidership.

Environment-level moderators comprise environmental uncertainty, distance, and home country development. Environmental uncertainty mainly has a negative effect. It includes firm-specific uncertainty (Turkov & Benito, 2020; Müllner, 2016), regional deregulation (Sun et al., 2021), policy uncertainty (Hu et al., 2021), and cultural revolution (Zhang, 2022). The distance includes geographic (Obadia & Robson, 2021; Kim et al., 2020; Asakawa et al., 2018; Presutti et al., 2016) and cultural distance (e.g., common official language) (Useche et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020), which negatively influence the effects of social networks on internationalization. In addition, low home market institutional support amplifies firms' dependence on networks (Eduardsen et al., 2022; Donbesuur et al., 2022). Cannizzaro (2020) empirically validates the model of bargaining influence as network prominence and social influence as structural equivalence. He demonstrates that home country social influence attenuates the negative effect of host country political risk on investment transparency. Using survey data, Pyper and Doherty (2022) prove that positive home country image can strengthen the positive influence network governance can have on export performance.

4. Discussion and directions for a future research agenda

Johanson and Vahlne (2009) observed in their award-winning article that firms form relationships and that environment consists of networks of relationships. Since 2009, numerous scholars have applied network perspectives to firm internationalization, which is seen as “a driver of the evolution of the multinational business enterprise” (Vahlne & Johanson, 2020). We have mapped out the progress of the field from 2009, discussed the range of theories and main conceptual perspectives applied (see Table 1 and Appendix J), and presented an integrative framework (see Fig. 1) that identifies the different aspects of these relationships. This section now discusses the implications of our findings, identifies gaps, and offers a future research agenda, focusing on the theory, content, and methodology at different levels (see Table 2).

4.1. Directions for theory development and utilization

IB theory (e.g., Hennart et al., 2021), network theory (e.g., Yan et al., 2022; Prashantham & Birkinshaw, 2020; Horak and Yang (2016)), and variations of the seminal Network Uppsala Model (e.g., Vahlne &

Johanson, 2020; based on Johanson & Vahlne, 2009) are now widely used in research on the relationship between social networks and internationalization. We conclude that there is still a considerable need to develop or optimize the existing theories or models at three levels.

Individual-level (or micro-level). Few studies discuss psychological (cognitive and emotional) factors in the relationship between social networks and internationalization (Vahlne & Johanson, 2020; based on Johanson & Vahlne, 2009) although decision makers inevitably suffer from some psychology-related limitations (including biases) (Vahlne & Johanson, 2020). Kahneman (2003) noted: “the central characteristic of agents is not that they reason poorly but that they often act intuitively”. Therefore, considering the characteristics of firms' decision makers offers insights into how firms use social networks to facilitate internationalization. For instance, how do managers think about and pursue changes in strategy (Shijaku et al., 2020)? Can managerial knowledge and skills of decision-makers determine the ability of firms to react and learn from failure (Ganotakis et al., 2022)? It is also recommended to explore the entry node and entry process from a psychological perspective. For example, how does social exchange theory serve individuals' choices? What are the decision-making mechanisms of managers (Vahlne & Johanson, 2020)? Besides emphasizing managers, the micro-level underpinnings of firm governance are also crucial. For example, what are the micro-foundations of network competencies (Eduardsen et al., 2022)? What are the micro-foundations of global value chains (GVCs) and their governance mechanisms (Kano et al., 2020)? What is the value and impact of inertia from a micro-perspective (Kumar et al., 2021)?

Firm-level. In an international network, the sources of power and power asymmetries are of great interest (Nippa & Reuer, 2019). For example, how is power acquired, maintained and deployed? Mechanisms that underpin the “strategic asymmetry” between lead firms and their network partners require greater elaboration. For example, how do heterogeneous resources and capabilities, isolating mechanisms, and potential switching costs work (Strange & Humphrey, 2019)? Within ecosystems, what are the key elements of integrative capability for platform firms orchestrating ecosystems that transcend national borders (Li et al., 2019)? In addition, *new scenarios* provide more insights. For example, how do the drivers and mechanisms underlying the international diffusion of digital platforms differ from those of MNEs (Pyper & Doherty, 2022; Li et al., 2019)? How do firms integrate GVCs and digitization (Kano et al., 2020)? What mechanisms influence a start-up's internationalization decisions (e.g., competition; Aharonson et al., 2020)?

Environmental-level. Institutional theory is widely used at the environmental level. However, it is suggested to integrate institutional theory with other perspectives on value creation in networks (Li & Reuer, 2022). For example, how do different dimensions of the institutional environment influence partners' uncertainties and behavior (Li & Reuer, 2022)? The combination and comparison of networks with different cultures need to be explored. For example, how do formal and informal institutions of home and host countries jointly shape the behavior patterns of foreign group networks in local market?

Social networks in internationalization can benefit from developing *network-level* theories. For example, what are the mechanisms affecting international network formation (Shijaku et al., 2020)? How do firms decide which networks to join and the type of firms to embed in the network (Eduardsen et al., 2022)? What are the differences between foreign and domestic partner selection mechanisms (Shijaku et al., 2020) and network positioning? The dynamic insights on establishing a network insider position in foreign market are essential. For example, what is the network (evolution) process in the local foreign market? What is network evolution's potential termination (Shijaku et al., 2020)? Are there different forms of insidership? Do different forms of insidership have different impacts on firm internationalization?

Integration. Few studies offer theoretical syntheses, which involve not only the juxtaposition of theories but an explanation of how theories are

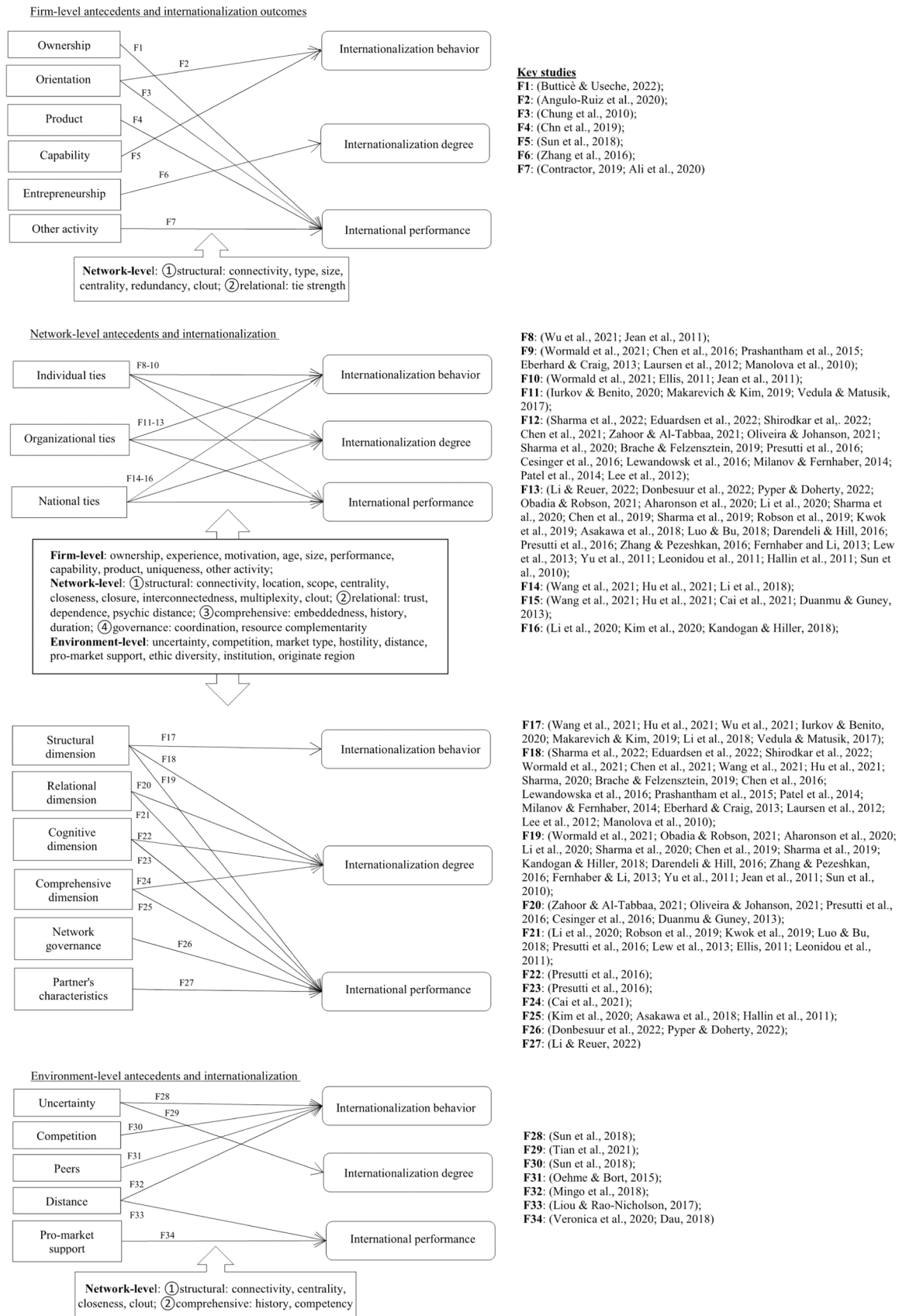


Fig. 9. Stream 2 linking antecedents-moderators-outcomes (moderating effect).

Table 2
Summary of illustrative research opportunities for networks in internationalization.

	Theory	Content	Context	Method
<i>Individual-level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive and emotional factors. Social exchange theory and individuals' choices. Microfoundations of network competencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence of individuals' reliability on international network formation and termination. Evolution of cross-border tripartite relationship. Influence of CEOs on financial results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Longer-term internationalization paths and cross-cultural adjustment of international entrepreneurs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychometrically sound measures Qualitative evidence and field surveys to explore the microprocess of motivation and decision-making
<i>Firm-level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sources of power and power asymmetries. GVCs and digitization. Start-up's internationalization decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Firm characteristics and firms' effective use of networks. Key elements of integrative capability for platform firms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital platforms Bi-cultural (second-generation) immigrant-run SMEs Non-profit firms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empirical studies on overcoming the liability of 'outsidership' for emerging market MNEs
<i>Network-level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Network formation and potential termination Differences between foreign and domestic network positioning. Different forms of insidership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different networks in one framework. The partial (basic units of the network) and total (ecosystem) interconnection of the network. Solutions to issues in establishing networks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Networks of race and gender Short-term, market-based contracts and relationships Formation and evolution of networks under multi-cultural influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Longitudinal quantitative studies to explore the Uppsala model: networks and micro-foundations
<i>Environment-level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutional theory and other perspectives on value creation in networks. Joint impact of formal and informal institutions of home and host countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of immigrant entrepreneurs in sector renewal and new industry evolution. Factors which cause adverse effects. Local distributors who imitate MNE offerings and compete with them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disruptions to GVCs in a Covid era Industries in the decline phase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patterns and dynamics of diplomatic ties Comparative study involving the use of primary or panel data from developed and developing economies
<i>Internationalization</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Dynamize" internalization theory. Life cycle motor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different market exit strategies. Ecosystem-specific advantages created in the home market vs. other markets. 		
<i>Integration</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combination of structural analysis of networks and psychological perspectives. Combination of multi-level theories. 			

compatible and complementary. For example, [Obadia and Robson \(2021\)](#) incorporate network and exchange theories, finding that increased cooperation with foreign distributors may impede export performance. [Zhao et al. \(2021\)](#) combine network and knowledge theories to explore how networks shape internationalization in a host country. Future studies could integrate trust, mode combination processes, and learning theories to explain the flexibility of IB firms ([Benito et al., 2019](#); [Nyamrunda & Freeman, 2021](#)). Besides, combining structural analysis of networks and psychological perspectives provides valuable insights. Additionally, integrating theories at multiple levels, such as individual, firm, network, and environmental levels, helps comprehensively understand social network phenomena and their effects.

4.2. Directions for content development

We categorize the independent variables into three levels—firm, network, and environment (see [Fig. 2](#)). As discussed, many scholars are calling for a future research agenda to focus more on the *individual-level* and micro-foundational issues in firm internationalization using social networks. One such important area is exploring the role of individuals in reducing firms' liability of network outsidership. For example, how do individuals access local networks to serve a firm's internationalization? How does an individual's reliability influence international network formation and termination? How does the cross-border tripartite relationship between outsiders, brokers, and insiders evolve? What are the roles of individuals in the governance of cooperative relationships ([Kano, 2018](#))? What are micro-foundations of the governance of international individual networks? Do owners of second-generation immigrant entrepreneurs take advantage of technological or

internationalization knowledge to internationalize ([Pruthi & Tasavori, 2022](#))? What is the influence of CEOs on resource allocation, global expansion, and financial results of MNEs ([Morgan et al., 2021](#))?

Firm-level issues. Further exploration is needed to understand the impact of certain firm characteristics, such as business groups, innovation investment, and human talent, on the effective utilization of networks by firms ([Li et al., 2018](#)). For example, do multinational diversifying entrants exhibit higher profitability than host country startups ([Balachandran & Hernandez, 2021](#))? What business models lead to fast internationalization ([Hennart et al., 2021](#))? How do the characteristics and strategies of lead firms impact international network governance ([Kano et al., 2020](#))? What are the effects of partner-market characteristics ([Makarevich & Kim, 2019](#))? How does the heterogeneity of subsidiaries impact their relationship with foreign parents ([Sun et al., 2021](#))? Additionally, future studies could focus on new types of firms. For example, platform firms provide an ideal context to explore the effects of product-level developments ([Kumar et al., 2021](#)). Thus, what are the key elements of integrative capabilities for platform firms ([Li et al., 2019](#))? How do platform firms enhance the transferability of FSAs ([Li et al., 2019](#))? How does innovation network activity shift from advanced to emerging markets when Western MNEs engage with SMEs ([Hennart et al., 2021](#))?

Network-level issues. Although existing studies propose numerous network variables (see [Fig. 3](#)), the impact of other structural characteristics, such as network cohesion and structural holes, can be extended ([Mingo et al., 2018](#); [Ong et al., 2022](#)). Moreover, future studies can identify factors that shape whole network development ([Berns et al., 2021](#)); partner search, selection, and contracting center stages ([Nippa & Reuer, 2019](#)); and inter-partner value creation processes ([Sun et al., 2021](#)). Additionally, it is feasible to include different networks in one

framework. For example, how do organizational and individual networks interact? How do interfirm networks differ from networks between firms and other public and non-profit actors, such as media and associations? What is the distinction between strategically establishing ties and established connections (Makarevich & Kim, 2019)? Furthermore, how do the partial (basic units of the network) and total (ecosystem) components of the network interact?

To optimize the network's potential for internationalization, consideration should be given to connective efficiency issues. These issues include combination mode adjustments, technical adjustments, relationship development, trust, and learning (Benito et al., 2019). Future research can also provide optimization solutions. For example, how do MNEs leverage resources and knowledge in different types of nodes in networks (Li & Bathelt, 2018)? How do variations in governance shape network effectiveness (Berns et al., 2021)? Studies to solve issues in establishing networks are encouraged. For example, how do firms solve secrecy questions? Under what conditions and how might leakage improve performance (Inkpen et al., 2019)? How do firms utilize the competitive context and consequences of collaboration (Nippa & Reuer, 2019)?

Environment-level issues. Although numerous studies discuss the influence of institutions on the relationship of networks and internationalization (e.g., Mingo et al., 2018; Pinto et al., 2017), the institutional factors can be extended in different contexts. For example, how do institutional factors which influence immigrant entrepreneurs attract foreign venture capital investments (Wormald et al., 2021)? What factors make a region an attractive place for MNEs? What effects do MNEs' entry have on regional start-ups' internationalization behavior (Aharonson et al., 2020)?

Studies can also adopt a dynamic perspective to explore the co-evolution with local business ecosystems (Luo et al., 2019). For example, how do immigrant entrepreneurs assist in sector renewal and new industry evolution? Moreover, some adverse events can also be explored. These events include Covid, anti-globalization sentiments (Hennart et al., 2021; Kano, 2018), populism and "de-globalization" forces (Cannizzaro, 2020), and conflicts such as the boycott of sporting events or criticism voiced by government leaders (Li et al., 2020). Some behaviors of firms or their stakeholders can cause adverse effects. These behaviors include the poor choice of governance institution, opportunism by partners (Verbeke et al., 2019), imitation, and competition of local distributors. Refusal of immigrant entrepreneurs to include local firms into their networks in the host market can impact both their own and local firms (Ong et al., 2022).

Internationalization issues. As shown in Fig. 2, we classified internationalization outcomes into behavior, degree, and performance. In terms of behavior, research needs to distinguish between different market expansion strategies (e.g., sales-based foreign market expansion) (Iurkov & Benito, 2018) and exit strategies (e.g., sales-based exit) (Iurkov & Benito, 2020). As for performance, it can be extended into ecosystems. Future studies can assess the net benefit for both the host and home countries in a cross-national ecosystem of entrepreneurship (Wormald et al., 2021). Ecosystem-specific advantages created in the home market versus other markets can also be studied (Ong et al., 2022; Li et al., 2019).

4.3. Directions for methodology development

Our sample studies show great diversity in methods and contexts such as firm, industry, and market types (see Appendix H), although some settings are not receiving sufficient attention.

Contextual orientations. For individuals, it is suggested to explore longer-term processes of cross-cultural and internationalization paths of international entrepreneurs. For firms, it is necessary to consider the characteristics of different firms. Some firms, particularly SMEs, are more subject to institutional fragility (Shi et al., 2017). Thus, business group networks are more beneficial for SMEs (Eduardsen et al., 2022). It

is worth investigating whether the effects of political networks are distinct for SMEs (Li et al., 2018). Contrasting traditional firms, digital platforms possess an evolutionary nature and product modularity, which helps overcome cultural distance. Consequently, the impact of social networks on the internationalization of iBusiness firms has garnered significant attention (Brouthers et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2019). Besides, bi-cultural (second-generation) immigrant-run SMEs (Ong et al., 2022) and non-profit firms are also interesting. Further, future studies could compare strategies for international expansion in industries thriving exclusively in developing countries (e.g., mobile money) versus those thriving across both developing and developed countries (e.g., smartphones) (Balachandran & Hernandez, 2021). Industries in the decline phase or facing disruptions to GVCs in the Covid era can also provide new insights (Ong et al., 2022).

To generalize conclusions, future studies could compare the role of the state among different emerging economies such as Brazil, India, Russia (Shi et al., 2017), and Arabia. Are the roles of Country-of-Origin (CoO) networks from different home countries the same (Berns et al., 2021; Urzelai & Puig, 2019)? If not, how and why do they differ? How do social networks form and evolve under multi-cultural influence? What is special in the context where the liability of outsidership is central to business development (Johanson & Johanson, 2021; Ong et al., 2022)? What are suitable strategies in conditions where local communities are prioritized (Röell et al., 2022)? Studies can also be extended to various types of social networks, such as race and gender networks (Wormald et al., 2021), as well as short-term, market-based contracts/relationships (Kano, 2018).

Methodological orientations. Although many studies in our review are qualitative, there remains limited in-depth qualitative comparative studies (Zahoor et al., 2022). To help understand the complexities of networks in internationalization, longitudinal qualitative studies are essential (Moschieri et al., 2022; Pyper & Doherty, 2022). A comparative study involving the use of primary or panel data from developed and developing economies helps understand how infrastructural, sociocultural, and institutional conditions moderate the effects (Röell et al., 2022).

Further, we suggest more field surveys to explore the micro process of motivation and decision making for internationalization choices (Zhang, 2022). Psychometrically sound measures of managers' decision-making processes are needed (Morgan et al., 2018). For example, how are heuristics used in internationalization decisions (Guercini & Freeman, 2021)? Despite considerable studies on political ties, some technical problems remain. For example, how do governments distinguish corporations reacting to government initiatives from corporations strategically exploiting government ties (Li et al., 2018)? How can scholars identify the patterns and dynamics of diplomatic ties? It is suggested to design measures or identify key diplomatic events such as state visits based on news-item-related measures (Li et al., 2018).

4.4. Limitations

Despite rich insights, our study is not free from limitations. First, to ensure the quality of our review, we limited our focus to articles in highly ranked international journals. As a result, we excluded other business journals, books, unpublished papers, and theses. We focused only on English journals and searched publications based on specific strings. In addition, we covered research after the publication of the seminal work, the Network Uppsala Model (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009), although the authors were not alone in noting the importance of network relationships for internationalization. Hence there might be a publication bias. However, Johanson and Vahlne (2009)'s article remains one of the most highly cited and influential papers in IB. Given the number of selected studies (n = 210), our focus on the articles published after 2009 in high-quality journals provides a comprehensive picture of social networks in internationalization. Second, we used the AMO framework to integrate the findings of previous studies. Although this

framework serves our analysis well and aligns with other recent and comparable reviews (e.g., Zahoor et al., 2020), there may be limitations in the coding of our selected studies. However, we used an iterative inductive-deductive approach, to help us identify the most important themes in the relationship between social networks and internationalization. Third, we focused on the impact of social networks on internationalization given their relevance. We also included several studies on GVCs and ecosystems which are the upper layer of networks and a combination of internationalization and types of networks. Although these studies are all qualitative, they have comprehensively reviewed and summarized the relevant research in their respective fields. Thus, we provide a deep understanding of the interaction of these networks and firm internationalization, along with a clear future research agenda.

5. Conclusion

The award-winning paper of Johanson and Vahlne (2009) provides arguments that markets are networks of relationships, and firms are interacting with various networks. The authors proposed a meaningful expression of “insidership” in IB, which is best understood as “a driver of the evolution of the multinational business enterprise”. Now new global phenomena such as the Covid-19 pandemic, de-globalization, sanction

initiatives, trade wars, and conflict-based “hard” wars shape changes across organizations and institutions. Networks facilitate our understanding of IB. Therefore, we provide a comprehensive picture of social networks in internationalization. We identify social networks in the individual, organizational, and national levels and how their characteristics, mainly positively, affect firm internationalization behavior, degree, and performance through resources, trust, knowledge, and capabilities. We analyze the boundary conditions from firm, network and environment levels. We propose that research might be contemplated in more diverse contexts, including underdeveloped countries. Furthermore, new industries such as digital platforms are promising to develop new approaches and models. Finally, we call for more studies on the theoretical syntheses in a richer array of contextual locations. More importantly, we call for attention on the role of decision-makers which can provide rich insights into IB and cognitive thinking in a rapidly changing global landscape of persistent disruptions.

Appendix K: Theories used.

Data Availability

Data will be made available on request.

Appendix A

Related reviews.

Study	Purpose	Criteria	Framework	Review type
Dekel-Dachs et al. (2021)	Advance alternative perspectives on institutional voids, networks and the internationalization of SMEs in emerging economies.	Research focuses on small business, institutional approach, emerging economy perspective, and internationalization.	Barriers to internationalization, the role of institutions, and networks which compensate for institutional voids.	Systematic
Zahoor et al. (2020)	Review, analyze, and critically synthesize the research into SMEs' collaborative internationalization, identify gaps and articulate potential areas for future studies.	Studies where collaboration is explicitly linked to internationalization of SMEs, and whose context concerns SMEs.	Key trends, theories, and perspectives on factors influencing internationalization in SMEs.	Systematic
Beamish and Lupton (2015)	Explore the role of JWB in disseminating expertise on the successful management of cross-border, inter-firm collaboration.	Articles published in JWB and elsewhere on “joint venture” or “alliance”.	Theme of the article, theoretical perspectives, and methodology.	Semi-structured
Li and Fleury (2020)	Explore the specifics of LoO in the case of EMNEs and how to overcome it; how can EMNEs develop absorptive capacity to overcome the LoO.	Papers published on EMNEs that cite Johanson and Vahlne (2009); papers also cited Cohen and Levinthal (1990).	Overview of J&V 2009; EMNEs develop absorptive capacity in overseas markets.	Narrative
Kurta and Kurt (2020)	Propose social network analysis (SNA) to IB scholarship as a promising tool for systematically describing, modelling and analyzing network relationships.		Key concepts in SNA and the utilization of SNA in IB.	Narrative
Cuypers et al. (2020)	Investigate IB-related phenomena at different levels that use network arguments, measures, or methodology.		Level of analysis: inter-personal, inter-subsidiary, inter-firm, and inter-location.	Narrative

Appendix B

Search terms and their definitions.

Keyword	Definition	Study	Condition
Internationalization	It is “the process through which a firm moves from operating solely in its domestic marketplace to international markets (Javalgi et al., 2003, p. 185).”	Amdam et al. (2020, p. 1)	
Network	It “can be defined as a set of nodes as well as the connections and the absence of connections between these nodes”. “These networks concern the interactions, relationships and ties existing between firms, and may arise through the need to access new assets and skills, and keep pace with competitors (Ahuja 2000).”	Cuypers et al. (2020, p. 715); Huggins (2010, p. 335)	
Relationship	“Social network research focuses on relationships (connections), and the structure of these relationships.”	Brass (2022, p. 227)	

(continued on next page)

(continued)

Keyword	Definition	Study	Condition
Tie	"In organizational research, the ties often involve information flow resulting from some form of interaction, such as communication or advice, or a more abstract connection, such as trust, friendship, or influence."	Brass (2022, p. 227)	
Collaboration	It is defined as "the interaction, relationship, and ties existing between a firm and other organizations (Huggins 2010)".	Zahoor et al. (2020, p. 430)	
Alliance	It is defined as "a close, collaborative relationship between two, or more, firms with the intent of accomplishing mutually compatible goals that would be difficult for each to accomplish alone" (Spekman et al., 2000, p. 37)."	Street and Cameron (2007, p. 241)	
Different forms of relationships			
Guanxi	"Guanxi can be defined as not only a social relationship, but also a relationship between people, forces, and objectives (Du et al., 2019; Yang, 1994) and is considered to be an informal institution (North, 1990; Peng et al., 2009)."	Zhang et al. (2021, p. 2)	China
Yongo	"Yongo can be described as consisting of affective ties between individual actors that form on an aggregate organizational level; they operate as particularistic and rather exclusive informal networks (Horak 2014, Lew 2013, Yee 2000)."	Horak (2020, p. 128)	South Korea
Jinmyaku	"Jin stands for 'person' and myaku is translated into 'vein,' as used in the field of geology to specify a vein of mineral deposits."	Horak (2020, p. 130)	Japan
Wasta	"Wasta refers to a middleman or 'connection' between someone who wants a job or government service and someone who is in a designation to provide it (Ramady, 2016)."	Mukhtar et al. (2022, p. 4)	Middle East
Et-moone	"Et-moone can be conceptualized as a deep and solid bond that helps partners to be more flexible in their business interactions, which allows them to make one-sided decisions in business relationships without being concerned that a dispute might occur between the parties."	Alalwan et al. (2021, p. 242)	Arabia
Hawala	"Hawala means 'ruju karna' (to refer), with reference to someone, to refer in trust, by attributing to someone (Urdu Lughat, 2020)."	Mukhtar et al. (2022, p. 4)	Pakistan
Sifarish	"The act of achieving ends on the basis of network connections is labelled as sifarish."	Nadeem and Kayani (2019, p. 970)	Pakistan
Clanism	"Clanism is an informal social network characterized by an 'extensive network of kin and fictive kin ties, or perceived and imagined kinship relations' (Collins 2006)."	Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron (2013, p. 111)	Kazakhstan
Blat	"Blat is the use of personal networks and informal contacts to obtain goods and services in short supply and to skirt formal procedures (Ledeneva, 1998)."	Ledeneva (2008, p. 120)	Russia / post-Soviet Union
Boon Koon	"Once relationships are developed and maintained, a store of goodwill is established (Boon koon)."	Pimpa (2008, p. 236)	Thailand
Ubuntu	"Ubuntu refers to the idea that one exists because of others within the community."	Kamoche (2021, p. 2)	Africa
Jeitinho	"Flexible adaptation." "Such solutions often include the use of personal influence or relationships."	Nardon and Aten (2008, p. 263, 270)	Brazil

Appendix C. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Description	Reason for inclusion	Reason for exclusion	Exemplary evidence
Time-period	Articles published between 2010 and 2021 to seize the research frontier	Not applicable	
Conceptual boundaries	Relationship of the firm or top manager(s) with other organization(s) or individual(s) Intra-firm networks Extra-firm networks which influence the firm The production and operation activities of firms are not limited to one country	Not applicable	
Search terms	Boolean logic with regard to network-related themes and "internationalization" in FT50 and management journals.	Not applicable	
Database	Web of Science, Scopus	Not applicable	
Quality criteria	50 Journals used in Financial Times Research Rank (FT50, 2016) JourQual 2015 A/B, ABDC 2019 A/A* , Cnrs 2020 1/1 * /2, Scopus CiteSc 2021 7 + in Journal Quality List (Harzing, 2022)	Not applicable	
Relevance criteria	Management journals	Bus Hist, Comm, Economics, F&A, PSM, Psychology, Sociology, Tourism subjects in JQL	<i>Annual Review of Sociology, Journal of Travel Research</i>
Fit-for-purpose criteria	Indicates the influence of social networks on firms' internationalization The influence of networks. Research on the behavior or performance of a firm in a foreign market.	The paper does not refer directly to the relationship between network and internationalization. Effects of internationalization on networks. Do not refer to a foreign market.	Arregle et al. (2016); Petricevic and Teece (2019); Wang et al. (2020); Li, Li, Goerzen, Shi (2018)

Appendix D. Keywords and search strings

Group string	Search strings (non-IB-focused journals)	Search strings (IB-focused journals)
1	Topic* "network" AND Topic "internationalization" AND Publication Titles "XXX"	Topic "network" AND Publication Titles "XXX"

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(continued)

Group string	Search strings (non-IB-focused journals)	Search strings (IB-focused journals)
2	Topic "relationship" AND Topic "internationalization" AND Publication Titles "XXX"	Topic "relationship" AND Publication Titles "XXX"
3	Topic "tie" AND Topic "internationalization" AND Publication Titles "XXX"	Topic "tie" AND Publication Titles "XXX"
4	Topic "collaboration" AND Topic "internationalization" AND Publication Titles "XXX"	Topic "collaboration" AND Publication Titles "XXX"
5	Topic "alliance" AND Topic "internationalization" AND Publication Titles "XXX"	Topic "alliance" AND Publication Titles "XXX"
6	Topic "Guanxi" OR "Yongo" OR "Jinmyaku" OR "Wasta" OR "Et-moone" OR "Hawala" OR "Sifarish" OR "Clanism" OR "Blat" OR "Boon" OR "Koon" OR "Ubuntu" OR "Jeitinho" AND Topic "internationalization" AND Publication Titles "XXX"	Topic "Guanxi" OR "Yongo" OR "Jinmyaku" OR "Wasta" OR "Et-moone" OR "Hawala" OR "Sifarish" OR "Clanism" OR "Blat" OR "Boon" OR "Koon" OR "Ubuntu" OR "Jeitinho" AND Publication Titles "XXX"

*Note: "Topic" in Web of Science and "Article title, Abstract

Appendix E. Summary of literature search results on social networks in internationalization

Subject	Journal	Search result	Remove duplication
FT50 (2016)			
<i>Management</i>	Academy of Management Journal	6	6
	Academy of Management Review	2	2
	Administrative Science Quarterly	1	1
	Journal of Management	14	13
	Journal of Management Studies	21	18
	Strategic Management Journal	26	19
	Harvard Business Review	0	0
	Sloan Management Review	0	0
<i>Marketing</i>	Journal of Consumer Psychology	0	0
	Journal of Consumer Research	0	0
	Journal of Marketing	0	0
	Journal of Marketing Research	1	1
	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	7	3
	Marketing Science	1	1
<i>Entrepreneurship</i>	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	23	17
	Journal of Business Venturing	27	18
	Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal	11	9
<i>Ethics</i>	Journal of Business Ethics	7	7
<i>Human Resources</i>	Human Relations	1	1
	Human Resource Management	3	3
<i>Organizational Behaviour</i>	Journal of Applied Psychology	0	0
	Organization Science	10	4
	Organization Studies	4	3
	Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes	0	0
<i>Operations & Information Systems</i>	Information Systems Research	0	0
	Journal of Management Information Systems	0	0
	Journal of Operations Management	4	2
	Management Science	0	0
	Manufacturing & Service Operations Management	0	0
	MIS Quarterly	1	1
	Operations Research	0	0
	Production and Operations Management	0	0
<i>Accounting</i>	Accounting, Organizations and Society	0	0
	Accounting Review	0	0
	Contemporary Accounting Research	0	0
	Journal of Accounting and Economics	0	0
	Journal of Accounting Research	0	0
	Review of Accounting Studies	0	0
<i>Finance</i>	Journal of Finance	0	0
	Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis	0	0
	Journal of Financial Economics	0	0
	Review of Finance	0	0
	Review of Financial Studies	0	0
<i>Management, Economics</i>	Research Policy	27	19
<i>Economics</i>	American Economic Review	0	0
	Econometrica	0	0
	Journal of Political Economy	0	0
	Quarterly Journal of Economics	0	0
	Review of Economic Studies	0	0

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Subject	Journal	Search result	Remove duplication
JQL (2022)			
<i>Entrep Gen & Strat</i>	Small Business Economics	17	16
	Business & Society	3	3
<i>Innovation Marketing</i>	Long Range Planning	26	19
	Organizational Research Methods	0	0
	International Journal of Management Reviews	9	7
	Strategic Organization	1	1
	Academy of Management Perspectives	5	4
	Academy of Management Annals	0	0
	Journal of Product Innovation Management	7	4
	Industrial Marketing Management	41	35
	Journal of Retailing	1	1
	Journal of Business Research	134	112
<i>MIS, KM</i>	International Journal of Research in Marketing	3	2
	Journal of International Marketing	45	33
	Journal of Service Research	0	0
	Journal of Interactive Marketing	0	0
	Decision Support Systems	0	0
	Journal of Information Technology	0	0
	Information and Management	0	0
	Journal of Strategic Information Systems	0	0
	Information Systems Journal	0	0
	International Journal of Operations and Production Management	0	0
<i>OR,MS,POM</i>	European Journal of Operational Research	0	0
	Journal of Business Logistics	0	0
	International Journal of Production Economics	5	5
<i>OS/OB,HRM/IR</i>	Transportation Research, Part A: Policy and Practice	0	0
	Personnel Psychology	0	0
	Journal of Organizational Behavior	0	0
	Leadership Quarterly	0	0
<i>IB</i>	Human Resource Management Review	3	1
	Journal of International Business Studies	462	343
	Journal of World Business	419	340
Total	International Business Review	771	563
		2149	1637

Appendix F

Latest systematic reviews and their methods.

Study	Purpose	Criteria	Scope	Period	Number
Fatima and Elbanna (JBE, 2023)	Survey the literature on CSR implementation.	Studies with main topic on CSR implementation or one of the four dimensions	ABDC (B and above) and AJG (3 and above)	2004–2021	139
Mishra et al. (JBE, 2022)	Take stock of the extant theorization and highlight unexplored opportunities for further development.	Studies that examine unethical pro-organizational behavior empirically or theoretically.	FT50 and ABDC (A*/A)	2010–2020	33
Jeon and Maula (JBV, 2022)	Combine the understanding of the CVC phenomenon with that of the paradox literature to evaluate how the understanding of the tensions in the CVC phenomenon has progressively developed.	Articles relevant to tensions in CVC.	FT50 and their references	1981–2019	111
Busch (JMS, 2022)	Developed a multi-level theory of (cultivating) serendipity that captures how, why, and when serendipity can emerge and be facilitated in the organizational context.	Papers that provide key demarcations and insights related to serendipity.	FT50 and their references	Before 2021	24
Bonfrer et al. (JoR, 2022)	Examine the body of empirical research available on the impact of retail store formats on both consumer responses and on competitive conduct.	Articles that addressed the research question.		1990–2020	178
Cuyper et al. (JIBS, 2022)	Explore the role of TMTs in IB research.	Articles that have an international focus	AJG (3 and above) and IB journals (2 *) and their references	1984 (seminal work) –present	140
Freixanet (JWB, 2022)	Understand the complex and sometimes apparently paradoxical links between export promotion and organizational behavior.	Articles that are fully linked to the topic.		1965–2021	192
Juergen-sen et al. (IBR, 2022)	Understand how innovation-related choices fit within a modern firm’s objectives to become (more) internationally diversified, and vice versa.	Articles that clearly focused on (in the case of theoretical/review papers) or tested (in the case of empirical studies) the ID-I relationship.	AJG (3 and above) (13)	1989 (influential studies)–2019	154
Soga et al. (JBR, 2022)	Map an organized framework that maps out the intellectual structure of pitfalls associated with flexible working practices	Articles which present pitfalls associated with FWP		2011 (legal provisions)–mid-2021	113

Appendix G. Summary of final results on social networks in internationalization

Publication year	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed	Total
2010	5	4	0	9
2011	8	4	0	12
2012	4	5	0	9
2013	8	2	0	10
2014	5	3	0	8
2015	2	2	1	5
2016	11	7	1	19
2017	8	4	0	12
2018	16	7	0	23
2019	8	13	2	23
2020	16	16	0	32
2021	17	9	3	29
2022	12	7	0	19
Grand total	120	83	7	210
Journal of Management Studies	1	3	0	4
Strategic Management Journal	3	0	1	4
Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice	1	0	0	1
Journal of Business Venturing	3	0	0	3
Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal	2	0	0	2
Organization Science	2	0	0	2
Organization Studies	0	1	0	1
MIS Quarterly	0	1	0	1
Research Policy	0	1	0	1
Small Business Economics	1	1	0	2
Long Range Planning	0	1	1	2
International Journal of Management Reviews	0	2	0	2
Industrial Marketing Management	2	4	0	6
Journal of Business Research	7	3	1	11
Journal of International Marketing	0	2	0	2
International Journal of Production Economics	0	1	0	1
Journal of International Business Studies	36	27	1	60
Journal of World Business	26	13	2	41
International Business Review	36	23	1	60
Total	120	83	7	210

Note: The first search time is on October 31, 2022 and the second time is on April 26, 2023. We corrected years to official publication years instead of “early access” years.

Appendix H

Summary of literature on regions, firms, and industries.

Home country	Host country	Firm	Industry
Developed	Developed	Business	Manufacturing (19)
Italy (13) US (12)	US (4) Japan (1)	MNEs (77)	ICT (12)
UK (6) Germany (6)	South Korea (1)	Exporters (17)	High-tech (5)
Japan (5) Canada (4)	France (1) Sweden (1)	Platforms (6)	Auto (5)
Sweden (4) Spain (3)		Venture capital firms (6)	Biotech (4)
Czech (2) Norway (2)	Developing	Social firms (1)	Software (4)
Finland (2) Portugal (1)	China (18) India (3)		Textile (3)
Australia (1) Greece (1)	Egypt (1) Indonesia (1)		Pharmaceutical (3)
Chile (1) Switzerland (1)	Saudi Arabia (1)	Ownership	Ibusiness (3)
France (1) Poland (1)	Vietnam (1) Brazil (1)	Joint venture (5)	Consumer goods (3)
New Zealand (1)	Thailand (1) Argentina (1)	Family firms (3)	Mobile money (2)
South Korea (1)		Immigrant firms (2)	R&D-active (2)
Scotland (1)	Underdeveloped	(2)	Industrial (2)
The Netherlands (1)	Bangladesh (1)	Sovereign wealth funds (1)	Construction (2)
	Libya (1)		Wine (2)
Developing		Size	Maritime(2)
China (28) India (7)	Multinational	Listed firms (10)	Oil (1)
Turkey (3) Brazil (1)	Europe (3)	Startups (11)	Internet (1)
Syria (1) Iran (1)	Advanced economies (3)	Large firms (3)	Low-tech (1)
Bulgaria (1) Malaysia (1)	Sub-Saharan Africa (3)	Medium and large firms (1)	Electronics (1)
	Developing countries (1)	Small and medium firms (42)	Counterfeit and pirated goods (1)
Underdeveloped	Emerging economies (1)	Small firms (6)	Electricity generation (1)
	OECD countries (1)		Retail (1)
Multinational	Latin America; Southeast Asia; Eastern Europe (1)		Crowdfunding (1)
Europe (3)	EU; China (1)		Food; ICT (1)
EU (1)			
Central and Eastern Europe (1)			

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Home country	Host country	Firm	Industry
Latin America (1)	Africa (1)		Chemical;
Asia (1)	Asia (1)		engineering (1)
South African (1)	UK; Germany; Denmark		Pharmaceutical; ICT
US; Europe; South Korea (1)	(1)		(1)
Finland; New Zealand; Sweden (1)	Rumania; China (1)		
India; Ireland; Israel (1)	Canada; China (1)		
Brazil; China; Poland (1)	India; China (1)		
India; Turkey; China (1)	Vietnam; China (1)		
Germany; Australia (1)			
Australia; New Zealand (1)			
Canada; China (1)			
India; China (1)			
Costa Rica; Italy (1)			

Appendix I

Summary of literature on methods and models.

Method	Model
Literature review (32)	SEM (26)
Concept paper (17)	OLS (21)
Review paper (15)	Logit (10)
	Logistic (8)
Secondary data (76)	Hazard (7)
Secondary survey data (12)	Negative binomial (6)
	Tobit (6)
Survey (45)	Heckman (5)
	Probit (4)
Interview (53)	Event-history (4)
Longitudinal interviews (10)	CFA (3)
Triangulation techniques (case study) (39)	Poisson (3)
	2SLS (3)
Interview and survey (2)	GLS (3)
	fsQCA (3)
Interview and secondary data (3)	DID (2)
	LISREL (2)
Quasi-experiment (2)	

Appendix J

Mapping the landscape of theories and research questions.

Theory	Research Question
Individual-level	
Social capital theory (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of formal network centrality of TMT in foreign expansion (Wu et al., 2021). Interaction of diaspora and network effects on new venture internationalization (Prashantham et al., 2015). Influence of localized potential social capital on firms' awareness of business opportunities (Laursen et al., 2012). Influence of individuals' social capital and its dimensions on SMEs' acquisition of foreign market knowledge and financial resources (Lindstrand et al., 2011). Relations between structural, cognitive and relational aspects of the international network of SME CEOs and two internationalization outcomes – speed and performance (Musteen et al., 2010).
Cognitive theory (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Micro-mechanism of formal and informal institutional interaction and the role of individual cognition in internationalization (Li et al., 2022).
Resource dependence theory (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Double-edged sword effects of immigrant ownership (Morgan et al., 2018). Double-edged sword effects of immigrant ownership (Morgan et al., 2018).
Agency theory (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributions of independent directors with human and social capital on firm internationalization (Chen et al., 2016). Individual and joint effects of board structure, network centrality through board interlocks and ownership structure on firm's growth strategies (Singh & Delios, 2017).
Practice theory (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributions of independent directors with human and social capital to firm internationalization (Chen et al., 2016).
Entrepreneurship theory (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Characteristics and traits of successful international entrepreneurs (Goxe et al., 2022). The role of structural and relational embeddedness of international networks in firm internationalization (Musteen et al., 2014).
Firm-level	
Learning theory (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacts of time-out period from exporting on foreign market re-entry (Ganotakis et al., 2022). A synthesis of the determinants of equity ownership stake in foreign investment decisions (Chhabra et al., 2021).

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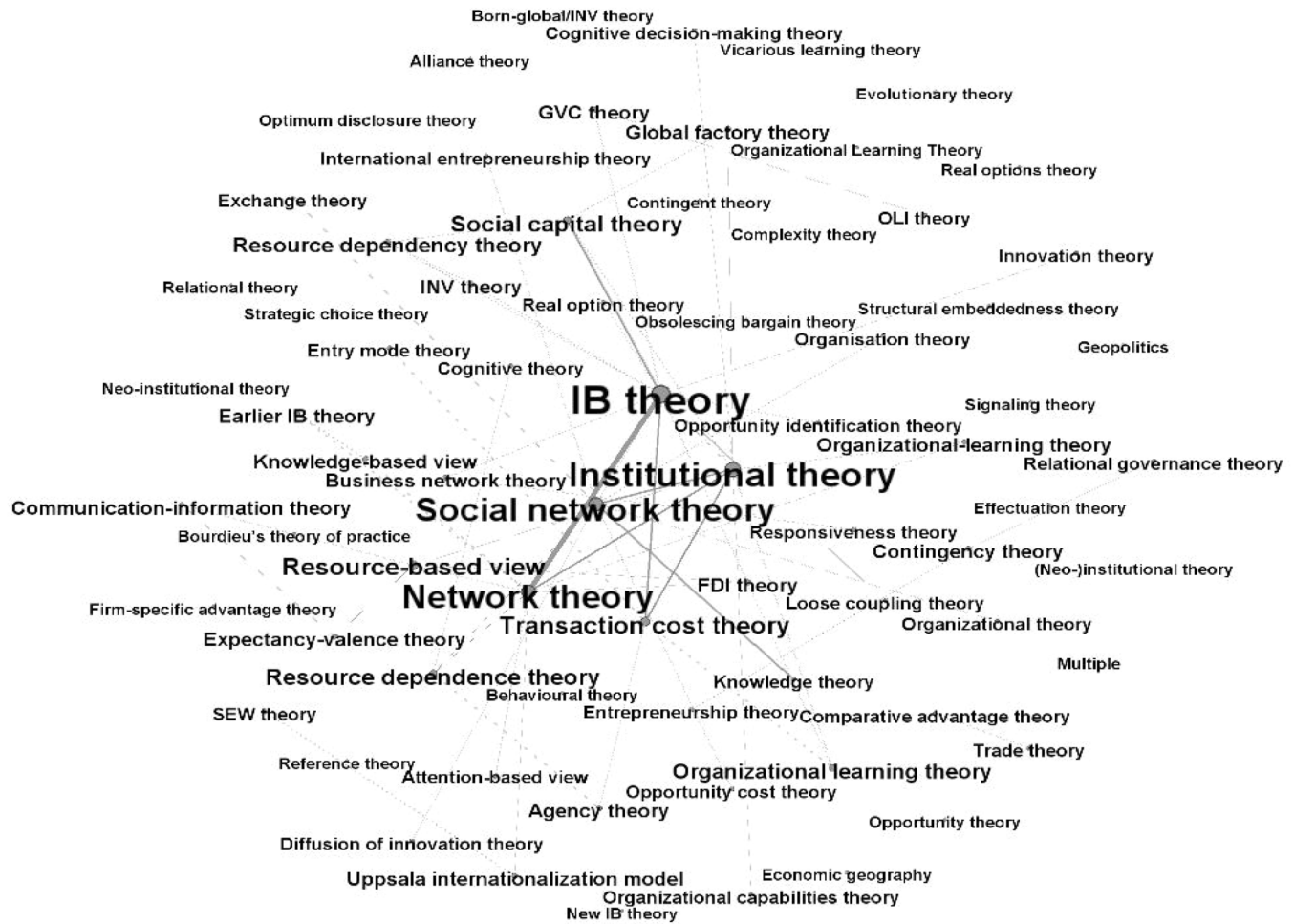
Theory	Research Question
Social capital theory (7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts of interfirm relationships on innovation and overall performance during SME internationalization (Ali et al., 2020). • Implications of the activity of a variety of regional actors for small and medium start-ups (Aharonson et al., 2020). • Benefits of syndicating with foreign VC firms for domestic VC firms in emerging markets (Khurshed et al., 2020). • Impacts of network-enabled imitation processes on young SMEs' internationalization (Oehme & Bort, 2015). • Effects of domestic partners on new venture internationalization (Milanov & Fernhaber, 2014). • Theoretical understanding of the small firm internationalization process (Fletcher & Harris, 2012). • Direct and indirect effects of information exchange on IJV performance (Kwok et al., 2019). • Dynamics of internationalization as an entrepreneurial and networked endeavour (Tian et al., 2018). • Influence of evolution of different dimensions of social capital between an SME and its key foreign customers on the firm's foreign performance growth (Presutti et al., 2016). • Influence of resource governance of international ventures on dynamic capability and market performance (Lew et al., 2013). • Interrelations between the dimensions of capital and their effects on the international market share of MNEs (Castro and Roldan, 2013).
Transaction cost theory (7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynamic influence of social capital on new venture internationalization (Prashantham and Dhanaraj, 2010). • A synthesis of the determinants of equity ownership stake in foreign investment decisions (Chhabra et al., 2021). • Business models of digital service multinationals (Hennart, 2019). • Implications for IB theory from the disparities between the ownership, control, and responsibility boundaries of the firm (Narula, 2019). • Impacts of internationalizing firms' host and home country bank relationships on their international-specific investments and growth (Eriksson et al., 2017). • The role of government support on the ownership choices by multinationals in cross-border acquisitions (Pinto et al., 2017). • Individual and joint effects of board structure, network centrality through board interlocks and ownership structure on firm's growth strategies (Singh & Delios, 2017).
Resource-based view (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinctions between uncertainty and manageable risk of entry modes (Mullner, 2016). • The ways to develop and leverage multiple political networking capabilities to institutionalize protection for transferrable intangible assets in weak institutional environments (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2022). • Context-specific micro-foundations that impact on internationalisation of SMEs in emerging markets (Jafari-Sadeghi et al., 2021). • Implications of comparative institutional advantages for foreign entrants (Cui et al., 2017). • Distinct internationalization patterns of small firms and capabilities' and resources' impacts on these patterns (Baum et al., 2015). • Location choice behaviors of firms originating in newly industrialized economies investing in emerging countries (Lei & Chen, 2011). • Relationships between capabilities, resources, and international performance among entrepreneurial firms in an emerging economy (Lu et al., 2010).
Resource dependence theory (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence of firms' political activities and connections in their home country on their internationalization (Shirodkar et al., 2022). • Impacts of political connections on the performance of Chinese exporter and non-exporter firms (Sharma et al., 2020). • Heterogeneity of political connections (PCs) and the relationship between PCs and OFDI (Deng et al., 2018). • Double-edged sword effects of immigrant ownership (Morgan et al., 2018). • A resource dependence approach to explain the effect of state participation on the dissolution of IJVs (Mohr et al., 2016). • Influence of foreign firms' position in alliance network in host country on their further allying with firms from the host and home countries (Zhang and Pezeshkan, 2016). • Contributions of independent directors with human and social capital on firm internationalization (Chen et al., 2016). • A framework of export antecedents of subcontracting (Kim & Hemmert, 2016).
Knowledge-based theory (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ways networks shape internationalization in a host country (Zhao et al., 2021). • The ways pioneering firms deploy and develop capabilities to pursue different internationalization strategies (Balachandran & Hernandez, 2021). • Influence of Social Networking Site usage in a large, emerging economy on firms' international orientations (Williams et al., 2020). • MNEs' strategies to leverage local knowledge pools by locating affiliates across clusters (Li & Bathelt, 2018). • A new model of rapid knowledge development, for understanding the inter-relationships of trust and inter-organizational co-dependency (Freeman et al., 2010).
Effectuation theory (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence of effectuation and causation approaches to international networking on post-entry performance (Donbesuur et al., 2022). • Performance implications of the distinct mechanisms represented by business and social networks in the effectual internationalization (Bai et al., 2021). • Interrelations of knowledge, network relationships, and decision-making logic throughout a firm's internationalization process (Vissak et al., 2020). • The ways effectuation theory helps to answer how international opportunities are developed (Karami et al., 2020).
Contingency theory (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits of governance of channel partners (Pyper & Doherty, 2022). • Effects of ethnic populations on international opportunity exploitation (Kim et al., 2020). • A composition-based logic toward international expansion by emerging market firms (Luo & Bu, 2018).
Real option theory (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing and scale of market entry or exit, entry mode and governance form, and the role of multinational networks (Chi et al., 2019). • Interaction of real options orientations of subsidiaries and general characteristics of multinational enterprise networks (Chung et al., 2010).
Exchange theory (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects of cooperation with foreign distributors on export performance (Obadia & Robson, 2021).
Innovation theory (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ways MNEs manage emerging markets (Elg et al., 2015). • Expansion of internationalization theory to iBusiness firms (Brouthers et al., 2016).
Complexity theory (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linkage among innovation, innovation cooperation, and export (Lewandowska et al., 2016). • Integration of the network-centric and complex systems in internationalization (Chandra & Wilkinson, 2017).
Obsolescing bargain theory (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships between competitiveness and innovation in the marketing practices (Gupta et al., 2016). • Reactions of MNEs to the escalating hostility of host governments (Moschieri et al., 2022). • Effects of partnership with the World Bank's International Finance Corporation on aggressive actions faced by foreign investors (Gamso & Nelson, 2019).

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Theory	Research Question
Attention-based view (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social hybrid firms' internationalization (Angulo-Ruiz et al., 2020). • The extent to which international exposure from key informal and formal network relationships impacts new venture internationalization (Fernhaber & Li, 2013).
Opportunity theory (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification and construction of international opportunities in the process of foreign market entry (Chetty et al., 2018). • The ways family firms identify international opportunities (Zaefarian et al., 2016).
Ownership, Location, and Internalization (OLI) theory (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence of geopolitics on SWFs foreign acquisitions, and the difference of their FDI patterns from those of private firms (Wang et al., 2021).
Capability-based theory (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classification of GVC governance topics concerning OLI (McWilliam, 2020)? • The ways MNEs organize internally to enhance subnational institutional fit in new frontier developing economies (Mbalyohere & Lawton, 2022).
Loose coupling theory (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key contingencies and mechanisms of MNEs' external organizing (Nambisan & Luo, 2021).
Signaling theory (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects of diasporans' ownership on firms' access to the international knowledge and technology markets (Gregoric et al., 2021).
Opportunity cost theory (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of domestic inter-firm networks in the foreign divestment decisions of firms (Turkov & Benito, 2020).
Behavioral theory (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internationalization process of social enterprises (Veronica et al., 2020)?
Reference theory (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivations for cluster firms to internationalize (Amdam et al., 2020)?
Firm-specific advantage theory (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of personal and inter-firm networks in new-venture internationalization (Manolova et al., 2010).
Strategic choice theory (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinctive dynamics of international expansion by emerging economy enterprises (Sun et al., 2018).
Optimum disclosure theory (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ways companies seek the optimum balance between conscious disclosure and secrecy (Contractor, 2019).
Communication-information and expectancy-valence theories (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implications of comparative institutional advantages for foreign entrants (Cui et al., 2017)?
Environment-level	
Institutional theory (19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Micro-mechanism of formal and informal institutional interaction and the role of individual cognition in the internationalization (Li et al., 2022). • The ways corruption shapes firms' value creation opportunities and risks in international alliances (Li & Reuer, 2022). • The ways MNEs organize internally to enhance subnational institutional fit in new frontier developing economies (Mbalyohere & Lawton, 2022). • The ways firms develop political networking capabilities to institutionalize protection for intangible assets (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2022). • Interaction of MNEs and political partners in host emerging markets (Sun et al., 2021). • A synthesis of the determinants of equity ownership stake in foreign investment decisions (Chhabra et al., 2021). • Differential adoption of platform-based payment services across developed and emerging markets (Kumar et al., 2021). • The role of the formal network centrality of TMT in foreign expansion (Wu et al., 2021). • Influence of intergovernmental ties at subnational levels between home and host countries on the intensity and location of FDI inflows (Hu et al., 2021). • Influence of informal institutional legacy on contemporary inward FDI distribution, and the role of political traumatic shock in shaping this effect (Zhang, 2020). • Effects of social influence and traditional bargaining power on MNEs' strategic response to political risk in their foreign investments (Cannizzaro, 2020). • Impacts of country-dyadic military conflicts on market reaction to cross-border acquisitions (Li et al., 2020). • Contingent value of home-host ties on political instability (Witte et al., 2020). • Chinese companies' actions to legitimacy imbalance (Zhang et al., 2018). • Integration of institutional fragility and OFDI behavior of firms from emerging economies (Shi et al., 2017). • Influence of colonial ties and institutional distance on cross-border acquisition performance of internationalizing (Liou & Rao-Nicholson, 2017). • The role of government support on the ownership choices by multinationals in cross-border acquisitions (Pinto et al., 2017). • Impacts of network-enabled imitation processes on young SMEs internationalization (Oehme & Bort, 2015). • Development and usage of networks by high-tech SMEs to penetrate their first foreign market, and the differences in emerging and developed markets (Ciravegna et al., 2014).
Neo-institutional theory (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal pressures from social movements (Tian et al., 2021). • Effects of colonial ties and institutional distance on the cross-border acquisition performance of internationalizing (Liou & Rao-Nicholson, 2017). • Firm behaviors that generate firm legitimacy to maintain a license to operate despite uncertainty (Darendeli & Hill, 2016). • Legitimizing aspects of MNE/NGO partnerships for the firm (Marano & Tashman, 2012).
Comparative advantage theory (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effect of migrants on trade (Cai et al., 2021). • Contributions of local and foreign network partners to the race to internationalize (Patel et al., 2014).
Geopolitics (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence of geopolitics on SWFs' foreign acquisitions, and the differences of their FDI patterns from those of private firms (Wang et al., 2021)?
Economic geography (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts of changes in EU on the entry modes of MNEs (Blevins et al., 2016).
Entrepreneurship theory (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects of ethnic populations on international opportunity exploitation (Kim et al., 2020).

Appendix K. Theories used



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