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Foreign market network and internationalization of domestic firms: A systematic literature review

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Abstract

This study examined foreign market network and internationalization of domestic firms. It was carried out to identify the contemporary foreign-market networks available for domestic firms seeking internationalization; the ways in which foreign market network facilitates the internationalization of domestic firms; and the major barriers to the internationalization of domestic firms in contemporary extant literature. To that end, a systematic literature review methodology was adopted. Through a thorough search process supported by a set of stringent inclusion-exclusion criteria, 103 relevant articles were included in this review. The articles were analyzed using in-depth content analysis method augmented with descriptive statistics. The study found that the contemporary foreign-market networks for internationalization can be grouped into 18 categories. It was also found that foreign market network can enhance the internationalization agenda of domestic forms by providing access to distribution channels, risk mitigation, and enabling access to market knowledge and insights, among other key findings. Therefore, the study recommended the following, among others: Domestic firms seeking to internationalize should seek out foreign market networks using personal contacts, social media and the internet generally in order to gather substantial market intelligence about the countries to which they intend to expand their operations; and domestic firms can leverage foreign market networks by establishing strategic partnerships with local distributors, leveraging international trade associations, and utilizing cross-border collaborations to gain market insights, access distribution channels, and build relationships with key stakeholders, facilitating the successful execution of their internationalization strategy.

Keywords: Foreign market network; Internationalization; Domestic firms; Going global; International marketing

1. Introduction

With the growing pace of digitization and globalization, internationalization is perceived to be indispensable to the growth, stability and expansion of domestic firms in contemporary times. This is because it avails domestic firms global market opportunities to expand the reach of their marketing activities to several countries, thereby enhancing their competitiveness (Ndiaye & Fall, 2020; Ngwakwe, 2023). Moreover, Kaur and Singh (2022) maintained that by entering foreign markets, domestic firms can tap into diverse consumer preferences, needs, and behaviours, allowing them to tailor their products or services to a wider range of potential customers. This not only increases sales but also reduces dependency on a single market, thereby spreading risk. This is critical because relying solely on a domestic market can expose a company to various risks, such as economic downturns, regulatory changes, or natural disasters specific to that region (Mufinda & Fuacutecia, 2021). By operating in multiple countries, domestic firms can spread their exposure to these risks, such that if one market experiences a downturn, the impact on the overall business is mitigated by the

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performance of other markets that may not be affected to the same extent. This diversification strategy stabilizes revenue and boosts the company's overall resilience (Câmara & Valente, 2020).

However, the success of domestic firms' internationalization agendas largely depends on extent of foreign-market networks at their disposal (Ackah & Asante, 2021; Arslan & Kabak, 2019; Diouf & Guiro, 2019; Jallow & Cham, 2018). According to Wong and Wong (2019), foreign-market network encompasses a multifaceted web of relationships, collaborations, and affiliations with stakeholders such as distributors, suppliers, partners, and regulatory bodies in foreign markets essential in providing access to valuable market insights, local knowledge, and cultural nuances that are essential for making informed business decisions. In the face of growing market restrictions, demographic differences, geographical barriers and different regulatory frameworks, domestic firms are increasingly relying on foreign-market networks to actualize their internationalization agendas (Kassem & Alaeddine, 2023). Similarly, Adeoye (2019) added that these networks are becoming popular among domestic firms because they provide immediate access to foreign markets and customers at minimal risks. As a consequence, by leveraging established networks, domestic firms can tap into existing foreign customer bases, distribution channels, and market knowledge, which can accelerate foreign market entry and reduce the risks associated with establishing a foothold in unfamiliar territories.

Furthermore, foreign-market networks are well sought after by domestic firms because offer invaluable access to foreign expertise and knowledge of the target market (Mahmood & Dar, 2020). This is particularly crucial in understanding the intricacies of a foreign market, such as consumer behaviour, market trends, and cultural nuances. Partnering with local players or leveraging their networks enables domestic firms to make more informed decisions and tailor their products or services to better suit the needs and preferences of the target market. Moreover, foreign market networks often come with an existing reputation and trustworthiness, which can be leveraged by domestic firms seeking to establish their presence (Mollah & Khan, 2020). As such, partnering with established entities can lend credibility to a new entrant, making it easier to gain the trust of customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders. This study was therefore carried out to systematically explore extant relevant literature to identify how foreign-market network contributes to the internationalization agendas of domestic firms in contemporary times, recognizing that global market dynamics are constantly evolving. The study also sought to identify the major foreign-market networks available for domestic firms; and the barriers to the internationalization agendas of domestic firms in extant literature.

1.1. Research problem

The internationalization agenda of domestic firms, particularly in developing countries, faces a myriad of formidable challenges that collectively hinder their expansion into global markets. Foremost among these obstacles is the glaring lack of foreign-market access (Adenuga & Oyekanmi, 2019). Navigating the complexities of international trade agreements, complying with stringent regulatory frameworks, and establishing reliable distribution channels in foreign markets can also be an arduous task for domestic firms seeking to internationalize (Boateng & Amoako-Agyeman, 2023). Moreover, financial constraints loom as a significant barrier, because securing the necessary capital for overseas ventures, which often involves extensive market research, and marketing efforts, can be a daunting challenge. Additionally, geographic and demographic complexities add another layer of difficulty for domestic firms. This is because differences in cultural norms, consumer preferences, and economic conditions across borders demand adequate localization strategies that necessitate substantial investments of time, expertise, and resources. These challenges underscore the formidable nature of the hurdles confronting domestic firms aspiring to internationalize in the contemporary global business landscape.

To that end, several relevant studies have been conducted to explore the role of foreign-market network in weathering these internationalization barriers. However, a fundamental gap persists in extant research. It has been observed that there are insufficient scholarly efforts to generate a synthesized and comprehensive empirical evidence of the interplay between foreign-market network and internationalization from a global perspective. This is because the majority of extant studies are localized within the contexts of particular countries (Bropleh, 2018; Baskaya & Aydinli, 2019; Chan & Tan, 2022), thereby failing to account for the peculiarities of the global market. As such, it is unfeasible for the available evidence to be generalized for domestic firms in several different countries, since the explorations were localized. This revealed a pressing need for a more expansive and globally-oriented research approach to illuminate the complex dynamics that underlie the internationalization process of domestic firms. This study was therefore conducted to explore extant literature from a global perspective to identify the roles of foreign-market network in the internationalization agendas of domestic firms. Hence, the following research objectives were sought:

- To explore the contemporary foreign-market networks available for domestic firms seeking internationalization;
- To identify the ways in which foreign market network can facilitate the internationalization of domestic firms;

- To explore the major barriers to the internationalization of domestic firms in contemporary extant literature.

2. Conceptual review

2.1. Foreign market network

A foreign market network, in the context of international marketing, refers to the interconnected system of relationships, channels, and nodes that enable firms to conduct business operations in foreign markets (Fatty & Jabai, 2021). It encompasses the various entities and interactions involved in the process of entering, operating, and succeeding in international markets. This term is crucial in understanding the complexities and dynamics of global business environments. According to Elahi and Koo (2019), a foreign market network is defined as the set of relationships necessary for acquiring and trading goods and services across national boundaries. This definition emphasizes the essential nature of relationships in the international business arena. It underscores the need for connections with various stakeholders, including distributors, suppliers, customers, personal contacts, research consultancies and regulatory authorities, to effectively operate in foreign markets. In the words of Ouma (2020), a foreign market network represents the web of interpersonal and interorganizational relationships within which goods and services flow and which link primary demand with the ultimate consumer. This definition highlights the intricate web of connections that facilitate the movement of products and services from producers to end consumers. It emphasizes the importance of both personal and organizational relationships in creating a robust foreign market presence.

2.2. Internationalization of domestic firms

The internationalization of domestic firms, often referred to as international business expansion, is a strategic process that involves the expansion of a company's operations beyond its national borders (Pani & Pani, 2019). This phenomenon has gained substantial attention in recent decades due to the globalization of markets, technological advancements, and increased competition. Internationalization encompasses various dimensions, including market entry strategies, cross-border collaborations, and global supply chain integration (Rahman *et al.*, 2020). According to Razak and Khalid (2022), internationalization is the process whereby domestic firms increase their involvement in international operations. This definition emphasizes the gradual nature of internationalization, suggesting that firms often begin with limited international activities before progressively expanding their global presence. Seah and Ong (2021) offered a broader definition, stating that internationalization is "the process of adapting firms' operations, strategies, structures, resources, and technologies to international environments" (p. 36). This definition highlights the comprehensive nature of internationalization, involving not only market entry but also organizational and strategic adjustments to suit foreign environments. Simão (2019) provided a concise yet encompassing definition, describing internationalization as "the process of increasing involvement in international operations" (p. 11). This definition echoes the sentiment of Razak and Khalid (2022), underlining the progressive nature of international expansion. In the views of Turcato and Zucchella (2020), one of the primary drivers of internationalization is the pursuit of new markets and customers. Domestic firms often seek international expansion to tap into larger customer bases, especially in emerging economies with rapidly growing consumer markets. This market-seeking behaviour is fueled by the desire for revenue diversification and increased profitability. Similarly, Abdelmawla (2022) maintained that internationalization allows firms to access critical resources and capabilities that may be scarce or unavailable in their home country.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopted systematic literature review design for the literary exploration. It was also adopted for this study because it is capable of highlighting areas where there is a lack of research or conflicting evidence, pointing to potential areas for future studies (Kraus *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, this study chose systematic literature review because this approach minimizes potential biases in the selection and interpretation of studies, enhancing the reliability of this study's findings (Myeong *et al.*, 2022).

3.2. Research population and sample

As a literature-based study, the target population comprised all relevant research articles published on foreign market network and internationalization of domestic firms. This is because the study was not an empirical analysis that would have targeted people as respondents; but a systematic review of extant literature. By focusing on the existing body of literature, the study sought to provide a valuable resource for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers interested in the internationalization processes of domestic firms and the crucial role played by foreign market networks in this context. From a combined and extensive literature search in 8 popular research databases, the target population for this study included a total of 499,133 published articles as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Population of the study

SN	Research databases	Websites	No. of articles found
1	Google Scholar	www.scholar.google.com	288,000
2	Research Gate	www.researchgate.net	102,561
3	Academia Edu	www.academia.edu/	88,265
4	ScienceDirect	www.sciencedirect.com	6,774
5	BASE	www.base-search.net	1,581
6	Journal Storage	www.jstor.org/action/doBasicSearch?Query	10,506
7	Mendeley	www.mendeley.com/	777
8	Semantic Scholar	https://semanticscholar.org	669
			499,133

Source: Online research database search

Given that the population of the study was known (finite), the study adopted the Taro Yamane approach to statistically determine the sample size for the exploration. This procedure has the following formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n	=	Sample size required
N	=	Finite population (499,133)
I	=	Constant
e	=	Margin of Error (5 percent)

In application,

$$n = \frac{499{,}133}{1+499{,}133(0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{499{,}133}{1+499{,}133(0.0025)}$$

$$= \frac{499{,}133}{1+1247.83}$$

$$= \frac{499{,}133}{1248.83}$$

$= 399.68$

$\therefore$ n = 400 published articles

3.3. Article search procedure

The article search procedure was conducted with precision and thoroughness, adhering to a systematic process designed to yield the most pertinent and valuable sources for the study. This process was greatly aided by the implementation of a carefully curated set of keywords, meticulously selected to encompass a wide range of relevant variables and concepts. This approach was crucial in ensuring that the search results would cover a comprehensive spectrum of literature, providing a holistic view of the subject under investigation. Furthermore, the selection of keywords was not arbitrary; it was informed by a meticulous review of existing literature, ensuring that they accurately reflected the terminologies relevant to the subject matter under investigation. This meticulous attention to detail was instrumental in guaranteeing that the search results would be as precise and relevant as possible. Similarly, the utilization of the keywords acted as a compass, guiding the search process towards articles that were most likely to offer valuable insights and information pertinent to the study's objectives. For this particular investigation, the following keywords guided the search process:

- Foreign market network AND internationalization;
- Foreign market network AND domestic firms.
- Foreign market network AND globalization.

3.4. Elimination of duplicates

The search keywords and procedure above enabled the generation of the articles relevant to the subject of this investigation. The total articles in the databases selected were streamlined into a sample of 400 published articles. However, there is a possibility that duplicate records may be found in the sample since the articles were obtained from several databases. Inclusion of all articles without eliminating these duplicate records would have skew the findings of the study and tarnish the credibility of the review process (Mohamed *et al.*, 2021). To that end, the Mendeley Reference Manager software was utilized to locate and eliminate duplicate records from the sample. This was done by exporting the full reference list of all 400 articles electronically from the research databases into the Mendeley software. Using the software's reference manager tools, a check was run for duplicates in the reference list. This check resulted in the identification of 148 duplicate entries, which were immediately expunged from the list, thereby remaining 252 original entries. This reduced the sample of articles from 400 to 252 articles.

3.5. Article selection procedure

Even though duplicates were eliminated from the sample of literature obtained, there was an acute need for a thorough article appraisal and selection procedure to ensure that only articles relevant to the aims of the study were reviewed. This procedure was facilitated by a set of stringent inclusion-exclusion criteria designed to ensure high-quality selection of articles for the review. According to Paul and Criado (2020), inclusion-exclusion criteria help narrow down the scope of the review to ensure that only studies relevant to the research question or objective are included. This helps prevent the inclusion of irrelevant or tangential studies. Moreover, by establishing clear criteria for inclusion and exclusion, researchers can reduce the potential for subjective judgment in the selection process. For this study, the following inclusion-exclusion criteria were set to facilitate high-quality article appraisal and selection:

- Articles published between 2018-2023;
- Articles whose full texts were available online as open access;
- Articles published in English language;
- Articles discussing "foreign market network" and "internationalization of businesses";
- Articles from peer-reviewed, non-predatory journals.

To apply these criteria, the researcher systematically went through the abstracts and occasionally, full-texts, of the 252 articles through a web browser to compare them against the criteria established. This led to the elimination of 149 articles for failing to meet the criteria established. Most of the eliminated articles were published in years earlier than 2018; were in other languages; their full-texts were unavailable and they examined subjects not relevant to the aims of the study. The elimination of 149 articles reduced the sample size to 103 articles. Therefore, the final sample size for this study comprised 103 highly relevant articles which were included in the review. The entirety of the article search, appraisal and selection procedure is presented comprehensively in the PRISMA framework in FIG. 1. PRISMA stands for Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses. It provides a structured guideline for reporting the methods and results of systematic reviews and meta-analyses, with the aim of improving the transparency and quality of these types of research (Sohrabi *et al.*, 2021).

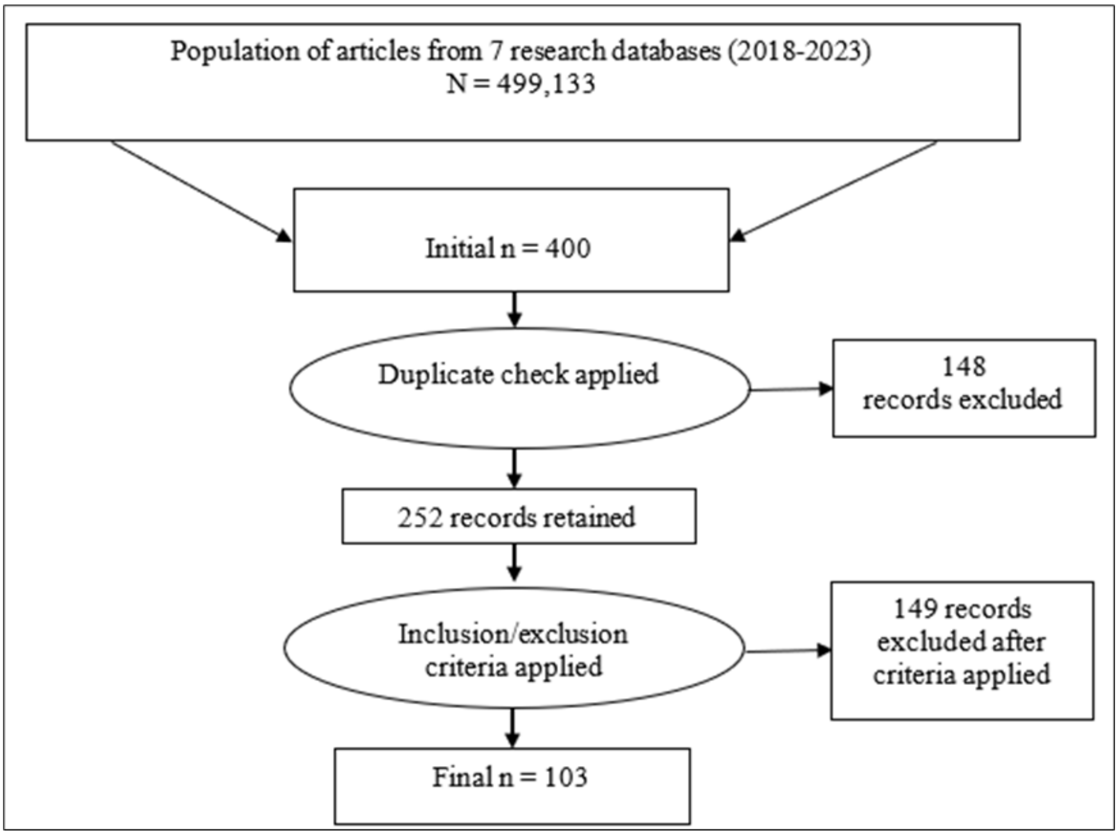

Figure 1 PRISMA flowchart of article selection

3.6. Data analytical procedure

This study utilized in-depth content analysis method to analyze the secondary data obtained from the research articles reviewed. This was augmented by descriptive statistics (frequencies and charts) for better visualization and comprehension of the analysis. According to Ataei *et al.* (2020), in-depth content analysis is a rigorous and comprehensive examination of the content of research articles included in a review study. This process involves carefully scrutinizing and extracting relevant information from the selected studies to address specific research questions or objectives of a study. By combining in-depth content analysis with descriptive statistics, the study aimed to offer a robust and multifaceted exploration of the research articles. This approach not only ensured a thorough examination of the underlying content but also provided a clear and concise means of presenting the results, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

3.7. General description of the literature

The information displayed in Charts 1, 2 and 3 generally describes the articles included in this review in terms of country of origin, journal indexing and year of publication. From the information presented, out of the 103 articles included in the review, majority of them (9 or 8.7 percent) were domiciled in Singapore. With respect to year of publication, the information reveals that out of the 103 articles reviewed, majority of them (27 or 26.2 percent) were published in 2019. In addition, regarding article indexing, the information shows that majority of the articles reviewed (75 or 72.8 percent) were indexed in non-Scopus journals.

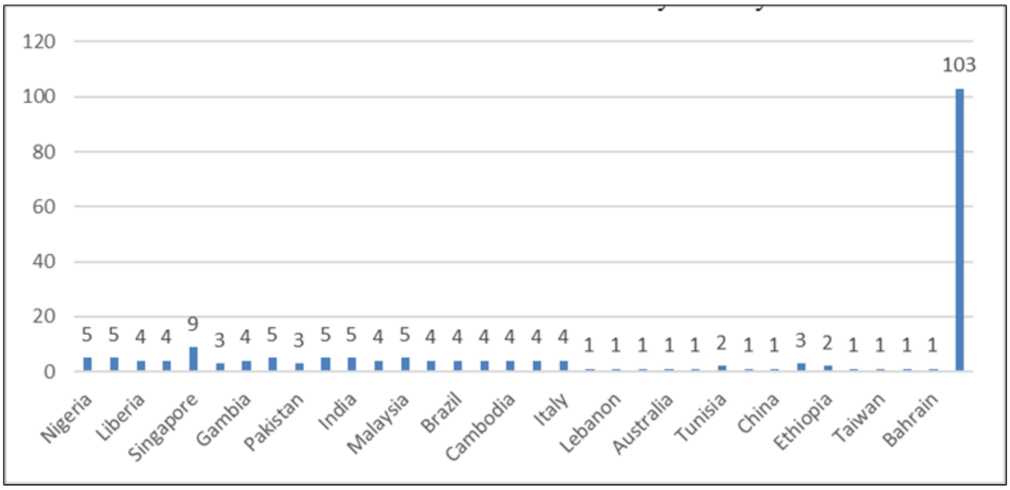

Figure 2 Distribution of articles by country

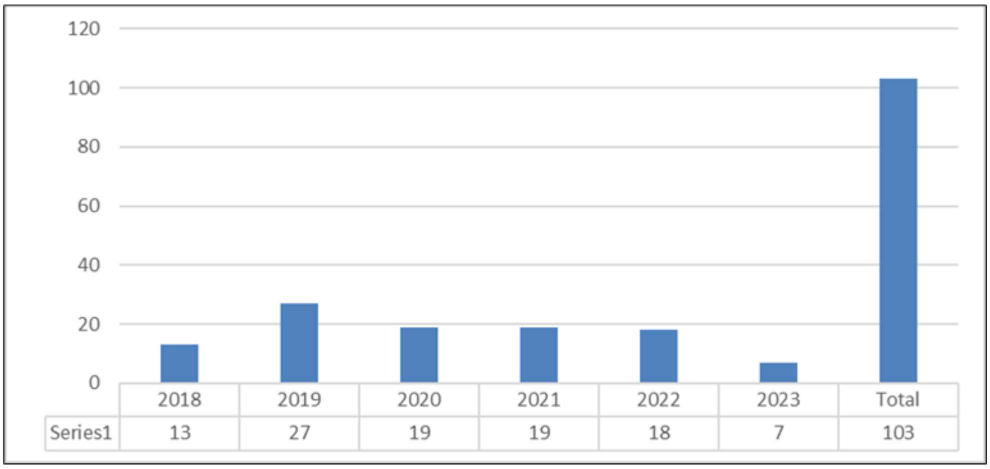

Figure 3 Distribution of articles by publication year

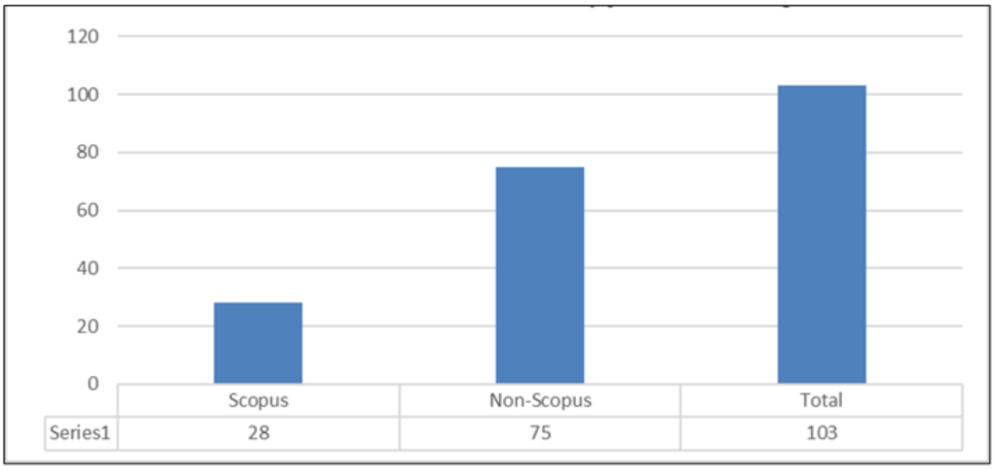

Figure 4 Distribution of articles by journal indexing

4. Empirical analysis of research objectives

4.1. Objective 1: Contemporary foreign-market networks available for domestic firms seeking internationalization

The results presented in Table 2 identify the contemporary foreign-market networks available for domestic firms seeking internationalization. According to the information displayed on the table, the contemporary foreign-market networks for internationalization can be grouped into 18 categories, including export intermediaries, franchisees, government agencies and trade associations, among others. However, the major foreign market networks in contemporary literature (with a frequency count of 9-12) included the following: Export intermediaries; franchisees; licensing partners; joint ventures; strategic alliances/partnerships; wholly owned subsidiaries; online marketplaces and E-commerce platforms; logistics and supply chain partners; financial institutions and trade finance providers; research and development collaborations; legal and regulatory advisors; and cross-border networking events.

Table 2 Contemporary foreign-market networks available for domestic firms seeking internationalization

SN	Foreign-market networks	Authors	Frequency
1	Export Intermediaries	Boateng and Amoako-Agyeman (2023); Adenuga and Oyekanmi (2019); Fatty and Jabai (2021); Ngwakwe (2023); Ouma (2020); Tan and Lee (2023); Mufinda and Fuacutecia (2021); Sok and Chhun (2021); Boari and Sguazzin (2021); Constant and Ménard (2019); Khalil and Ezzeddine (2021); Menzies and James (2022);	12
2	Franchisees	Baskaya and Aydinli (2019); Bropleh (2018); Ndiaye and Fall (2020); Elahi and Koo (2019); Kaur and Singh (2022); Wong and Wong (2019); Câmara and Valente (2020); Kassem and Alaeddine (2023); Chia and Muntari (2022); Bernal and Sánchez (2020); Yuan and Zhang (2020)	11
3	Licensing Partners	Ndiaye and Fall (2020); Chan and Tan (2022); Ngwakwe (2023); Rahman and Hossain (2021); Câmara and Valente (2020); Sok and Chhun (2021); Constant and Ménard (2019); Besley *et al.* (2019); Menzies and James (2022);	9
4	Joint Ventures	Fatty and Jabai (2021); Adenuga and Oyekanmi (2019); Kassem and Alaeddine (2023); Boateng and Amoako-Agyeman (2023); Bropleh (2018); Elahi and Koo (2019); Ouma (2020); Kaur and Singh (2022); Tan and Lee (2023); Mufinda and Fuacutecia (2021); Chia and Muntari (2022); Khalil and Ezzeddine (2021);	12
5	Strategic Alliances/Partnerships	Kaur and Singh (2022); Sok and Chhun (2021); Ouma (2020); Bropleh (2018); Baskaya and Aydinli (2019); Chan and Tan (2022); Wong and Wong (2019); Câmara and Valente (2020); Al-Fawzan *et al.* (2022)	9
6	Wholly Owned Subsidiaries	Ngwakwe (2023); Tan and Lee (2023); Câmara and Valente (2020); Mufinda and Fuacutecia (2021); Chan and Tan (2022); Elahi and Koo (2019); Fatty and Jabai (2021); Kaur and Singh (2022); Gamble and Wang (2022);	9
7	Government Agencies and Trade Associations	Boateng and Amoako-Agyeman (2023); Constant and Ménard (2019); Ndiaye and Fall (2020); Al-Fawzan *et al.* (2022); Bernal and Sánchez (2020); Khalil and Ezzeddine (2021); Menzies and James (2022); Yuan and Zhang (2020);	8
8	Online Marketplaces and E-Commerce Platforms	Bropleh (2018); Chan and Tan (2022); Adenuga and Oyekanmi (2019); Fatty and Jabai (2021); Ouma (2020); Rahman and Hossain (2021); Tan and Lee (2023); Kassem and Alaeddine (2023); Sok and Chhun (2021); Chia and Muntari (2022); Boari and Sguazzin (2021);	11
9	Logistics and Supply Chain Partners	Boateng and Amoako-Agyeman (2023); Baskaya and Aydinli (2019); Bropleh (2018); Ouma (2020); Ngwakwe (2023); Elahi and Koo (2019);	11

		Kaur and Singh (2022); Mufinda and Fuacutecia (2021); Al-Fawzan *et al.* (2022); Wong and Wong (2019); Constant and Ménard (2019);	
10	Financial Institutions and Trade Finance Providers	Fatty and Jabai (2021); Baskaya and Aydinli (2019); Adenuga and Oyekanmi (2019); Rahman and Hossain (2021); Mufinda and Fuacutecia (2021); Câmara and Valente (2020); Bernal and Sánchez (2020); Gamble and Wang (2022); Khalil and Ezzeddine (2021); Yuan and Zhang (2020);	10
11	Consultants and Professional Service Firms	Bernal and Sánchez (2020); Ngwakwe (2023); Chan and Tan (2022); Ndiaye and Fall (2020); Fatty and Jabai (2021); Tan and Lee (2023); Sok and Chhun (2021)	7
12	Social Networks and Industry Groups	Kassem and Alaeddine (2023); Fatty and Jabai (2021); Bropleh (2018); Chan and Tan (2022); Rahman and Hossain (2021); Chia and Muntari (2022); Besley *et al.* (2019)	7
13	Research and Development Collaborations	Rahman and Hossain (2021); Chan and Tan (2022); Baskaya and Aydinli (2019); Elahi and Koo (2019); Ouma (2020); Kaur and Singh (2022); Mufinda and Fuacutecia (2021); Boari and Sguazzin (2021); Menzies and James (2022);	9
14	Economic Development Agencies and Investment Promotion Agencies	Gamble and Wang (2022); Wong and Wong (2019); Ouma (2020); Elahi and Koo (2019); Adenuga and Oyekanmi (2019); Fatty and Jabai (2021); Rahman and Hossain (2021); Al-Fawzan *et al.* (2022);	8
15	Cultural and Business Chambers of Commerce	Kaur and Singh (2022); Ndiaye and Fall (2020); Tan and Lee (2023); Baskaya and Aydinli (2019); Ngwakwe (2023); Câmara and Valente (2020); Constant and Ménard (2019); Bernal and Sánchez (2020)	8
16	Legal and Regulatory Advisors	Bropleh (2018); Adenuga and Oyekanmi (2019); Ngwakwe (2023); Elahi and Koo (2019); Wong and Wong (2019); Kassem and Alaeddine (2023); Boari and Sguazzin (2021); Al-Fawzan *et al.* (2022); Gamble and Wang (2022); Besley *et al.* (2019)	10
17	Freight Forwarders and Customs Brokers	Baskaya and Aydinli (2019); Ndiaye and Fall (2020); Bernal and Sánchez (2020); Fatty and Jabai (2021); Ouma (2020); Rahman and Hossain (2021); Tan and Lee (2023); Mufinda and Fuacutecia (2021);	8
18	Cross-Border Networking Events	Al-Fawzan *et al.* (2022); Ngwakwe (2023); Adenuga and Oyekanmi (2019); Boari and Sguazzin (2021); Wong and Wong (2019); Boateng and Amoako-Agyeman (2023); Chan and Tan (2022); Elahi and Koo (2019); Câmara and Valente (2020); Constant and Ménard (2019)	10

4.2. Export intermediaries

In the context of international marketing, export intermediaries serve as vital conduits for domestic firms seeking to expand their operations into foreign markets (Constant & Ménard, 2019; Adenuga & Oyekanmi, 2019; Menzies & James, 2022). These intermediaries, also known as export agents or trading companies, act as intermediaries between the domestic firm and foreign buyers or distribution channels (Ngwakwe, 2023; Mufinda & Fuacutecia, 2021). Their primary role is to facilitate the process of exporting goods or services across borders efficiently and effectively (Boari & Sguazzin, 2021). Importantly, they offer a contemporary foreign-market network that can significantly aid in the internationalization efforts of domestic firms. One of the key functions of export intermediaries is market entry facilitation (Boateng & Amoako-Agyeman, 2023; Khalil & Ezzeddine, 2021). Navigating the complexities of foreign markets can be daunting for many domestic firms, especially those with limited international experience. Export intermediaries possess valuable knowledge of foreign markets, including consumer preferences, regulatory requirements, and cultural nuances (Fatty & Jabai, 2021). Leveraging their expertise, they assist domestic firms in identifying promising market opportunities and devising appropriate entry strategies (Ouma, 2020; Sok & Chhun, 2021; Tan & Lee, 2023).

4.3. Franchisees

Franchising is a business arrangement in which a franchisor grants the rights to use its brand, products, and business model to a franchisee in exchange for fees and royalties (Câmara & Valente, 2020). This arrangement enables the franchisee to operate under the established brand name, benefiting from the franchisor's reputation, support, and expertise while assuming the responsibility for day-to-day operations (Kaur & Singh, 2022; Yuan & Zhang, 2020). For domestic firms seeking internationalization, franchising offers a strategic avenue to penetrate foreign markets with reduced risks and costs compared to other methods like direct investment or joint ventures (Baskaya & Aydinli, 2019; Ndiaye & Fall, 2020; Wong & Wong, 2019; Chia & Muntari, 2022). One of the key attractions of franchising lies in its ability to leverage local knowledge and resources through franchisees who possess a deep understanding of the local market dynamics, consumer preferences, and regulatory environment (Kassem & Alaeddine, 2023). This localized approach can facilitate quicker adaptation to diverse cultural nuances and market conditions, thus enhancing the likelihood of success in foreign markets (Bropleh, 2018). Moreover, franchising allows domestic firms to rapidly expand their global footprint without substantial capital outlay or extensive operational commitments (Elahi & Koo, 2019; Bernal & Sánchez, 2020).

4.4. Licensing partners

Licensing is a business arrangement where a licensor grants the rights to intangible property (such as patents, trademarks, copyrights, or technology) to another party, known as the licensee, for a specified period, in exchange for royalties or other compensation (Menzies & James, 2022). This arrangement allows the licensee to utilize the intellectual property in their own operations, often within a designated geographic region or for a particular purpose (Sok & Chhun, 2021). In the context of international business expansion, licensing partnerships offer a strategic avenue for domestic firms to enter foreign markets without the complexities and risks associated with establishing wholly-owned subsidiaries or engaging in direct export operations (Chan & Tan, 2022; Câmara & Valente, 2020; Besley et al., 2019). Instead, licensing allows firms to leverage the expertise, resources, and market presence of local partners already established in the target markets (Ngwakwe, 2023). One of the key benefits of licensing partnerships is the expedited access to foreign markets (Constant & Ménard, 2019). By partnering with established local entities, domestic firms can circumvent many of the barriers to entry, such as regulatory hurdles, cultural differences, and logistical challenges (Rahman & Hossain, 2021). Moreover, licensing partnerships enable knowledge transfer and technology diffusion across borders (Ndiaye & Fall, 2020; Câmara & Valente, 2020).

4.5. Joint ventures

A joint venture (JV) is a strategic partnership formed between two or more entities, typically firms or companies, to undertake a specific business project or pursue a common goal while maintaining their separate identities (Tan & Lee, 2023; Ouma, 2020). At its core, a joint venture involves the pooling of resources, expertise, and capabilities of the partnering entities to access foreign markets (Bropleh, 2018; Elahi & Koo, 2019; Chia & Muntari, 2022). By combining forces, domestic firms can mitigate risks associated with entering unfamiliar territories, such as cultural, regulatory, and market complexities (Adenuga & Oyekanmi, 2019). This collaboration allows them to leverage the local knowledge, networks, and market insights of their partners, thereby enhancing their competitive advantage in the global arena (Khalil & Ezzeddine, 2021; Fatty & Jabai, 2021). One of the key benefits of joint ventures for domestic firms venturing into international markets is risk sharing (Boateng & Amoako-Agyeman, 2023). International expansion entails various risks, including financial, operational, and legal uncertainties. Through a joint venture, these risks can be distributed among the partnering entities, reducing the burden on any single firm and increasing the likelihood of success in the foreign market (Mufinda & Fuacutecia, 2021; Kaur & Singh, 2022; Kassem & Alaeddine, 2023).

4.6. Strategic alliances/partnerships

A strategic alliance entails a collaborative arrangement between two or more entities, typically firms, with the aim of achieving mutual strategic objectives (Chan & Tan, 2022). These alliances are forged based on shared interests, complementary capabilities, or the pursuit of common goals in foreign markets (Ouma, 2020). In the context of internationalization, strategic alliances serve as potent mechanisms for firms to extend their reach beyond domestic borders (Kaur & Singh, 2022). Rather than solely relying on organic growth or mergers and acquisitions, these partnerships offer a more flexible and less capital-intensive avenue for market expansion (Bropleh, 2018). Through alliances, firms can leverage the resources, expertise, and market presence of their partners to navigate the complexities of foreign markets more effectively (Baskaya & Aydinli, 2019). One of the primary benefits of strategic alliances in internationalization is risk mitigation (Sok & Chhun, 2021; Al-Fawzan *et al.*, 2022). Entering foreign markets can be fraught with uncertainties ranging from regulatory hurdles to cultural differences (Wong & Wong, 2019; Câmara & Valente, 2020).

4.7. Wholly owned subsidiaries

A wholly owned subsidiary is a company that is completely owned and controlled by another company, often referred to as the parent or holding company (Chan & Tan, 2022). This subsidiary operates independently, with its own management structure, resources, and legal identity, yet it remains under the full ownership and control of the parent company (Câmara & Valente, 2020). One of the primary motivations behind establishing wholly owned subsidiaries is to gain direct control over foreign operations (Ngwakwe, 2023; Elahi & Koo, 2019). This control allows the parent company to implement its business strategies, transfer technology and expertise, and maintain consistency in product quality and brand image across different markets (Mufinda & Fuacutecia, 2021; Kaur & Singh, 2022). Additionally, owning the subsidiary outright provides the parent company with greater flexibility in decision-making and operations, as it does not need to consult with external partners or shareholders (Fatty & Jabai, 2021). Moreover, wholly owned subsidiaries can facilitate the transfer of knowledge, skills, and managerial practices from the parent company to the subsidiary (Tan & Lee, 2023). This transfer of expertise can be crucial in ensuring that the subsidiary effectively adapts to local market conditions while still aligning with the overall objectives and standards of the parent company (Gamble & Wang, 2022).

4.8. Government agencies and trade associations

Government agencies and trade associations serve as crucial components of the contemporary foreign-market network available to domestic firms seeking internationalization (Constant & Ménard, 2019). These entities play pivotal roles in facilitating access to foreign markets, providing essential support, and fostering relationships that are vital for successful international expansion (Khalil & Ezzeddine, 2021). Government agencies are institutions established and operated by governments to regulate, promote, and facilitate various aspects of economic activities, including international trade (Boateng & Amoako-Agyeman, 2023). These agencies often have specialized departments or units dedicated to assisting domestic firms in their efforts to enter foreign markets (Al-Fawzan *et al.*, 2022). By leveraging their diplomatic channels and political influence, these agencies can help businesses navigate complex international trade environments and overcome barriers to entry (Yuan & Zhang, 2020). On the other hand, trade associations are organizations formed by groups of businesses operating within the same industry or sector (Bernal & Sánchez, 2020). In the context of internationalization, trade associations play a critical role in connecting domestic firms with overseas partners, distributors, and customers (Ndiaye & Fall, 2020). They often organize trade missions, exhibitions, and business matching events where firms can showcase their products and explore potential collaboration opportunities in foreign markets (Menzies & James, 2022; Khalil & Ezzeddine, 2021).

4.9. Online marketplaces and E-commerce platforms

Online marketplaces and e-commerce platforms represent contemporary foreign-market networks that have transformed the landscape for domestic firms seeking internationalization (Rahman & Hossain, 2021). These platforms provide avenues for businesses to expand their reach beyond domestic borders by leveraging digital technologies and the global connectivity of the internet (Adenuga & Oyekanmi, 2019; Kassem & Alaeddine, 2023). According to Bropleh (2018), an online marketplace is a digital platform, such as Amazon, eBay, Alibaba, and Etsy, that connects buyers and sellers from around the world. Similarly, e-commerce platforms, such as Shopify, WooCommerce, and BigCommerce, enable businesses to create their own online storefronts, where they can showcase their products and facilitate transactions directly with consumers (Sok & Chhun, 2021; Chia & Muntari, 2022; Ouma, 2020). The prominent benefit of leveraging online marketplaces and e-commerce platforms for internationalization is the scalability they offer (Boari & Sguazzin, 2021; Tan & Lee, 2023). These digital platforms have the capacity to reach millions of potential customers worldwide, providing domestic firms with unprecedented growth opportunities (Chan & Tan, 2022; Fatty & Jabai, 2021).

4.10. Logistics and supply chain partners

Logistics and supply chain partners play a pivotal role in facilitating internationalization for domestic firms seeking to expand into foreign markets (Elahi & Koo, 2019; Ouma, 2020). The concept of logistics refers to the management of the flow of goods and services from the point of origin to the point of consumption, encompassing activities such as transportation, warehousing, inventory management, and distribution (Boateng & Amoako-Agyeman, 2023; Kaur & Singh, 2022). On the other hand, supply chain partners are entities involved in various stages of the production and distribution process, including suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, retailers, and third-party logistics providers (Ngwakwe, 2023; Wong & Wong, 2019). Together, logistics and supply chain partners form a dynamic network that connects businesses across borders, enabling efficient movement of products globally (Mufinda & Fuacutecia, 2021). Similarly, Constant and Ménard (2019) maintained that in the context of internationalization, by collaborating with established logistics providers and supply chain partners in target countries, firms can tap into their knowledge of local regulations, transportation networks, customs procedures, and market preferences (Bropleh, 2018; Al-Fawzan et al., 2022; Baskaya & Aydinli, 2019).

4.11. Financial institutions and trade finance providers

Financial institutions and trade finance providers play a crucial role in facilitating international trade and supporting domestic firms in their efforts to internationalize (Mufinda & Fuacutecia, 2021; Adenuga & Oyekanmi, 2019; Gamble & Wang, 2022). At its core, trade finance refers to the financial instruments and services utilized by businesses engaged in cross-border trade activities to mitigate the risks associated with conducting business across different jurisdictions (Bernal & Sánchez, 2020; Rahman & Hossain, 2021). In the contemporary global market, domestic firms seeking internationalization often rely on financial institutions and trade finance providers to navigate the complexities of cross-border transactions (Baskaya & Aydinli, 2019). These institutions serve as vital intermediaries, bridging the gap between buyers and sellers in different parts of the world (Khalil & Ezzeddine, 2021; Yuan & Zhang, 2020). They offer a range of financial products tailored to meet the specific needs of exporters and importers, thereby facilitating smoother and more secure transactions (Fatty & Jabai, 2021; Câmara & Valente, 2020).

4.12. Consultants and professional service firms

Consultants and professional service firms play a pivotal role as contemporary foreign-market networks for domestic firms eyeing internationalization (Chan & Tan, 2022). A consultant or professional service firm offers specialized expertise and guidance to organizations across various domains such as management, finance, marketing, legal affairs, and more (Sok & Chhun, 2021). In the context of international expansion, these entities serve as strategic partners, aiding companies in navigating the complexities and challenges inherent in foreign markets (Bernal & Sánchez, 2020). A key function of consultants and professional service firms in internationalization is providing market insights and analysis (Fatty & Jabai, 2021). By leveraging their expertise, domestic firms can make informed decisions regarding market entry strategies, target markets, and product adaptation to suit local preferences (Ngwakwe, 2023). Furthermore, these firms offer valuable assistance in market entry strategies and implementation by helping to devise entry modes such as exporting, licensing, joint ventures, or direct investment, tailored to the specific needs and capabilities of the domestic firm (Tan & Lee, 2023; Ndiaye & Fall, 2020).

4.13. Social networks and industry groups

In the modern landscape of global business, social networks and industry groups have emerged as vital components of foreign-market networks for domestic firms seeking internationalization (Bropleh, 2018). These networks serve as valuable platforms for connecting businesses across borders, facilitating information exchange, collaboration, and market entry strategies (Kassem & Alaeddine, 2023). By leveraging these networks, companies can tap into a wealth of resources, insights, and opportunities that transcend geographical boundaries (Chia & Muntari, 2022). Social networks, such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook, play a significant role in facilitating international business activities (Rahman & Hossain, 2021). These platforms provide avenues for building professional relationships, accessing market intelligence, and engaging with potential partners, clients, and stakeholders worldwide (Besley et al., 2019). Through targeted outreach and networking efforts, firms can identify key players in foreign markets, establish credibility, and foster meaningful connections that drive expansion efforts (Fatty & Jabai, 2021). Similarly, industry groups serve as specialized networks that bring together companies operating within specific sectors or niches (Chan & Tan, 2022). These groups often comprise industry associations, trade organizations, or professional forums where firms share common interests, challenges, and goals (Bropleh, 2018).

4.14. Research and development collaborations

Research and development (R&D) collaborations serve as a contemporary foreign-market network that domestic firms often leverage when seeking internationalization (Baskaya & Aydinli, 2019; Ouma, 2020). These collaborations involve partnering with foreign entities, such as research institutions, universities, or other businesses, to collectively engage in innovative activities aimed at developing new products, technologies, or processes (Kaur & Singh, 2022). This strategic approach enables domestic firms to access foreign markets by tapping into the expertise, resources, and networks of their partners in those regions (Boari & Sguazzin, 2021). A critical advantage of R&D collaborations in internationalization efforts is the opportunity for knowledge exchange and technology transfer (Rahman & Hossain, 2021). By collaborating with foreign partners, domestic firms can gain insights into local market preferences, industry trends, and regulatory requirements (Mufinda & Fuacutecia, 2021). Additionally, they can access cutting-edge technologies and research capabilities that may not be readily available in their home country (Elahi & Koo, 2019). This exchange of knowledge and technology enhances the competitiveness of domestic firms in foreign markets and accelerates their innovation processes (Menzies & James, 2022; Chan & Tan, 2022).

4.15. Economic development agencies and investment promotion agencies

Economic development agencies (EDAs) and investment promotion agencies (IPAs) play pivotal roles in facilitating the internationalization of domestic firms by providing essential support and resources (Fatty & Jabai, 2021). These organizations serve as contemporary foreign-market networks that offer a spectrum of services tailored to assist businesses in expanding their operations overseas (Wong & Wong, 2019). At the core of EDAs and IPAs' functions lies the objective of fostering economic growth and development within their respective regions or countries (Al-Fawzan et al., 2022). They achieve this by creating an enabling environment for businesses to thrive, both domestically and internationally (Elahi & Koo, 2019). Through strategic planning, policy advocacy, and targeted interventions, these agencies aim to attract foreign investment, stimulate job creation, and enhance competitiveness in global markets (Adenuga & Oyekanmi, 2019). Furthermore, the primary roles of these agencies is to offer guidance and assistance to domestic firms interested in venturing into international markets (Gamble & Wang, 2022). This support often comes in the form of market research, feasibility studies, and access to valuable information on foreign trade regulations, market trends, and investment opportunities (Rahman and Hossain, 2021; Ouma, 2020).

4.16. Cultural and business chambers of commerce

Cultural and business chambers serve as multifaceted platforms facilitating cross-border business interactions, cultural exchange, and trade promotion (Bernal & Sánchez, 2020). They play a pivotal role in connecting businesses with resources, networks, and opportunities essential for navigating the complexities of foreign markets. Domestic companies engage with cultural and business chambers of commerce because of their ability to mitigate the risks associated with foreign-market entry (Tan & Lee, 2023; Câmara & Valente, 2020). By leveraging their established networks and local expertise, these chambers help domestic firms navigate the complexities of unfamiliar business environments, thereby reducing the likelihood of costly missteps or cultural misunderstandings (Kaur & Singh, 2022; Baskaya & Aydinli, 2019). Furthermore, by fostering a sense of community among like-minded businesses, chambers of commerce create opportunities for collaborative learning and knowledge sharing, enabling firms to benefit from the collective experiences of their peers (Ngwakwe, 2023). In the context of globalization, cultural and business chambers of commerce play an increasingly vital role in facilitating cross-border trade and investment (Ndiaye & Fall, 2020; Constant & Ménard, 2019).

4.17. Legal and regulatory advisors

Legal and regulatory advisors serve as pivotal components within the contemporary foreign-market network accessible to domestic firms aiming for internationalization (Boari & Sguazzin, 2021; Bropleh, 2018). In the pursuit of expanding into foreign markets, businesses encounter a myriad of legal and regulatory challenges unique to each jurisdiction. These challenges encompass compliance with local laws, regulations, and standards, which can often be intricate and unfamiliar to foreign entities (Ngwakwe, 2023; Besley et al., 2019; Wong & Wong, 2019). Consequently, legal and regulatory advisors play an indispensable role in guiding firms through this intricate landscape, ensuring adherence to legal requirements while mitigating risks associated with international expansion (Al-Fawzan et al., 2022; Adenuga & Oyekanmi, 2019; Gamble & Wang, 2022). Additionally, the key role of legal and regulatory advisors is to provide comprehensive guidance on the legal frameworks governing the target foreign market (Kassem & Alaeddine, 2023). This involves conducting thorough assessments of local laws and regulations pertinent to the industry in which the firm operates. By leveraging their expertise and understanding of the legal landscape, advisors can assist firms in navigating complex regulatory regimes, including those pertaining to trade, taxation, intellectual property rights, employment, and consumer protection (Elahi & Koo, 2019).

4.18. Objective 2: Ways in which foreign market network facilitates the internationalization of domestic firms

The results presented in Table 3 identify the ways in which foreign market network facilitates the internationalization of domestic firms in contemporary extant literature. According to the information displayed on the table, foreign market network can facilitate the internationalization of domestic firms in 11 broad ways, including access to distribution channels, risk mitigation, access to market knowledge and insights, among others. However, with a frequency count between 9-13, the results show that the major ways in which foreign market network facilitates internationalization of domestic firms include: Market knowledge and insights; access to distribution channels; access to resources and capabilities; government and regulatory support; adaptation to local trends and innovations; scale and growth; crisis management and contingency planning.

Table 3 Ways in which foreign market network facilitates the internationalization of domestic firms

SN	Ways of facilitation	Authors	Frequency
1	Market knowledge and insights	Mahmud and Yuguda (2020); Talaat (2020); Ackah and Asante (2021); Allison (2018); Iaci and Carlei (2021); Arslan and Kabak (2019); Diouf, and Guiro (2019); Sousa and Vaz (2019); Mohanty and Sahoo (2018); Nasir and Amin (2019); Seah and Ong (2021)	11
2	Access to distribution channels	Wei and Liu (2022); Tsao and Leung (2022); Khalil and Altarawneh (2022); Jallow and Cham (2018); Ackah and Asante (2021); Chen and Ho (2022); Keke and Njiabi (2019); Orji and Adetunji (2023); Mollah and Khan (2020); Simão and Deju (2019); Talaat (2020); Uamusse (2018); Mokgwathi and Matlhape (2020)	13
3	Risk mitigation	Sousa and Vaz (2019); Allison (2018); Diouf, and Guiro (2019); Simão and Deju (2019); Mahmud and Yuguda (2020); Seah and Ong (2021)	6
4	Access to resources and capabilities	Iaci and Carlei (2021); Mahmud and Yuguda (2020); Ackah and Asante (2021); Arslan and Kabak (2019); Chen and Ho (2022); Mohanty and Sahoo (2018); Nasir and Amin (2019); Talaat (2020); Khalil and Altarawneh (2022); Mokgwathi and Matlhape (2020); Wei and Liu (2022)	11
5	Government and regulatory support	Keke and Njiabi (2019); Ackah and Asante (2021); Nasir and Amin (2019); Mahmud and Yuguda (2020); Jallow and Cham (2018); Allison (2018); Diouf, and Guiro (2019); Orji and Adetunji (2023); Simão and Deju (2019); Sousa and Vaz (2019); Uamusse (2018)	11
6	Partnership and collaboration opportunities	Chen and Ho (2022); Ackah and Asante (2021); Mohanty and Sahoo (2018); Mollah and Khan (2020); Seah and Ong (2021); Tsao and Leung (2022)	6
7	Brand recognition and reputation	Sousa and Vaz (2019); Simão and Deju (2019); Arslan and Kabak (2019); Keke and Njiabi (2019); Orji and Adetunji (2023); Nasir and Amin (2019); Wei and Liu (2022)	7
8	Adaptation to local trends and innovations	Wei and Liu (2022); Khalil and Altarawneh (2022); Nasir and Amin (2019); Mahmud and Yuguda (2020); Allison (2018); Ackah and Asante (2021); Jallow and Cham (2018); Iaci and Carlei (2021); Mokgwathi and Matlhape (2020)	9
9	Scale and growth	Jallow and Cham (2018); Allison (2018); Chen and Ho (2022); Sousa and Vaz (2019); Diouf, and Guiro (2019); Uamusse (2018); Mollah and Khan (2020); Seah and Ong (2021); Simão and Deju (2019); Tsao and Leung (2022);	10
10	Competitive advantage	Tsao and Leung (2022); Arslan and Kabak (2019); Mahmud and Yuguda (2020); Orji and Adetunji (2023); Talaat (2020); Uamusse (2018)	6
11	Crisis management and contingency planning	Seah and Ong (2021); Mohanty and Sahoo (2018); Wei and Liu (2022); Mokgwathi and Matlhape (2020); Simão and Deju (2019); Nasir and Amin (2019); Keke and Njiabi (2019); Ackah and Asante (2021); Jallow and Cham (2018); Chen and Ho (2022); Iaci and Carlei (2021)	11

4.19. Market knowledge and insights

Foreign market networks play a pivotal role in providing valuable market knowledge and insights for domestic firms aspiring to internationalize their operations (Ackah & Asante, 2021). These networks serve as conduits through which companies can gather crucial information about foreign markets, including consumer preferences, cultural nuances, regulatory frameworks, competitive landscapes, and emerging trends (Seah & Ong, 2021; Arslan & Kabak, 2019; Talaat, 2020). By tapping into these networks, domestic firms can make informed decisions and strategize effectively for their international expansion endeavours (Mohanty & Sahoo, 2018; Iaci & Carlei, 2021; Allison, 2018). Similarly, foreign market networks offer access to localized expertise and resources, because they often comprise a diverse array of stakeholders, such as distributors, suppliers, agents, consultants, and industry associations, who possess in-depth knowledge of their respective markets (Mahmud & Yuguda, 2020; Sousa & Vaz, 2019). These local contacts can provide invaluable insights into market dynamics, customer behaviour, and prevailing business practices (Diouf & Guiro, 2019; Nasir & Amin, 2019).

4.20. Access to distribution channels

Foreign market networks play a pivotal role in facilitating access to distribution channels for domestic firms seeking internationalization because through them, domestic firms can overcome barriers to entry and gain footholds in new markets (Khalil & Altarawneh, 2022; Wei & Liu, 2022; Jallow & Cham, 2018). According to Orji and Adetunji (2023), foreign market networks provide invaluable insights into local market dynamics, consumer behaviour, and regulatory frameworks. This is because domestic firms often lack comprehensive knowledge of foreign markets, including distribution channels, consumer preferences, and cultural nuances (Simão & Deju, 2019; Ackah & Asante, 2021). Hence, by leveraging existing networks, firms can tap into the expertise of established players, gaining crucial understanding that informs their distribution strategies (Chen & Ho, 2022; Talaat, 2020; Mollah & Khan, 2020). This insight minimizes the risks associated with entering unfamiliar territories and ensures that domestic products align with the needs and preferences of target consumers (Mokgwathi & Matlhape, 2020; Tsao & Leung, 2022; Uamusse, 2018; Keke & Njiabi, 2019).

4.21. Risk mitigation

Expanding into foreign markets can present a myriad of risks for domestic firms seeking internationalization (Simão & Deju, 2019). These risks can range from currency fluctuations and geopolitical instability to cultural misunderstandings and regulatory differences. However, foreign market networks can significantly mitigate these risks and provide numerous benefits for domestic firms venturing into international markets (Allison, 2018). To begin with, foreign market networks offer valuable insights and local knowledge, providing domestic firms with a deeper understanding of the foreign market's dynamics (Diouf & Guiro, 2019). Armed with such information, domestic firms can make more informed decisions, reducing the likelihood of costly mistakes or missteps (Seah & Ong, 2021). Moreover, foreign market networks provide access to established distribution channels and partnerships, who possess an intricate understanding of the market's distribution infrastructure and customer base (Mahmud & Yuguda, 2020; Sousa & Vaz, 2019).

4.22. Access to resources and capabilities

Foreign market networks play a pivotal role in facilitating access to resources and capabilities for domestic firms seeking internationalization by providing invaluable insights into the local market conditions of target countries (Mokgwathi & Matlhape, 2020; Ackah & Asante, 2021; Chen & Ho, 2022). Through these networks, domestic firms can gain access to critical information about market demand, competitive landscape, and regulatory requirements. This knowledge allows firms to tailor their products or services to meet the specific needs and preferences of foreign consumers, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in international markets (Nasir & Amin, 2019; Mahmud & Yuguda, 2020; Mohanty & Sahoo, 2018). Moreover, foreign market networks offer access to distribution channels and supply chains that are essential for establishing a presence in overseas markets (Iaci & Carlei, 2021; Talaat, 2020; Arslan & Kabak, 2019; Khalil & Altarawneh, 2022; Wei & Liu, 2022).

4.23. Government and regulatory support

Foreign market networks can aid domestic firms by providing crucial insights into the regulatory landscapes of target countries (Ackah & Asante, 2021). Each country has its own set of laws, regulations, and compliance requirements governing various aspects of business operations, including taxation, import/export policies, intellectual property rights, and labor laws (Mahmud & Yuguda, 2020; Orji a& Adetunji, 2023). Navigating these regulations can be daunting for firms venturing into new markets. However, foreign market networks often have established relationships with local regulatory bodies and government agencies, enabling them to provide valuable guidance and assistance to domestic firms (Keke & Njiabi, 2019; Uamusse, 2018). This guidance helps firms ensure compliance with local regulations, mitigate regulatory risks, and avoid potential legal pitfalls, thus facilitating smoother market entry and operations abroad (Diouf & Guiro, 2019; Orji & Adetunji, 2023). Moreover, foreign market networks often serve as advocates for domestic firms seeking government support and assistance in their internationalization efforts (Jallow & Cham, 2018). By leveraging their relationships and expertise, these networks can help domestic firms access various forms of government support, such as export financing, trade promotion programs, grants, and subsidies (Nasir & Amin, 2019; Sousa & Vaz, 2019; Simão & Deju, 2019).

4.24. Partnership and collaboration opportunities

Foreign market networks facilitate partnerships and collaborations for domestic firms by providing access to established relationships and connections with local businesses, organizations, and government entities (Mollah & Khan, 2020). These networks often consist of a web of contacts built over time through trade associations, chambers of commerce, industry groups, and other business networks. Leveraging these connections enables domestic firms to identify potential partners, distributors, suppliers, and other stakeholders in foreign markets, thereby easing the process of entering and navigating unfamiliar territories (Seah & Ong, 2021; Tsao & Leung, 2022). Moreover, foreign market networks offer valuable insights and information about the local business environment, regulatory landscape, cultural nuances, and consumer preferences (Ackah & Asante, 2021; Mohanty & Sahoo, 2018). This knowledge is indispensable for domestic firms seeking to tailor their products and marketing strategies to suit the specific needs and preferences of international markets. By tapping into these insights, firms can mitigate risks, avoid costly mistakes, and better position themselves for success abroad (Chen & Ho, 2022).

4.25. Brand recognition and reputation

Foreign market networks play a crucial role in fostering brand recognition and building reputation for domestic firms venturing into international markets (Arslan & Kabak, 2019). These networks serve as conduits for disseminating information about the domestic firm's brand. By leveraging the existing relationships and channels within the foreign market, the firm can amplify its brand messaging and reach a wider audience (Sousa & Vaz, 2019). Distributors and retailers, for instance, act as intermediaries who introduce the domestic brand to consumers in the foreign market (Nasir & Amin, 2019). Through their established distribution channels and marketing efforts, they help raise awareness and visibility for the brand, laying the groundwork for brand recognition (Simão & Deju, 2019; Orji & Adetunji, 2023). Moreover, foreign market networks provide valuable insights and feedback that contribute to enhancing the domestic firm's brand reputation (Keke & Njiabi, 2019). Through ongoing interactions with various stakeholders in the foreign market, such as customers, suppliers, and partners, the firm gains a deeper understanding of local preferences, cultural nuances, and market dynamics (Wei & Liu, 2022).

4.26. Adaptation to local trends and innovations

Foreign market networks facilitate internationalization of domestic firms by providing invaluable insights into local trends and consumer behaviours (Allison, 2018; Iaci & Carlei, 2021). These networks consist of distributors, suppliers, partners, and other stakeholders who possess intimate knowledge of the market dynamics. By tapping into these networks, domestic firms gain access to real-time information about evolving consumer preferences, emerging trends, and market demands (Mahmud & Yuguda, 2020; Ackah & Asante, 2021). This enables them to tailor their products or services to suit the specific needs and desires of the target market, thereby enhancing their competitive advantage (Khalil & Altarawneh, 2022). Also, foreign market networks serve as conduits for accessing local innovations and best practices (Nasir & Amin, 2019; Wei & Liu, 2022). In many cases, foreign markets may be at the forefront of technological advancements or may have unique solutions to existing challenges. By establishing relationships with local businesses, research institutions, and industry associations, domestic firms can gain exposure to these innovations (Jallow & Cham, 2018; Mokgwathi & Matlhape, 2020).

4.27. Scale and growth

A foreign market network enhances the scale and growth of domestic firms seeking internationalization by providing access to new markets and customer bases (Diouf & Guiro, 2019). By establishing partnerships with local distributors, retailers, or wholesalers, domestic firms can tap into the existing networks and channels already present in foreign markets. This enables them to reach customers more efficiently and effectively than trying to build their distribution channels from scratch (Chen & Ho, 2022; Uamusse, 2018; Sousa & Vaz, 2019; Simão & Deju, 2019). Moreover, these local partners often possess invaluable market knowledge and insights that can help domestic firms tailor their products or services to better suit local preferences and demand (Tsao & Leung, 2022; Jallow & Cham, 2018). Similarly, a foreign market network can enhance operational efficiency and cost-effectiveness, because by leveraging existing infrastructure such as warehouses, logistics providers, and supply chain networks, domestic firms can reduce the time and resources required to set up operations in foreign countries (Mollah & Khan, 2020; Seah & Ong, 2021; Allison, 2018).

4.28. Competitive advantage

Foreign market network can enhance the competitive advantage of domestic firms through knowledge acquisition (Orji & Adetunji, 2023; Talaat, 2020). By tapping into the insights, expertise, and market intelligence within these networks, domestic firms can gain valuable information about target markets, consumer preferences, regulatory frameworks, and emerging trends. This knowledge equips them with a deeper understanding of foreign market dynamics, enabling them to make informed strategic decisions and adapt their offerings accordingly (Arslan & Kabak, 2019). Also, foreign market networks enhance the competitive advantage of domestic firms by providing access to critical resources and capabilities that may be scarce or unavailable domestically (Tsao & Leung, 2022). Through partnerships, alliances, and collaborations with foreign firms or intermediaries, domestic companies can leverage complementary assets, technologies, distribution channels, or production facilities. This access to resources enhances their competitiveness by augmenting their capacity to innovate, produce high-quality goods or services, and deliver value to customers in foreign markets (Uamusse, 2018; Mahmud & Yuguda, 2020).

4.29. Crisis management and contingency planning

Foreign market networks play a crucial role in crisis management and contingency planning for domestic firms venturing into international markets (Nasir & Amin, 2019). These networks provide valuable resources, information, and support to navigate unfamiliar territories and mitigate risks. They offer insights into local regulations, cultural nuances, and political landscapes, enabling firms to anticipate and address potential crises effectively (Mohanty & Sahoo, 2018; Simão & Deju, 2019; Seah & Ong, 2021). Moreover, through established relationships with local stakeholders, such as suppliers, distributors, and government agencies, foreign market networks offer access to critical resources during emergencies, such as supply chain disruptions or geopolitical instability (Ackah & Asante, 2021; Jallow & Cham, 2018; Wei & Liu, 2022). Additionally, by fostering communication channels across borders, these networks facilitate timely crisis communication and coordination of response efforts (Mokgwathi & Matlhape, 2020; Chen & Ho, 2022). Furthermore, being part of a network allows firms to leverage collective expertise and experiences, enabling them to develop robust contingency plans tailored to specific market conditions (Iaci & Carlei, 2021). Overall, foreign market networks serve as invaluable assets for domestic firms seeking internationalization by providing them with the necessary support and resilience to navigate uncertainties and crises in foreign markets (Keke & Njiabi, 2019).

4.30. Objective 3: Major barriers to the internationalization of domestic firms in contemporary extant literature

The results presented in Table 4 identify the major barriers to the internationalization of domestic firms in contemporary extant literature. According to the information displayed on the table, the major barriers to the internationalization of domestic firms can be grouped into 17 categories, including geographical distance and time zones, cultural differences, legal and regulatory barriers, political instability and risk, among others. However, with a frequency count between 9-15, the results show that the most dominant barriers to the internationalization of domestic firms include: Cultural differences; legal and regulatory barriers; economic factors; infrastructure and logistics challenges; inadequate market knowledge and research; communication and coordination challenges; supply chain disruptions; geographical distance and time zones.

Table 4 Major barriers to the internationalization of domestic firms in contemporary extant literature

SN	Major barriers	Authors	Frequency
1	Cultural differences	Osei-Kyei and Amoako (2019); Adegbile and Oluwatayo (2018); Ali and Baig (2021); Omondi and Ongori (2018); Ali and Rahman (2020); Ahmed and Abdul Aziz (2021); Nhantumbo and Cossa (2022); Khalil and Altarawneh (2019); Rami and Abdulhafed (2021);	9
2	Legal and regulatory barriers	Tay and Ong (2022); Adegbile and Oluwatayo (2018); Başkaya and Kırdar (2021); Cissé and Ndiaye (2018); Sinden and Baloi (2020); Gupta and Chakraborty (2019); Lopes and Garcia (2018); Barros and Souza (2019); Kamal and Abdel-Aziz (2020); Khun and Lim (2021); Iaci and Carlei (2018); Mahmoud and Musa (2020); Suleimanu and Abdulai (2023);	13
3	Political instability and risk	Osei-Kyei and Amoako (2019); Colley and Njie (2019); Ali and Baig (2021); Ahmed and Abdul Aziz (2021)	4
4	Economic factors	Başkaya and Kırdar (2021); Sinden and Baloi (2020); Gupta and Chakraborty (2019); Singh and Sharma (2023); Ali and Rahman (2020); Barros and Souza (2019); Iaci and Carlei (2018); Mahmoud and Musa (2020); Rami and Abdulhafed (2021)	9
5	Infrastructure and logistics challenges	Osei-Kyei and Amoako (2019); Adegbile and Oluwatayo (2018); Huang and Lee (2022); Tay and Ong (2022); Nhantumbo and Cossa (2022);	15

		Lopes and Garcia (2018); Ali and Rahman (2020); Colley and Njie (2019); Ali and Baig (2021); Omondi and Ongori (2018); Kamal and Abdel-Aziz (2020); Khun and Lim (2021); Rami and Abdulhafed (2021); Khalil and Altarawneh (2019); Suleimanu and Abdulai (2023);	
6	Inadequate market knowledge and research	Khun and Lim (2021); Adegbile and Oluwatayo (2018); Mahmoud and Musa (2020); Suleimanu and Abdulai (2023); Nhantumbo and Cossa (2022); Cissé and Ndiaye (2018); Sinden and Baloi (2020); Ahmed and Abdul Aziz (2021); Tay and Ong (2022); Barros and Souza (2019); Iaci and Carlei (2018); Singh and Sharma (2023);	12
7	Inappropriate entry mode selection	Osei-Kyei and Amoako (2019); Başkaya and Kırdar (2021); Gupta and Chakraborty (2019); Ali and Rahman (2020); Lopes and Garcia (2018); Khalil and Altarawneh (2019)	6
8	Resource constraints	Huang and Lee (2022); Cissé and Ndiaye (2018); Mahmoud and Musa (2020); Colley and Njie (2019); Ali and Baig (2021); Omondi and Ongori (2018); Nhantumbo and Cossa (2022);	7
9	Communication and coordination challenges	Lopes and Garcia (2018); Ahmed and Abdul Aziz (2021); Iaci and Carlei (2018); Nhantumbo and Cossa (2022); Barros and Souza (2019); Khun and Lim (2021); Adegbile and Oluwatayo (2018); Sinden and Baloi (2020); Singh and Sharma (2023); Tay and Ong (2022); Kamal and Abdel-Aziz (2020); Mahmoud and Musa (2020); Rami and Abdulhafed (2021); Suleimanu and Abdulai (2023);	14
10	Tariffs and trade barriers	Yombo and Kollie (2020); Cissé and Ndiaye (2018); Omondi and Ongori (2018); Gupta and Chakraborty (2019); Ali and Rahman (2020); Khalil and Altarawneh (2019)	6
11	Intellectual property concerns	Gupta and Chakraborty (2019); Ali and Baig (2021); Adegbile and Oluwatayo (2018); Colley and Njie (2019); Khalil and Altarawneh (2019); Barros and Souza (2019); Nhantumbo and Cossa (2022)	7
12	Supply chain disruptions	Sinden and Baloi (2020); Suleimanu and Abdulai (2023); Cissé and Ndiaye (2018); Rami and Abdulhafed (2021); Yombo and Kollie (2020); Omondi and Ongori (2018); Ahmed and Abdul Aziz (2021); Lopes and Garcia (2018); Kamal and Abdel-Aziz (2020); Khun and Lim (2021); Iaci and Carlei (2018); Mahmoud and Musa (2020); Singh and Sharma (2023);	13
13	Intense local competition and market saturation	Başkaya and Kırdar (2021); Sinden and Baloi (2020); Tay and Ong (2022)	3
14	Adaptation of products and services	Huang and Lee (2022); Khalil and Altarawneh (2019); Cissé and Ndiaye (2018); Nhantumbo and Cossa (2022); Omondi and Ongori (2018); Ali and Rahman (2020)	6
15	Lack of local networks and relationships	Ali and Rahman (2020); Yombo and Kollie (2020); Sinden and Baloi (2020); Singh and Sharma (2023);	4
16	Market research and information accessibility	Huang and Lee (2022); Adegbile and Oluwatayo (2018); Ali and Baig (2021); Gupta and Chakraborty (2019); Lopes and Garcia (2018); Barros and Souza (2019); Khun and Lim (2021)	7
17	Geographical distance and time zones	Suleimanu and Abdulai (2023); Khalil and Altarawneh (2019); Rami and Abdulhafed (2021); Iaci and Carlei (2018); Tay and Ong (2022); Ahmed and Abdul Aziz (2021); Omondi and Ongori (2018); Osei-Kyei and Amoako (2019); Huang and Lee (2022); Colley and Njie (2019); Sinden and Baloi (2020); Ali and Baig (2021); Kamal and Abdel-Aziz (2020)	13

4.31. Cultural differences

Cultural differences present a significant hurdle for domestic firms seeking international expansion (Ahmed & Abdul Aziz, 2021; Omondi & Ongori, 2018). These differences encompass various aspects such as language, customs, values, and communication styles, all of which profoundly influence business practices and relationships. Language barriers can impede effective communication, hindering negotiation processes and inhibiting the establishment of trust and rapport with foreign partners and customers (Osei-Kyei & Amoako, 2019; Rami & Abdulhafed, 2021). Also, differing cultural norms and etiquettes may lead to misunderstandings or offense, jeopardizing potential business opportunities (Khalil & Altarawneh, 2019). Moreover, divergent work ethics and management styles can pose challenges in aligning strategies and fostering collaboration within multicultural teams (Adegbile & Oluwatayo, 2018; Ali & Baig, 2021; Nhantumbo & Cossa, 2022; Ali & Rahman, 2020).

4.32. Legal and regulatory barriers

Legal and regulatory barriers present formidable obstacles to the internationalization endeavors of domestic firms, significantly impeding their expansion into global markets (Lopes & Garcia, 2018; Khun & Lim, 2021; Cissé & Ndiaye, 2018). These barriers encompass a multitude of challenges, including diverse legal frameworks across countries, complex regulatory requirements, compliance costs, and the need for extensive legal expertise (Iaci & Carlei, 2018; Kamal & Abdel-Aziz, 2020; Adegbile & Oluwatayo, 2018). Navigating these intricate legal landscapes demands substantial resources and time, particularly for smaller firms with limited capacities (Mahmoud & Musa, 2020; Sinden & Baloi, 2020). Moreover, regulatory barriers often create uncertainty and risk, deterring firms from pursuing international opportunities or leading to costly legal disputes (Gupta & Chakraborty, 2019; Tay & Ong, 2022). The burden of compliance with differing regulations not only adds to operational costs but also hampers the agility and competitiveness of domestic firms in global markets (Suleimanu & Abdulai, 2023; Başkaya & Kırdar, 2021; Barros & Souza, 2019).

4.33. Political instability and risk

Political instability and risk present tough barriers to the internationalization efforts of domestic firms, acting as disruptive forces that undermine strategic planning, operational continuity, and investment confidence (Ahmed & Abdul Aziz, 2021). In environments marked by frequent changes in government, policy unpredictability, civil unrest, or geopolitical tensions, firms encounter heightened uncertainty regarding regulatory frameworks, market conditions, and the safety of investments (Colley & Njie, 2019). Moreover, social unrest or political turmoil can disrupt supply chains, jeopardize infrastructure, and pose security threats, forcing firms to divert resources towards risk mitigation rather than expansion efforts (Ali & Baig, 2021). Such uncertainties diminish investor confidence, impede long-term planning, and increase the cost of capital, making it challenging for domestic firms to successfully navigate international markets (Osei-Kyei & Amoako, 2019; Ahmed & Abdul Aziz, 2021).

4.34. Economic factors

Economic factors pose significant barriers to the internationalization of domestic firms due to various challenges they present such as the high costs associated with expanding into foreign markets, including initial investments, transportation, tariffs, and establishing distribution channels (Gupta & Chakraborty, 2019; Başkaya & Kırdar, 2021). Also, currency fluctuations and exchange rate risks can affect profitability and financial stability, making it difficult for firms to plan and forecast accurately (Mahmoud & Musa, 2020; Barros & Souza, 2019; Iaci & Carlei, 2018). Moreover, differences in economic conditions, such as varying levels of economic development, income levels, consumer preferences, and regulatory frameworks across countries, require significant adaptations in marketing strategies, product offerings, and pricing strategies, which can increase complexity and costs for domestic firms (Singh & Sharma, 2023; Sinden & Baloi, 2020; Ali & Rahman, 2020; Rami & Abdulhafed, 2021).

4.35. Infrastructure and logistics challenges

Infrastructure and logistics challenges present significant barriers to the internationalization of domestic firms due to their pervasive impact on operational efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and market reach (Huang & Lee, 2022; Tay & Ong, 2022; Nhantumbo & Cossa, 2022). Inadequate transportation networks, such as poorly maintained roads, ports, and airports, hinder the timely movement of goods, leading to delays and increased expenses (Ali & Rahman, 2020; Colley & Njie, 2019; Ali & Baig, 2021). Limited access to reliable utilities like electricity and water further compounds these challenges, affecting production schedules and overall business continuity (Rami & Abdulhafed, 2021; Khalil & Altarawneh, 2019; Suleimanu & Abdulai, 2023). Additionally, cumbersome customs procedures and bureaucratic red tape exacerbate logistical complexities, slowing down the flow of goods across borders and increasing transaction costs (Osei-Kyei & Amoako, 2019; Lopes & Garcia, 2018; Omondi & Ongori, 2018).

4.36. Inadequate market knowledge and research

Inadequate market knowledge and research represent significant barriers to the internationalization of domestic firms due to their crucial role in understanding foreign markets, consumer behaviour, cultural nuances, and regulatory frameworks (Mahmoud & Musa, 2020; Suleimanu & Abdulai, 2023; Nhantumbo & Cossa, 2022; Cissé & Ndiaye, 2018). Without comprehensive research, firms may struggle to identify viable market opportunities, effectively position their products or services, or navigate the complexities of global trade (Barros & Souza, 2019; Tay & Ong, 2022; Sinden & Baloi, 2020). Lack of understanding about local preferences, competition, and legal requirements can lead to costly mistakes and failures (Iaci & Carlei, 2018; Singh & Sharma, 2023). Moreover, insufficient market intelligence inhibits strategic decision-making and undermines the ability to adapt to evolving market dynamics, hindering firms' competitiveness and expansion efforts on the international stage (Khun & Lim, 2021; Adegbile & Oluwatayo, 2018).

4.37. Inappropriate entry mode selection

Inappropriate entry mode selection presents a significant barrier to domestic firms seeking internationalization by hindering their ability to effectively penetrate foreign markets (Khalil & Altarawneh, 2019; Başkaya & Kırdar, 2021). When firms fail to choose the most suitable entry mode, such as exporting, licensing, joint ventures, or wholly-owned subsidiaries, they risk encountering various challenges including cultural misunderstandings, regulatory issues, and competitive disadvantages (Osei-Kyei & Amoako, 2019). For instance, opting for a joint venture when a wholly-owned subsidiary would be more appropriate might lead to conflicts in decision-making and strategic direction (Ali & Rahman, 2020). Similarly, selecting exporting without considering local market dynamics could result in limited market access and suboptimal distribution channels (Lopes & Garcia, 2018).

4.38. Communication and coordination challenges

Communication and coordination challenges represent significant obstacles to the internationalization of domestic firms, impeding their ability to effectively expand into global markets (Khun & Lim, 2021; Adegbile & Oluwatayo, 2018; Sinden & Baloi, 2020; Singh & Sharma, 2023). These challenges stem from diverse cultural, linguistic, and operational differences across borders, complicating interactions with foreign stakeholders, partners, and customers (Mahmoud & Musa, 2020; Rami & Abdulhafed, 2021; Suleimanu & Abdulai, 2023). Misunderstandings arising from language barriers, differing communication styles, and time zone disparities can hinder efficient collaboration and decision-making processes (Ahmed & Abdul Aziz, 2021; Iaci & Carlei, 2018). Moreover, inadequate infrastructure and technology limitations may further exacerbate these challenges, hindering the flow of information and impeding real-time coordination efforts (Nhantumbo & Cossa, 2022; Barros & Souza, 2019).

4.39. Tariffs and trade barriers

Tariffs and trade barriers represent significant hurdles for domestic firms seeking internationalization (Omondi & Ongori, 2018). Tariffs, essentially taxes on imported goods, directly increase the cost of entering foreign markets, reducing the competitiveness of domestic products abroad (Ali & Rahman, 2020). Additionally, trade barriers such as quotas and regulations further limit market access and increase administrative burdens for companies (Khalil & Altarawneh, 2019). These barriers hinder economies of scale, raising production costs and diminishing profit margins for domestic firms (Cissé & Ndiaye, 2018). Moreover, uncertainty surrounding trade policies can deter long-term investment and strategic planning (Gupta & Chakraborty, 2019). Consequently, domestic firms face formidable challenges in expanding internationally, impeding their growth potential and ability to tap into new markets for sustained development and competitiveness (Yombo & Kollie, 2020).

4.40. Intellectual property concerns

Intellectual property (IP) concerns represent a significant barrier to the internationalization of domestic firms due to the complex legal landscape and varying levels of protection across countries (Barros & Souza, 2019; Nhantumbo & Cossa, 2022). The lack of harmonization in IP laws, enforcement mechanisms, and cultural attitudes towards intellectual property rights creates uncertainty and risk for businesses (Colley & Njie, 2019). Additionally, navigating the process of obtaining and enforcing IP rights in multiple jurisdictions can be time-consuming and costly, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises with limited resources (Ali & Baig, 2021; Adegbile & Oluwatayo, 2018). Moreover, the threat of counterfeit products and piracy further exacerbates these challenges, undermining the competitiveness and profitability of firms operating internationally (Gupta & Chakraborty, 2019). Consequently, IP concerns pose a formidable obstacle for domestic companies seeking to expand their presence in global markets, necessitating strategic approaches to mitigate risks and protect their intellectual assets effectively (Khalil & Altarawneh, 2019).

4.41. Intense local competition and market saturation

Intense local competition and market saturation present formidable challenges for domestic firms seeking to expand internationally (Tay & Ong, 2022). In highly competitive local markets with limited growth opportunities, firms often face difficulty in generating the necessary resources and momentum to venture into foreign markets (Başkaya & Kırdar, 2021). The saturation of domestic markets means that firms must contend with established competitors and struggle to differentiate themselves (Sinden & Baloi, 2020). This fierce competition can squeeze profit margins and hinder investments in research, development, and marketing essential for international expansion (Tay & Ong, 2022). Moreover, entrenched competitors may possess stronger brand recognition and economies of scale, making it harder for domestic firms to penetrate new markets abroad (Başkaya & Kırdar, 2021). Additionally, market saturation can lead to price wars and commoditization, further constraining firms' ability to invest in internationalization efforts.

4.42. Lack of local networks and relationships

The lack of local networks and relationships presents a significant barrier to the internationalization of domestic firms for several reasons. Firstly, without established connections in foreign markets, firms struggle to access critical information about local business practices, regulations, and consumer preferences (Ali & Rahman, 2020). This knowledge gap impedes strategic decision-making and increases the risk of costly mistakes. Secondly, local networks often provide invaluable support in navigating bureaucratic hurdles, securing partnerships, and building trust with stakeholders abroad (Sinden & Baloi, 2020). Without these networks, firms face heightened challenges in establishing their presence and credibility in new markets (Yombo & Kollie, 2020). Additionally, strong local relationships are essential for identifying potential collaborators, suppliers, and distributors, which are crucial for effective market entry and sustained growth (Singh & Sharma, 2023). Overall, the absence of local networks and relationships hampers the ability of domestic firms to successfully expand internationally, limiting their competitiveness and growth prospects on the global stage (Ali & Rahman, 2020).

4.43. Market research and information accessibility

Market research and information accessibility pose significant barriers to the internationalization of domestic firms due to several interconnected factors. Firstly, conducting comprehensive market research in foreign territories requires substantial resources, including time, finances, and expertise, which smaller domestic firms may lack (Khun & Lim, 2021; Lopes & Garcia, 2018). Additionally, cultural and linguistic differences can complicate the gathering and interpretation of market data, impeding firms' ability to accurately assess opportunities and risks in foreign markets (Adegbile & Oluwatayo, 2018). Moreover, limited access to reliable information about regulations, consumer preferences, competitive landscapes, and distribution channels further hinders firms' ability to make informed decisions and formulate effective internationalization strategies (Gupta & Chakraborty, 2019; Barros & Souza, 2019). Consequently, without sufficient market intelligence and information accessibility, domestic firms face heightened uncertainty and risk when expanding into international markets, constraining their growth potential and competitiveness on a global scale (Ali & Baig, 2021; Huang & Lee, 2022).

4.44. Geographical distance and time zones

Geographical distance and time zones present significant hurdles for domestic firms seeking internationalization (Omondi & Ongori, 2018; Osei-Kyei & Amoako, 2019; Huang & Lee, 2022). Geographical distance complicates logistical operations, leading to increased shipping costs, longer transit times, and difficulties in maintaining supply chains (Rami & Abdulhafed, 2021; Iaci & Carlei, 2018; Ali & Baig, 2021). This can deter firms from expanding into distant markets due to the associated complexities and expenses. Also, time zone differences pose challenges in coordinating communication, collaboration, and decision-making across global operations (Ahmed & Abdul Aziz, 2021; Colley & Njie, 2019). As such, synchronous communication becomes challenging, impacting real-time problem-solving and decision-making processes (Kamal & Abdel-Aziz, 2020; Suleimanu & Abdulai, 2023). Additionally, time zone disparities can disrupt workflow efficiency, leading to delays in project completion and hindered responsiveness to market changes (Khalil & Altarawneh, 2019; Tay & Ong, 2022).

5. Discussion

From an empirical analysis of research objective one, it was found that the contemporary foreign-market networks for internationalization can be grouped into 18 categories, including export intermediaries, franchisees, government agencies and trade associations, among others. In the context of this study, the finding underscores the complexity and diversity of strategies employed by firms seeking to expand their presence in foreign markets. By identifying these 18 categories, businesses gain valuable insights into the multitude of options available, allowing them to tailor their approach to suit their specific circumstances and objectives. Moreover, understanding these categories offers firms the opportunity to benchmark their strategies against industry norms and best practices. This can serve as a crucial guidepost in the decision-making process, reducing uncertainty and enhancing the likelihood of successful market entry.

Similarly, from a systematic review of extant literature on research objective two, it was found that foreign market network can facilitate the internationalization of domestic firms in 11 broad ways, including access to distribution channels, risk mitigation, access to market knowledge and insights, among others. The revelation that a foreign market network can serve as a facilitator implies that companies should prioritize the development and expansion of their international connections. Also, access to distribution channels emerges as a critical advantage, potentially allowing firms to tap into previously untapped markets and customer bases. This can lead to increased sales and revenue streams, driving overall growth. Moreover, the finding highlights the role of foreign market networks in risk mitigation. By establishing a presence in multiple markets, firms can spread their risk, reducing vulnerability to economic fluctuations or geopolitical uncertainties in any single region.

Finally, the review of empirical literature on research objective three revealed that the major barriers to the internationalization of domestic firms can be grouped into 17 categories, including geographical distance and time zones, cultural differences, legal and regulatory barriers, political instability and risk, among others. The identification of 17 distinct categories of barriers provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex challenges that firms may face in the process of internationalization. This categorization can enable businesses to systematically assess and prioritize these obstacles, allowing for more targeted and effective strategic planning. Specifically, geographical distance and time zones emerge as crucial factors influencing internationalization efforts. This implies that firms must devise strategies to mitigate the impact of physical separation and time disparities, such as leveraging technology for virtual communication, establishing local offices or partnerships, and carefully scheduling operations to align with global markets. Cultural differences also emerge as a prominent barrier, underscoring the need for firms to invest in cross-cultural training and sensitivity to ensure effective communication and harmonious relationships with stakeholders across diverse regions.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

As observed at the outset of this study, internationalization has played a critical role in the growth, sustainability and expansion of domestic firms around the world. This is because it provides a gradual but consistent platform for these firms to access foreign markets and exploit their potential, thereby minimizing the risks of over-reliance on a single market. This study was therefore carried out to explore scholarly positions on the roles of foreign market network in the internationalization of domestic firms. It specifically sought to identify the contemporary foreign-market networks available to domestic firms seeking internationalization; the major internationalization approaches available to these firms; as well as the major barriers to the internationalization agendas of these firms. To that end, a systematic literature review design was adopted, enabling a comprehensive, structured and in-depth exploration of extant literature on the research questions. From an in-depth content analysis of extant relevant studies, the study found that the contemporary foreign-market networks for internationalization can be grouped into 18 categories, including export intermediaries, franchisees, government agencies and trade associations, among others.

The study also found that foreign market network can facilitate the internationalization of domestic firms in 11 broad ways, including access to distribution channels, risk mitigation, access to market knowledge and insights, among others. Finally, the study revealed that the major barriers to the internationalization of domestic firms can be grouped into 17 categories, including geographical distance and time zones, cultural differences, legal and regulatory barriers, political instability and risk, among others. The findings of this study suggest that foreign market network is critical to the internationalization agenda of domestic firms. However, for internationalization of domestic firms to be successful, there is need for the major institutional, economic, political, legal, and socio-cultural barriers to be adequately addressed. On the basis of the findings made in this study, the following recommendations are suggested for possible implementation by domestic firms seeking internationalization:

Domestic firms seeking to internationalize should seek out foreign market networks using personal contacts, social media and the internet generally in order to gather substantial market intelligence about the countries to which they intend to expand their operations. This approach will enable the firms to obtain invaluable insights and understanding of the issues in the target markets, facilitating smoother market entry.

While there are several approaches to internationalization, it is recommended that domestic firms pursue approaches like exporting, franchising, licensing, joint ventures and strategic alliances that entail less risk and offer the most promising success potential at minimal expenditure. These approaches not only facilitate international expansion but also enable firms to adapt to the unique challenges and peculiarities of foreign markets, ultimately increasing their chances of sustained success on a global scale.

Domestic firms can leverage foreign market networks by establishing strategic partnerships with local distributors, leveraging international trade associations, and utilizing cross-border collaborations to gain market insights, access distribution channels, and build relationships with key stakeholders, facilitating the successful execution of their internationalization strategy.

Domestic firms can address key barriers to internationalization and successfully expand into foreign markets by conducting thorough market research, establishing strong local partnerships, adapting products/services to meet local preferences, complying with regulatory requirements, and effectively managing cultural differences. By following this approach, domestic firms can surmount critical obstacles to internationalization and achieve prosperous expansion into foreign markets.

Suggestions for further research

The subject of foreign market network and internationalization is a critical one especially for domestic firms in developing countries, which are too often shortchanged and sidelined in global marketing operations. Against this backdrop, it is suggested that more research be carried out within the context of developing countries to determine how the barriers to international trade for domestic firms can durably and effectively mitigated through the establishment of foreign market networks with partners around the world. The results of such studies will be instrumental to domestic firms in the developing world seeking the best ways to internationalize to other country markets to growth their business.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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