

Internationalization of Moroccan SMEs. Literature review of different theoretical approaches and limits.

Internationalisation des PME marocaines. Revue de littérature des différentes approches et limites théoriques.

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Abstract

Small and medium-sized enterprises are seen as an essential source of development and dynamism for all countries (Agndal, Chetty, 2007; Todd, Javalgi, 2007). Indeed, SMEs have gained the interest of researchers and can now be considered as a real object of study. Moreover, in recent years, Ribau, Moreira and Raposo highlighted the interest in the internationalization of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which is growing rapidly, mentioned in (Child, 2022), as their ability to do business globally has been perceived (HSBC, 2016). Internationalization has been characterized both as a cycle and to the extent that the exercises that companies embrace to go into international markets (Ribau et al., 2018). Welch and Luostarinen (1988) represent internationalization as "a more common way of expanding contribution to global tasks. As a cycle, it is not guaranteed that SME internationalization follows a fixed pattern of stages; on the contrary, various cases have been observed to present differentiated successions of opportunities (Jones, 1999).

In this article, which focuses on the literature review of SME internationalization, we have proceeded by listing the different definitions of the concept of internationalization, and then we have listed the different approaches as well as their limitations.

Keywords: Internationalization; SMEs; Literature review; Internationalization approaches; Limitations.

Résumé

Les petites et moyennes entreprises sont considérées comme une source essentielle de développement et de dynamisme pour tous les pays (Agndal, Chetty, 2007 ; Todd, Javalgi, 2007). En effet, les PME ont gagné l'intérêt des chercheurs et peuvent désormais être considérées comme un véritable objet d'étude. De plus, ces dernières années, Ribau, Moreira et Raposo ont souligné l'intérêt pour l'internationalisation des petites et moyennes entreprises (PME) qui est en pleine croissance, mentionné par (Child, 2022), car leur capacité à faire des affaires à l'échelle mondiale a été perçue (HSBC, 2016). L'internationalisation a été caractérisée à la fois comme un cycle et dans la mesure où les exercices que les entreprises embrassent pour se rendre dans des marchés internationaux (Ribau et al., 2018). Welch et Luostarinen (1988) représentent l'internationalisation comme "un moyen plus courant d'étendre la contribution à des tâches mondiales". En tant que cycle, il n'est pas garanti que l'internationalisation des PME suive un modèle fixe d'étapes ; au contraire, on a aperçu que divers cas présentaient des successions d'occasions différenciées (Jones, 1999).

Dans le présent article qui se porte sur la revue de littérature de l'internationalisation des PME, nous avons procédé par l'énumération des différentes définitions du concept d'internationalisation, puis nous avons énuméré les différentes approches ainsi que leurs limites.

Mots clés : Internationalisation ; PME ; Revue de littérature ; Approches d'internationalisations ; limites.

Introduction

Several strategy research studies have been devoted to the elements influencing the global development of SMEs in recent years. This highlights both the contribution of SMEs to local or regional economic growth and the importance of global rivalry, which is imposed on small firms due to the consequences of economic and market globalization (Bourcieu & al., 2006).

Therefore, the presence of SMEs in international trade is detected, where they are also actively involved in global trade with exceptional competitiveness (Ali & Swierez, 1991). In 1992, Kaynak states that the participation of SMEs in foreign trade promotes the growth of output and the number of jobs produced Kaynak (1992). According to the OECD, this factor was important for the creation of 70% of jobs in SMEs in 2004. In addition to this boost to growth, the increase in exports demonstrates the competitiveness and excellent innovation potential of these companies. Faced with this observation, SME managers are increasingly being asked to integrate the international component into their business plans. Several studies (Johanson and Vahlne, 1990; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990; Fillion, 1991; Scott Morton, 1993; Julien and Morin, 1996; Arrègle, 2000; Bahija, 2001; Dunning, 2002; Rogers, 2003; Fabi & al, 2004; Etrillard, 2004), based on voluntarist and deterministic approaches, have attempted to analyze the choice of entrepreneurial strategies to explain the behavior of SME managers. Olinga (2022) highlighted that another important fact about internationalization is the existence of several explanatory paradigms. These theories allude to many entrepreneurial techniques (business intelligence, strategic intelligence, innovation, resources, technology, strategic vision, network....) that are found to enhance the effectiveness of SMEs in conquering more competitive global markets (Kombate, 2018). *So what are the main processes of SME's internationalization? what are the main theoretical approaches and what are the limits dedicated to every approaches?*

Indeed, this article represents a review of the literature embracing all the different concepts related to the internationalization of SMEs. For this purpose, we will try to list the most important definitions of the concept of internationalization in a first order, then in a second order we will explain each approach and model of internationalization of SMEs such as the U-model and the I-model, internationalization by stages, internationalization by economy and internationalization by networks, as well as their phases of implementation and the limitations related to each one, then we finish with a conclusion.

1- Internationalization: what does it mean?

To internationalize is to "cross borders". This expression is described as "the action of making something international" in the Petit Robert dictionary (2014). Internationalization is also the process of adapting a company's strategy, resources and operational structure to the global environment in order to increase its performance.

Internationalization, according to Kotler and Dubois (2000:779), is "the growth of firms' products and services beyond national borders to overseas markets." This is more in line with the objectives of our work. It is necessary to define internationalization as the process by which firms decide to expand into other markets and offer their products and services there.

Internationalization refers to a company's attitude towards foreign operations or the actual implementation of a foreign activity. With this in mind, we study the expansion of Moroccan SMEs beyond their borders. The primary purpose of internationalizing a firm is to earn revenue and expand its market. The increase in business profits from internationalization is based on various factors or advantages. Internationalization is the process by which a small or medium-sized business exports its goods or services to a foreign market. This method frequently allows companies to reap a variety of benefits, including lower wages, better resource utilization, and increased productivity and work capacity.

2- Internationalization of SMEs: what schools of thought?

Although other factors, both internal and external to the organization, may play a preponderant role, management research finds three main categories of reasons to explain the internationalization behavior of SMEs. These are the Stage Approach, the Economics Approach, and the Network Approach, which study how and why the firm internationalizes.

2.1 The Stages Approach :

Many models all agree that internationalization is a linear and sequential process composed of a series of steps known as the "establishment chain" (Coviello & McAuley, 1999). Within this school of thought, researchers distinguish two paths of analysis of internationalization: the Uppsala model (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977) and the innovation model (Bilkey & Tesar, 1977; Cavusgil, 1980; Reid, 1981; Czinkota, 1982). However, recent work (Gankema et al., 2000; Pope, 2002; Etrillard, 2004; Torrès, 2004; Boutary, 2006) has generated interest in the need to examine the universal applicability of these models (Axinn & Metthyssens, 2002).

2.1.1 The U-model: UPPSALA model

The Swedish school of Johanson, Wiedershiem-Paul and Vahlne was the first to establish this concept (1975; 1977). Two fundamental principles can be drawn from their contributions: the learning process and psychological distance. This paradigm views internationalization as a gradual learning process, with experience gained along the way serving as the key to that internationalization (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977). Therefore, the objective and experiential information explained in the table below obtained from this experience in international markets feeds into the firm's decision-making process.

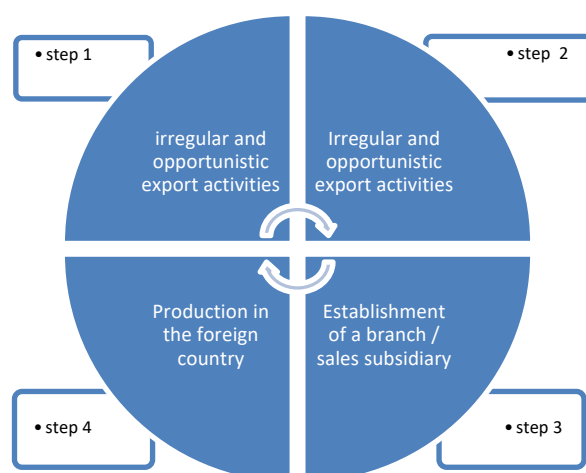
Table n°1: Adapted to Johanson and Vahlne (1977) and Benyetho (2017)

Objective Information	Subjective or experiential Information
It is information that can be easily transmitted between operators and firms, and can be generated through the collection and transmission of data.	It is information that is generated by the firm through its experience in foreign markets while accumulating different types of knowledge.

Source : Authors.

In addition, the more experience a company has in a particular market, the more resources and capabilities it mobilizes to enter that market. Therefore, internationalization is achieved through a series of sequential and gradual actions. According to the proponents of this model, their studies of Swedish companies show that they follow a sequential process divided into four stages as mentioned in the following figure:

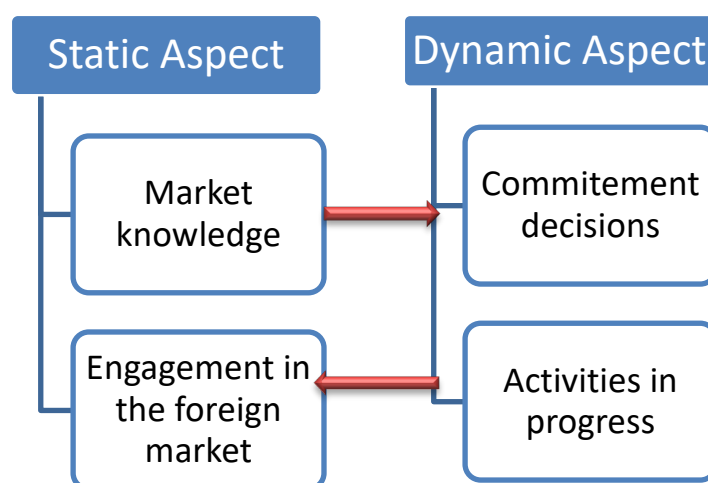
Figure 1: The internationalization process according to (Sarrailh,2008)



Source : Authors.

Secondly, companies look for countries and markets that are psychically close (K.Benyetho,2017), which is why the second contribution of this model concerns the psychological distance. Indeed, Johanson and Vahlne (1977) use this concept, defined as the set of cultural and linguistic differences that influence the flow of information and decision-making in international transactions, to explain that as international experience increases, the psychological distance that separates the SME from new foreign territories decreases. This decrease in psychological distance favors a more extensive progression and a more complete use of the opportunities offered by the different countries known.

Figure 2: The internationalization process according to Johanson & Vahlne



Source : Vahlne and Johanson 2009

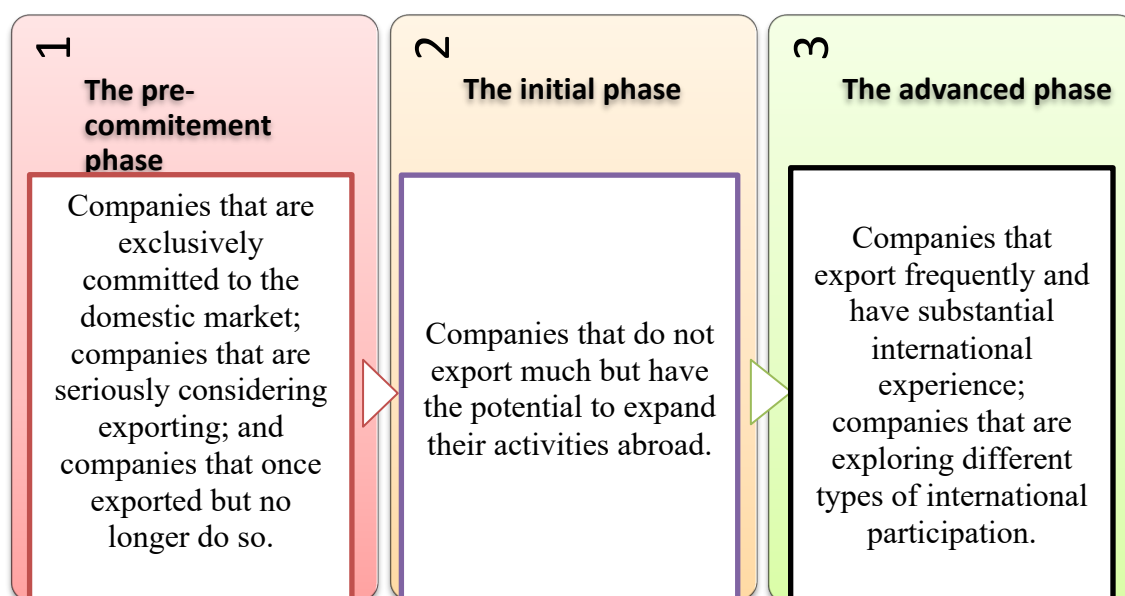
This figure highlights the interaction between the static and dynamic aspects. As soon as the firm enters the foreign market, it begins to develop more knowledge through its experience, allowing it to generate the capacity to seize opportunities and mobilize more resources abroad. These capabilities allow the firm to increase the commitment to the foreign market (K.Benyetho, 2017).

2.1.2 The I-model: Innovation Model

This approach identifies internationalization as a system with stages similar to those of product acceptance (Rogers, 1962, cited in Gankema & al., 2000; Gemser & al., 2004; Li & al., 2004). Indeed, many scholars have kept this perspective in mind when describing the globalization of SMEs. The best known models are those of Bilkey and Tesar (1977), Cavusgil (1980), Reid (1981) and Cinzkota (1981) cited above in K.Benyetho (2017) . All these models consider that the completion of each stage represents an innovation for the firm (Gankema et al., 2000; Gemser et al., 2004; Li et al., 2004), the only differences being the phases chosen, their number and the mechanism for launching the SME's internationalization.

Leonidou and Katsikeas (1996) stated that the stages of the different models from this perspective are basically described in three phases:

Figure 3: The three phases of the innovation model



Source : Authors.

It should be noted, however, that the models that make up this vision remain extremely similar to the Uppsala school, which retains the two key principles: the progressive commitment of SMEs and the presence of a psychological distance. To this we add the model of Bilkey and Tesar (1977), which is based on 6 essential steps:

Figure 4: Diagram explaining Bilkey and Tesar's (1977) 6 stages of internationalization-innovation



Source : Authors.

As for Coviello and McAuley (1999), they observe the variety of results on the thesis of internationalization in phases by recognizing the range of the two models. While some works support this idea, others refute it and address several issues (Kombate, 2018). Other literature supports this critical stance on the existence of a fixed path for SMEs pursuing internationalization. These objections, based on empirical observation of counterexamples, sometimes focus on explaining the observed outlier behaviors and sometimes on criticizing the broad scope of the stepwise models: According to Millington and Bayliss (1990, cited in Pope, 2002), the stepwise method would only be an exception and would therefore not apply to SMEs.

2.1.3 Internationalization by stages: which limits to consider

The theory of internationalization by stages suffers from several limitations, the authors mentioned them as follows:

Table n°2: The limits of U-Model and I-Model

Authors	Limit
F. Pantin, 2006; 78	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deterministic theories - Mechanical nature - Difficulty in determining the factors and conditions for moving from one stage to another in the internationalization process. - The neglect of the lack of resources factor in SMEs.
F. Cheriet, 2008, 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the inadequacy of the notion of psychic distance in view of the existence of other factors pushing companies to internationalize, such as the opportunities present in the target market, the resources and capacities of the company and the skills of its managers.
S.Laghzaoui,2009,55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He mentioned that Axiin and Matthussens questioned the general scope of the two models (U-model and I-model) in view of the fact that exceptions appear superior to behaviors conforming to these models.
P-A Buigues & D. Lacoste, 2011,277	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They pointed out the weakness of the empirical confirmations of the models. - The absence of longitudinal tests showing the systematic passage of the firm through each stage of the model.

Source : Authors.

2.2 Internationalization through economics

The second process for analyzing the international development of SMEs is based on the publications of economists. Penrose argued in 1959 that the indivisibility of productive resources explained their chronic under-utilization and, consequently, the incentive for firms to expand into new markets. Montgomery and Wernerfelt (1991) extend this approach by observing that some resources are unique and can only be used for specific activities (Khayat, 2004). Ruzzier et al (2006) outline the main theoretical currents integrated into the economic approach in a more recent work, from which they distinguish three types of theories concerning this effect:

2.2.1 The theory of Direct Foreign Investment

Y. Montenay defined FDI in 2003 as "any cross-border investment whose result is either to acquire or control an existing company, or to create new production capacity through a subsidiary".

While it was defined in 2005 by Essou as the :

"the process by which a non-resident investor acquires or increases a long-term stake in a resident enterprise in order to gain influence over its management. It often precedes portfolio investment and accelerates the growth of local capital markets. It involves a "direct investor" (parent company) with an invested company, whether it is a subsidiary or a branch office. It is defined as the investment by foreign companies in manufacturing facilities or other physical assets." (Essou, 2005).

FDI thus highlights the decision of the firm to send their production activities abroad in the form of FDI instead of exporting their products from the local market or cooperating with local partners while taking into consideration the concepts of transaction cost (Coase, 1937) and internalization in the context of upstream or downstream vertical integration operations (Buckley & Casson, 1993, 1995). It is obvious to understand transaction costs (Coase, 1937) and internalization (Buckley & Casson, 1976), (J. Sarrailh, 2008, 6). For example, Pisarek (2011, 7) states that "the internationalization of firms is understood as a choice between internalization and outsourcing of operations. The firm chooses the organizational structure that reduces transaction costs. In other words, when transactions are considered risky and require more management time, the company opts for the organizational structure, which in turn reduces transaction costs, management time and requires significant resources. The company

will therefore prefer to internalize this work within its hierarchical structure rather than have it done by a third party (N. Coviello and K. Martin, 1999, 44).

2.2.2 - The eclectic paradigm

The eclectic paradigm of (Dunning, 1988, 2001), or the OLI paradigm (Ownership, Location, Internalization), which is based on the theory of internalization and highlights the three categories of advantages:

Table n°3: The OLI Paradigm

Internal benefits (Ownership)	Geographical advantages (Location)	Benefits of Internalization (Internalization)
They are specific to the company and linked to the accumulation of intangible resources such as: technological advancement, product differentiation, specific endowment (men, capital, organization), economic size of scale.	They are made up of institutional and productive factors in a geographical location such as: price differentiation and quality of raw materials, internal communication and possibility of agreement, transport costs, psychological distance (language, culture), spatial distribution of inputs and markets	the company's ability to manage and coordinate activities in the best conditions: reduction of exchange costs, reduction of theft of property rights, reduction of uncertainty, control of supply (quantity and quality),

Source : Authors.

Dunning's (1988, 2001, 2002) resource theory is reinforced by this paradigm, which is based on the idea that a firm with distinct advantages in resource and skill ownership and management can trade directly in international markets without going through a linear process (Kombate, 2018). Skills are specific abilities to apply assets (financial and technological resources) arranged to achieve goals (Dunning, 1988; Bayad & al., 2006).

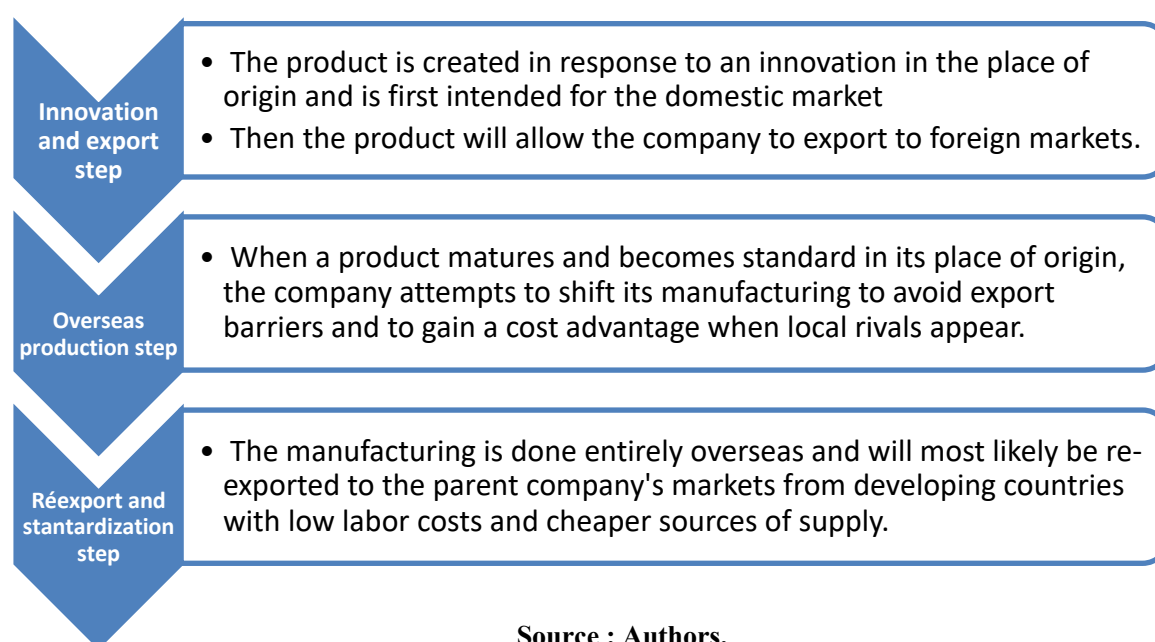
These talents are used in deliberate and concluded activities where they are strengthened and enriched by learning to achieve greater international performance (Tarondeau, 1998).

One of the difficulties of the current is the difficulty of extending its theoretical contributions to the SME framework because they were developed in the environment of large companies. Moreover, the impact of social relations on transactions (Johanson & Mattson, 1988; Gemser & al., 2004) seems to be neglected by this approach.

2.2.3 Vernon's life cycle

Vernon proposed an explanation of FDI based on the product life cycle in a first article published in 1966, and followed in 1970 by the publication of a book. It differs from FDI theory and Dunning's eclectic paradigm in the dynamic and temporal component it brings to the study of FDI flows (J. Sarrailh, 2008, 8). Vernon (1966) proposes three crucial phases in the life of a product in his attempt to explain the evolution of American FDI in Europe:

Figure 5: Veron's 2 life cycle stages



Source : Authors.

However, this approach has been subject to various challenges, particularly in terms of empirical validation in industries other than manufacturing (J. Sarrailh, 2008, 9).

Despite its obvious contribution through the many models presented, the economic approach only partially explains the process of firm internationalization.

- On the one hand, its use of methods of analysis of the multinational firm tends to neglect the process of internationalization.

- On the one hand, the use of techniques for evaluating multinational firms tends to neglect the unique characteristics of SMEs, both in terms of structure and operation (W. Pisarek, 2011, 12).

On the other hand, empirical investigations reveal that managerial decisions are not systematically based on cost-benefit tradeoffs (S. Laghzaoui, 2006, 8).

Similarly, economic theory overlooks and forgets the crucial and influential role of connections in transactions, paving the way for the emergence of the network approach.

2.3 Internationalization through networks

The Uppsala school of thought inspired the network approach. Indeed, Johanson and Vahlne (1990) revisited their earlier model (1977) to emphasize the importance of the firm's networked location. These authors attempted to explain the motivations and modalities of internationalization by placing the firm in a multilateral framework mobilizing intra- and inter-organizational relationships, based on the concepts used in their original model (commitment, knowledge, current activities and decision making).

Second, internationalization is described as the growth of a network through relationships with other nations, as characterized by Johanson and Mattson (1988) in three stages: extension, penetration and integration. The initial step firms take toward network integration is network extension. It is accompanied by new investments by the firm. Immersion refers to the expansion of the company's positions in the network and the expansion of its committed resources. Integration is a more advanced level in which the company is linked to different national networks that it must coordinate. Thus, the establishment of technological, commercial and financial contacts with other network actors allows companies to expand their connections and gradually develop their activities outside their national borders until they become international. As a result, a company can be described as global because other companies in its network are international. Incremental learning and information acquisition through networked interactions are central to their paradigm (Johanson & Mattson, 1988). The network approach provides a fresh look at the firm's internationalization process, especially for small firms, where network participation is a critical component of success due to their limited resources.

2.3.1 The business network

A business network is defined as "the firm's diverse, close and long-term ties with important suppliers and customers" (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009, 3).

Instead of targeting only nearby markets, the internationalizing firm aspires to incorporate itself into a network in which one or more of its members already established in foreign markets can play a crucial role and can serve as an important resource, and also ensuring their success in global expansion. In fact, according to Johanson and Vahlne (2009), the firm will do better to manage its problem of not being part of a network "Liability of outsidership" than to fear its handicap from the foreign firm "Liability of foreignness"

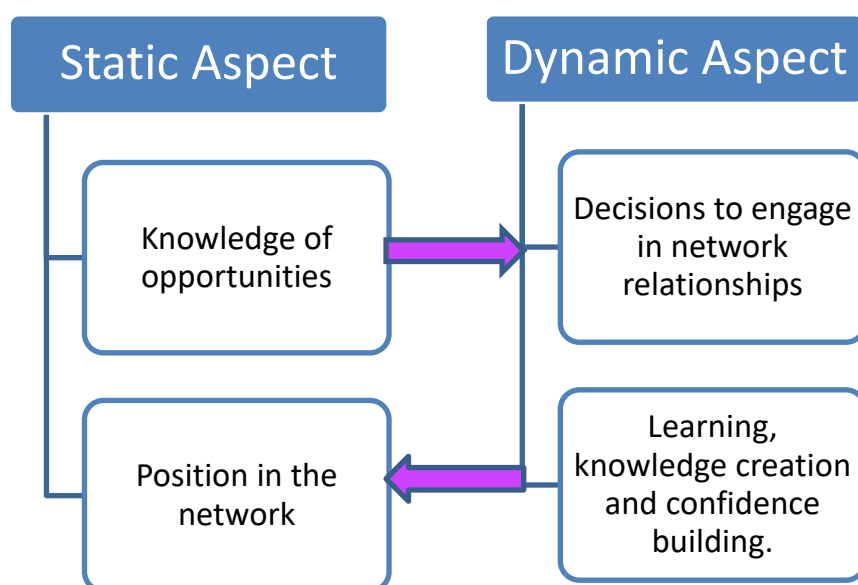
2.3.2 Revised Uppsala Model

Johanson and Masson (1988) and Johanson and Vahne (1990) emphasize the relevance of the firm's network in explaining the reasons and patterns of internationalization.

Indeed, they adapt the way they evaluate the ideas in their original model (commitment, knowledge, current actions, and decision making) by using a multi-stakeholder approach rather than simply relying on the perspective of the target firm. As a result, the internationalization process is seen as both intra-organizational and inter-organizational (S. Laghzaoui, 2006, 7).

Thus, in an article published in the "Journal of international business studies" in 2009, Johanson and Vahne proposed a new or revised version of their basic model from the 1970s, based on the assumption that internationalization processes take place within a network whose relationships are characterized by particular levels of knowledge, commitment and trust (E. Moalla, 2010. 7). Thus the new revised Uppsala model is as follows:

Figure n°6: The new revised Uppsala model

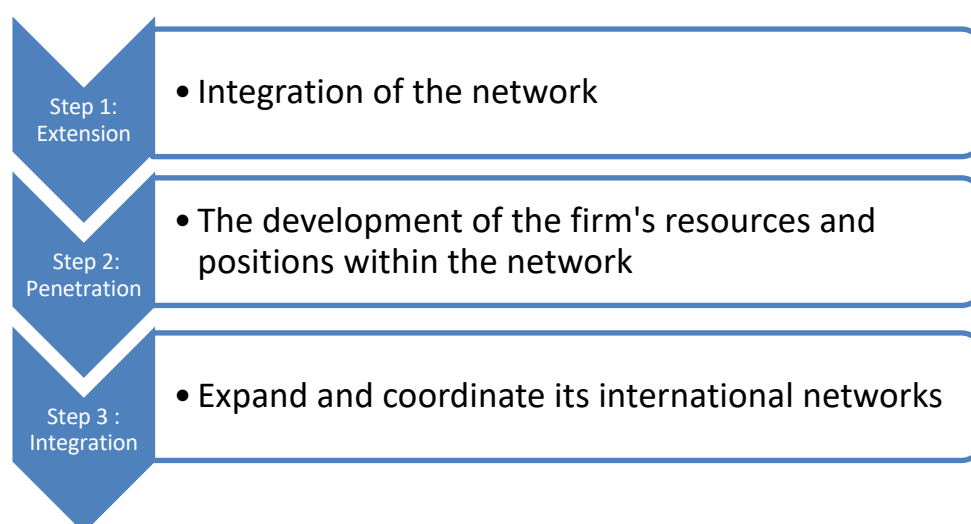


Source : Vahlne and Johanson 2009.

This new model retains the structure of the previous Uppsala model from 1977, with its two static and dynamic characteristics. The network experience can help the globalization efforts of the company. This basis is positively related to the amount of international expansion prospects that exist for the firm (O. Meier, 2010, 15). Thus, the firm may decide to increase or decrease its commitment to one or more connections in its existing network. This learning and knowledge development fosters trust and is essential to the relationship between the firm and the network members. They serve as the basis for gaining a key and meaningful position within the company's network, which will support successful internationalization.

Johanson and Mattson (1988) identify three stages for the internationalization of firms (S. Laghzaoui, 2006, T):

Figure 6: The three stages of internationalization according to the revised Uppsala model



Source : Authors.

The network approach introduces a new explanation and interpretation of the internationalization process of the firm in general, and the SME in particular (Benyetho, 2017). The latter is more receptive to integration into one or more networks in order to overcome a lack of resources and/or a lack of skills and thus effectively launch itself on the global stage.

At this level, it is worth noting the limitations of each of the methodologies mentioned so far (stepwise, economy-based, and network-based), as evidenced by the conceptual and empirical investigations. However, when these methodologies are combined, they provide a fairly complete and broader knowledge of the internationalization process (S. Laghzaoui, 2006, 2).

Conclusion

According to Dorinela and al (2022), Internationalization introduces new stimuli, risks, and complexities to enterprise and it entails situational uncertainty, with multiple actions having unpredictable results.

Furthermore, the main idea generated by the writing of this article was related to the understanding of the internationalization cycle of SMEs. Certainly, this process is characterized by a complexity that manifests itself through the variety of methodologies depicting the process in question: the financial methodology, the stage approach and the organization approach. Each provides a unique perspective, but fails to capture the full picture of the cycle. Our aspiration in this article was to constitute an adequate literature review allowing the consolidation of these commitments into a rational and organized narrative form.

Indeed, this article allows us to shed some light on the "why" and "how" a company, especially an SME, goes international (Pantin, 2006). On the schematic plan the principal engagement of our work relates to the exploration of the process of internationalization of SME. This deepening makes it possible to coordinate the whole of the engagements of the methodologies in order to better seize the variety of the modes of internationalization of the SME. This article also shows that essential administration, often considered to be reserved for large companies, can offer valuable insights for SMEs.

For public policymakers, understanding how and why SMEs internationalize allows them to plan and execute a viable global marketing plan and public projects for internationalization development.

For specialists, this new study of SME internationalization has a major advantage in that it offers a redesign and explanation of conventional methodologies.

In sum, the realization of internationalization is carried out internally through the gathering of SMEs in parts of economic interest, and externally through the union of business networks with the countries on which they wish to internationalize, but this remains fueled by the presence of a solid platform that can gather key data allowing the obtaining of strategic information, and a framework ready to face a wide range of dangers and risks.

It is necessary to highlight the importance of the SME's manager during internationalization to make the right decisions in a short period of time even if he does not have all the necessary information.

One of our study's shortcomings being that it's exclusively dependent on the construction of the literature review without the empirical investigation. As a result, we would encourage additional academics to contribute to the empirical continuation of this study and investigate the predicted outcomes further.

Finally, as Cropanzano (2009) suggests, one strategy to making a review article relevant is to define a topic that, while now small, has possibility for expansion. This is precisely what we intend to do with this review essay.

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