

ABSTRACT

B2B Managerial Strategies and Practices of Internationalization: From Digitalization and Competitiveness to Organizational Performance

PhD student: Elena-Adriana Biea

In the current context of advanced technological progress, particular attention must be paid to B2B managerial strategies and practices through which companies succeed in shaping an international trajectory and expanding into new foreign markets. The challenges are all the greater when considering the new elements of global and economic security that have emerged in the post-COVID-19 period, as well as the ongoing digital transformations and automation processes that are developing and may influence the evolution of the entire business environment.

Research in the field of internationalization with a focus on the use of B2B managerial strategies and practices is not a new subject; however, the present study seeks to bring a contemporary contribution, concentrating on how organizational behavior has been influenced by digital transformation and emerging technologies. In a world of business increasingly rewritten in lines of code, algorithms, and qubits, each innovation brings us closer to a future marked by change—one in which robots become autonomous, factories are easily managed, and quantum computers promise to solve problems that previously seemed impossible to address.

At the macroeconomic level, in the context of organizational expansion into global markets, an area of interest adjacent to the development of B2B strategies and practices is represented by the role of emerging technologies—such as 5G & 6G, artificial intelligence, machine learning, blockchain, cloud computing, robotics, and quantum computing—which aim to introduce a new dimension to the world as we know it today. The technological process will generate significant differences in organizational efficiency worldwide as AI- and edge-computing-based solutions are implemented; however, their adoption will involve substantial investments. From this perspective, the research explores novel relationships, less frequently

studied in the specialized literature, namely the impact of these new tools on achieving performance among internationalizing companies, as well as on their competitiveness.

This paper makes a significant contribution to the specialized literature due to its holistic, systemic approach to internationalization, proactive and reactive B2B managerial strategies and practices of internationalization, digitalization, competitiveness, and organizational performance. By integrating a conceptual framework that correlates these constructs, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics and interrelations among them.

In the specialized literature, the term „internationalization” is often employed in the area of business strategies and the ways in which organizations manage their activities or operations within the global economy. This concept has evolved and acquired new connotations alongside the rise of globalization and the emergence of significant changes in the manner in which businesses engage with foreign markets worldwide. At its core, internationalization reflects the ability and aspiration of an organization to participate in and thrive within the international environment, surpassing national geographic boundaries.

The aim of this scientific endeavor is to analyze and highlight the strategies and practices employed by Romanian managers in the businesses in which they are involved, both to develop these enterprises internationally and to strengthen their strategic relationships with stakeholders from convergent industries—particularly with partners from business networks on the targeted markets. The emphasis is placed specifically on the modalities of entering a new country or on the strategies and steps initiated for business internationalization, whether through direct acquisitions, mergers, strategic global alliances and collaborations, the opening of new branches or subsidiaries, or joint-venture partnerships. The industries under analysis range from IT&C, automotive, trade, pharmaceuticals, food, industrial and manufacturing sectors, to energy, oil, and gas.

The evolution of business internationalization has been profoundly shaped by the new digital era in which we have entered, and a constant metamorphosis can be observed in managerial decision-making, adapted to today’s global circumstances. Departing from the traditional paradigms of physical business expansion through external market penetration based on merchandise exports and the opening of branches for the transfer of physical resources, we now witness a new concept of internationalization that entails a far more dynamic and agile valorization of the full set of company activities and resources—including intangible ones such

as knowledge, innovation, and human capital—with greater attention paid to cultural, spiritual, and emotional differences among international markets.

Companies are not only crossing physical borders but also transcending digital ones, leveraging the advantages of global e-commerce and the ability to utilize digital platforms to sell products, services, or solutions. These technological advantages enable businesses to innovate in unexpected ways, to interact more easily with international partners and clients, and to adapt rapidly to international regulations or to the increasingly complex and diverse demands of consumers in global markets.

Internationalization should not be regarded merely as a simple geographic expansion, but rather as an advanced and complex process, marked by strategic decisions, constant risk assessments, and heightened capacities for adapting both business environments and internal operations to change. However, in order to better understand how firms can evolve in this global setting and what factors may influence their trajectory, an in-depth study of the fundamental theories of internationalization is required. From classical models, such as the Uppsala Model and the Eclectic Paradigm Theory, to contemporary perspectives based on knowledge and international networks, all of these approaches to internationalization bring to the forefront the complexity and dynamics considered by managers when engaging with this process in a global context characterized by uncertainty and probabilities.

Moreover, this research seeks to serve as a reference point for managers, strategists, researchers, and organizations that are in search of solutions to accelerate the internationalization of their businesses and to expand into new profitable markets, while pursuing notable organizational performance outcomes. In this regard, the study aims to examine the concept of organizational performance from a multidimensional, multifaceted perspective, not limited solely to the improvement of financial indicators—such as revenue growth and profitability—but also considering the access firms may gain to broad relational capital, key resources, international expertise, and technological capital. The creation of performance models and monitoring systems that provide relevant information for strategic decision-making complements this framework, as organizations must have access to precise data and specialized research in order to evaluate opportunities and the effectiveness of their internationalization strategies.

At present, companies pursuing the internationalization of their processes or activities face a series of major challenges shaped by a dynamic global geopolitical and economic

landscape. These challenges include the necessity to confront the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy crisis, and rising global inflation, as well as to navigate the consequences of the 2020 global downturn caused by the U.S.–China trade war, the conflict in Ukraine, or the repercussions of Brexit, alongside the new business conditions resulting from the policy decisions of the current U.S. administration. In addition, firms seeking to expand into international markets must address country-specific legal regulations and find appropriate solutions when restrictions arise in the expansion process. Such adaptations often bring with them a series of risks, including cyberattacks, breaches of security and data protection, and organizational vulnerabilities generated by the instability of external environments.

In this context, the present research intends to analyze the opportunity for managers in traditional firms to approach digital transformation from a dual perspective: on the one hand, as a valuable tool supporting the internationalization process and as a critical factor in maintaining competitive advantage within an ever-changing global environment; on the other hand, as a complex challenge, given the multitude of aspects highlighted above. To this end, the study considers B2B managerial internationalization strategies, as well as proactive and reactive B2B managerial practices applied in the internationalization process with the goal of achieving competitiveness and organizational performance.

This work is relevant to a diverse range of stakeholders. Company managers may use the study to refine their internationalization decisions, optimize the strategies employed, and secure a competitive advantage in international markets. The academic community will benefit from a solid theoretical foundation for further exploration in the field of managerial strategies, practices, and internationalization, while policymakers and business support institutions can leverage the findings in designing and implementing policies, regulations, and programs aimed at assisting firms in their global expansion. Thus, this research aspires to become both a theoretical and practical reference in addressing the challenges and opportunities of internationalization in the digital era.

To meet the objectives of the research, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, which enabled an in-depth and comprehensive investigation of the subject. The qualitative component was carried out through semi-structured interviews with 11 experienced managers from various industries, offering valuable insights into the strategies, practices, and challenges specific to internationalization in

the era of digital transformation. These interviews facilitated the identification of key themes and patterns, which were subsequently integrated into the quantitative analysis.

For the quantitative component, a survey-based questionnaire was administered to a sample of 207 respondents, representing top managers and company leaders engaged in internationalization processes. The data collected were analyzed using the SmartPLS software, a robust structural equation modeling (SEM) technique, which allowed for the evaluation of complex relationships among the studied variables—managerial strategies, proactive and reactive managerial practices, digitalization, competitiveness, and organizational performance. This technique further enabled the testing of hypotheses and the validation of the proposed conceptual model.

This thesis is organized into several chapters in order to provide a clear, logical, and well-founded structure for the research. The introduction is followed by a chapter dedicated to bibliometric analysis, which represents an indispensable preliminary step for understanding the current state of research in the field of B2B managerial strategies and practices in the process of internationalization, within the context of digital transformation.

The bibliometric analysis investigates recent academic trends, highlights relevant studies, and examines the tools employed by companies for international expansion through the use of digital technologies. In doing so, it outlines the conceptual framework and provides a solid foundation for the review of the specialized literature. The chapter dedicated to the literature review, which establishes the theoretical foundation, examines in detail the main conceptual aspects related to B2B managerial strategies and practices in internationalization, taking into account the impact of digital transformation on this process and on the resulting organizational performance. In its first section, the chapter analyzes fundamental concepts of internationalization, including theoretical perspectives, strategies, and B2B practices used by firms to expand into foreign markets. The importance of knowledge and relational capital in enhancing organizational competitiveness is emphasized, as well as the role of new digital technologies—such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, blockchain technology, and ERP and CRM systems—in facilitating the internationalization process. Furthermore, the relationship between internationalization, competitiveness, and organizational performance is examined, offering a theoretical framework that underpins the subsequent data analysis and interpretation of results.

In the first part of the chapter, relevant theoretical notions of internationalization are analyzed, with particular emphasis on how the concept has evolved over time and on the interpretations offered by different schools of thought. The chapter then explores the role of knowledge transfer and relational capital, both of which are central elements in strengthening the competitive position of organizations in international markets. It also provides an in-depth review of internationalization strategies and models, with a specific focus on the configuration of B2B managerial strategies in relation to resource availability, as well as their scope—whether local, transnational, or global. Another point of interest is represented by B2B managerial practices, studied from both reactive and proactive perspectives, and through the lens of online and offline interactions, each playing a distinct role in the internationalization process.

Digital transformations and their impact on internationalization constitute another key aspect, with a focus on emerging technologies such as cloud computing, blockchain, artificial intelligence (AI), ERP and CRM systems, as well as the use of analytics as support tools for international market expansion. The relationship between internationalization and organizational competitiveness is also addressed, highlighting the ways in which internationalization facilitates the achievement of a competitive advantage in global markets. Finally, the chapter examines the relationship between internationalization and organizational performance, contextualizing the theoretical aspects with the specific case of Romanian companies that expand their activities internationally. Overall, this theoretical framework serves as a foundation for an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of applying and adopting B2B managerial strategies and practices when pursuing business internationalization in the contemporary economic landscape, using new digital tools that facilitate such processes.

The third chapter of the thesis focuses on a detailed presentation of the methodology employed to address the research aim and objectives. This chapter explains the stages of the research process, designed to provide a rigorous and balanced approach between qualitative and quantitative methods. The primary purpose is to clarify how the data collection and analysis methods were selected, as well as the ways in which the theoretical constructs were operationalized. It also details the sampling procedures, the development of research instruments, and the measurement process of the essential variables for the proposed study. The research objectives, therefore, target the evaluation of the impact of B2B managerial internationalization

strategies and practices on organizational performance in foreign markets and the development of a conceptual model that integrates these aspects.

The methodology chapter rigorously describes the research design, offering details on the mixed-methods approach employed, which combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to ensure a deep and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. In this section, the data collection methods are presented: semi-structured interviews conducted with 11 top managers, aimed at exploring in depth the internationalization strategies and managerial practices adopted, the digital tools employed, and the performance achieved, along with a questionnaire administered to a sample of 207 respondents, designed to analyze managers' perspectives for each described item or construct. The chapter also provides a strong justification for the chosen methods and ensures the validity and reliability of the results obtained.

The research findings are structured into two distinct chapters. First, the qualitative research results are presented through a detailed interpretation of the answers provided by the interviewed managers, with emphasis on their practical experiences, challenges encountered, and solutions adopted in the process of internationalization. Subsequently, the quantitative research results are analyzed to provide a statistical perspective on the identified relationships and trends, supporting the preliminary conclusions with robust empirical evidence.

To achieve the research objectives, a mixed-methods strategy was adopted, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain a complex and nuanced picture of the internationalization process of Romanian businesses from the perspective of managers. Within the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten respondents—experienced managers from both SMEs and large organizations, with expertise in B2B strategies, managerial practices, digitalization, and organizational performance enhancement. The set of twelve questions aimed to explore in depth their perceptions regarding company internationalization, the main challenges encountered, and the solutions applied. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data enabled the identification of relevant patterns and correlations between the strategies adopted and the level of organizational readiness for international expansion.

The quantitative component consisted of a questionnaire that generated 207 responses from Romanian managers involved in internationalization processes, both in small and large companies. The data were subsequently analyzed using SmartPLS 4 software. The results

confirmed most of the formulated hypotheses and highlighted the fact that internationalization is strongly influenced by factors such as B2B managerial strategies and practices, close relationships with external partners, process digitalization, adaptability to foreign market requirements, and investments in managerial competence development. The conclusions drawn provide applicable and relevant insights for business leaders in Romania seeking to expand their operations internationally.

The fourth chapter presents a detailed analysis of the qualitative research findings, highlighting the ways in which participants' responses contributed to the development of the conceptual framework and to the preparation of the quantitative research phase. The chapter is structured around three key themes: B2B managerial strategies and practices in internationalization, competitiveness through digitalization, and organizational performance.

In the first section, dedicated to B2B managerial strategies and practices, participants' responses are presented regarding how managers define and implement internationalization strategies, how these adapt to the requirements of foreign markets, and the challenges encountered. The responses emphasize key elements such as the selection of international markets, the development of strategic partnerships, and the adaptability of strategies to local requirements. The second section explores competitiveness through digitalization, underscoring the impact of modern technologies on internationalization processes. Participants provided insights into the adoption and integration of digital tools such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and ERP/CRM solutions, and how these influence operational efficiency and competitive positioning in international markets. In the final section, the analysis focuses on organizational performance in the context of internationalization. Changes observed in key performance indicators—such as profitability, market share, and customer satisfaction—were investigated, along with managerial perspectives on measuring success in foreign markets. Additional relevant indicators, depending on the industry of the company represented by each respondent, were also considered. This chapter thus provides an integrated analysis of the key constructs and their interrelationships, illustrating the complexity of the internationalization process across 11 companies from different industries that have expanded internationally within a dynamic economic environment.

The penultimate chapter presents the results of the quantitative research, aimed at testing and validating the proposed theoretical model and the hypotheses formulated based on the

literature review. The quantitative study focuses on analyzing the relationships between B2B internationalization strategies, related managerial practices, digitalization, competitiveness through internationalization, and organizational performance. The proposed research model, the evaluation of the measurement and structural models, and the interpretation of the hypotheses in the context of the specialized literature are all presented in a structured manner.

The proposed model comprises a series of hypotheses that highlight causal links between key variables, organized around essential dimensions such as B2B managerial strategies, proactive and reactive B2B managerial practices, digitalization, competitiveness through internationalization, and organizational performance. The empirical analysis therefore seeks to answer fundamental questions regarding the impact of managerial factors on the internationalization process and the success of B2B companies in foreign markets.

Each hypothesis in the model is tested using appropriate statistical methods, in order to assess the robustness of the identified relationships and to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of internationalization in the B2B business context. The results obtained are interpreted in light of the existing literature and contribute to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of how managerial strategies and practices influence organizational performance in an increasingly digitalized and globalized business environment.

The thesis concludes with a chapter on conclusions and limitations, which synthesizes the main contributions of the research, discusses the practical and theoretical implications of the study, provides relevant recommendations for practitioners and the academic community, and highlights the present limitations while also suggesting future research directions for the author. The conclusions indicate that the combination of quantitative and qualitative research played a central role in shaping a clear picture of the strategies adopted by managers in the internationalization process. Among the most relevant strategies identified are the customization of products and services for foreign markets, the development of a dedicated team, and collaboration with local partners. Statistical analysis based on the responses from over 200 questionnaires completed by top managers revealed that the majority consider digitalization to be an essential component of internationalization. Digitalization, in turn, contributes to enhancing competitiveness in foreign markets and, implicitly, to achieving organizational performance.

Moreover, the statistical data confirmed that well-defined strategies, adapted to the specific characteristics of international markets, facilitate the implementation of efficient

practices, both proactive and reactive. At the same time, interviews revealed that companies implementing proactive strategies reported faster growth in their international presence, while reactive strategies enabled them to quickly adjust to unforeseen challenges. Organizational flexibility and the adaptability of strategies to local market requirements were identified as decisive factors in the success of international expansion. Managers confirmed that success depends not only on general internationalization strategies but also on the ability to adjust them rapidly in line with external market dynamics. In this context, adapting products and services to local specificities, as well as establishing effective strategic partnerships, were found to be key factors in achieving competitive advantage.

In addition, the analysis preceding the applied research with over 200 respondents revealed a significant correlation between B2B managerial practices in internationalization and the positive influence these exert on company digitalization. Quantitative data demonstrated that organizations emphasizing proactive adaptation to international markets integrate digital solutions—such as automation, ERP, and CRM systems—more rapidly. This finding complements the qualitative evidence, which indicated that organizations integrating such technologies reported higher levels of operational efficiency, enabling them to optimize internal processes and reduce costs in international markets.

Furthermore, a statistically significant relationship was identified between the use of modern technological solutions and improvements in organizational performance, demonstrating that investments in digitalization are a key factor in the internationalization process. Company competitiveness through internationalization was also shown to influence organizational performance from a statistical perspective—a finding reinforced by the qualitative component, where managers reported that strategic positioning in international markets brings substantial benefits in terms of market share and long-term business sustainability.

Based on the implications of the thesis, several recommendations can be formulated for managers targeting internationalization. They should pay closer attention to adopting strategies tailored to international markets—such as product/service customization and collaboration with local partners—carefully analyze investments in digital technologies to support international operational processes (e.g., ERP and CRM solutions) so that these can be adapted across multiple markets, focus on local regulations and cultural challenges in different markets, and closely monitor organizational performance indicators to ensure access to financial resources that

support international expansion. The recommendations formulated are both relevant and applicable for companies seeking to differentiate themselves in global markets by approaching digital transformation with a strategic perspective.

Regarding practical implications, the study highlights the need for strategic management oriented toward internationalization and the adoption of new digital technologies to maximize organizational performance. Practitioners are encouraged to adopt a strategic perspective that integrates internationalization as a fundamental pillar, both for company growth and for achieving competitive advantage and enhanced organizational performance. Interfunctional collaboration is recommended, involving all departments in the internationalization process to ensure coherence and alignment of organizational objectives, the development of business networks to facilitate this process, and sustainable investments directed toward innovative digital solutions that significantly impact performance and competitiveness in international markets. Business expansion is an extremely complex and dynamic process, in which managers play a central role not only in setting B2B strategies but also in implementing the necessary steps and practices to achieve such objectives. However, this stage cannot be carried out without considering the economic and geopolitical challenges we currently face in what some specialists have referred to as the “Great Reset.”

Like any research, this thesis also presents certain limitations. Among the main limitations is the sample size, since both the qualitative and quantitative studies were conducted on a limited number of companies, which may affect the generalizability of the results across all industries. Additionally, the study focuses on a snapshot of the situation during 2024–2025, without capturing the dynamic evolution of B2B managerial strategies and practices of internationalization over time. Another limitation is the regional context, as the research mainly focuses on managers from a specific geographic area (Romania), which may limit the applicability of results to managers from other regions or different economic contexts. A degree of subjectivity may also be present in the qualitative research, since the participating managers were professional acquaintances of the author, whose responses may reflect individual perceptions not always entirely objective or representative of their entire organization, particularly as they were aware that their responses would be analyzed by the author. Moreover, given the current transitional phase of digitalization, expected to extend until 2030, certain technological aspects—such as the influence of artificial intelligence or blockchain on

internationalization—were not explored in depth and may have far greater implications in the future.

Future research directions could explore longitudinal analyses to investigate the evolution of the five constructs—B2B internationalization strategies, proactive B2B managerial practices, reactive B2B managerial practices, digitalization, competitiveness through internationalization, and organizational performance—over different periods of time. Future studies may also consider expanding the sample size and involving a larger number of managers from diverse geographic regions (not only Romanian managers) to enhance the generalizability of the findings. A broader sample with balanced representation across different types of organizations could also enable comparative analyses between various categories of companies, in relation to the proposed structural model.

Also, future research could examine in more detail the relationships between the constructs, potentially identifying new interdependencies using more complex structural models. Since the cultural contexts covered in the current research were limited, there is insufficient variation to fully understand how economic and cultural differences may impact internationalization processes. In addition, it is necessary to further explore the impact of emerging technologies—such as automation, cloud computing, blockchain, and artificial intelligence—on internationalization, competitiveness, and organizational performance.