Enablers of international product customisation strategy – a Swedish case

Daniella Fjellström

Department of Business and Economic Studies,
University of Gävle,
Gävle, Sweden
Email: Daniella.fjellstrom@hig.se

Aihie Osarenkhoe*

Department of Business and Economic Studies,
University of Gävle,
Gävle, Sweden
Email: Aihie.osarenkhoe@hig.se
*Corresponding author

Thomas Roe

The Bank of New York Mellon Corporation,
Wexford, County Wexford, Ireland
Email: thomasjmroe@gmail.com

Abstract: The aim of this study is to understand what factors influence companies to customise products international customers and markets. A qualitative case study with semi-structured interviews was conducted at one multinational corporation to gain insights into its product customisation strategy. The findings demonstrate how internationalisation can impact product customisation and identify four factors in the customisation process: culture, internationalisation, knowledge transfer, and product strategy. Tailored marketing strategies that influenced the international product customisation strategy (IPCS) were used. This study augmented on our understanding of how product customisation impacts internationalisation and vice versa, revealing the importance of knowledge transfer in IPCS and its growing impact due to digitalisation. It also shows how both B2B marketing and a tailored marketing strategy are overarching themes in international product customisation, making it one of few studies to recognise the relevance of omnichannel strategy in the B2B market segment.

Keywords: digitalisation; knowledge transfer; internationalisation; product customisation.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Fjellström, D., Osarenkhoe, A. and Roe, T. (2022) 'Enablers of international product customisation strategy – a Swedish case', *Int. J. Business Environment*, Vol. X, No. Y, pp.xxx–xxx.

Biographical notes: Daniella Fjellström is an Associate Professor at the Department of Business and Economic Studies, University of Gävle. She was awarded her PhD in International Business at the Centre for International

Business, the University of Leeds. Her research interests include knowledge transfer, regional development, digitalisation, reshoring and competitiveness. She has published in, among others, *Asian Business & Management*, *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, *International Journal of Applied Business and Economic Research*, *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, *Journal of Asia Business Studies*, *Global Business and Economics Review*, *EuroMed Journal of Business*, *International Journal of Business Environment*.

Aihie Osarenkhoe holds a Full Professorial position of Marketing and International Business at University of Gävle, Sweden – where he is also the Head of Research. He obtained PhD in Business Studies from Stockholm University in Sweden. He is an Associate Editor of *Journal of Global Marketing*. His research encompasses interplay between information technology and marketing paradigms and application of relationship and network approaches to study challenges such as digitalisation, urbanisation and globalisation. He has published over 40 articles in highly ranked peer-reviewed academic journals – e.g., *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, *Journal of Promotion Management*, *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, *Business Process Management Journal*, *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing*, *Journal of Regional Research*, *Thunderbird International Business Review*, *Health Marketing Quarterly*, *Journal of Information Technology Research*, *EuroMed Journal of Business*, *International Journal of Business Environment*.

Thomas Roe is currently a Client Services Manager with one of the world's largest financial institutions and has a vast experience in the world of financial services. Since graduating from his Bachelor of Business in Entrepreneurship and Management, he has always strived to better himself be it through working for some of the world's largest financial institutions; or through his continued desire for knowledge by obtaining a Professional Diploma in Financial Advice, Master's degree in Business Administration from the University of Gävle (Sweden) and starting a PhD in Business and Economics in Italy. These global experiences have lead to his research interests, particularly in culture.

1 Introduction

It is now almost 40 years since Theodore Levitt published his influential essay, *The Globalization of Markets* (1983), which spawned a long-standing debate as to whether a firm's products should be standardised across foreign markets or adapted to the specific needs and requirements of customers living in different countries. In that 1983 article, Levitt thus made the case for a standardisation strategy, arguing that technology and worldwide communications had helped to trigger the emergence of global consumer markets receptive to single, standardised global products. According to Levitt, adopting a standardised global strategy provides a competitive advantage in cost and effectiveness. On first reading, Levitt's article provides an elegant and coherent argument. World markets, he declares, are 'irrevocably homogenised' (1983, p.93). People everywhere are becoming more alike and homogeneous market segments are repeated throughout the world. The influence of local culture is decreasing to the extent that global companies not only can, but must, offer the same products in the same way everywhere.

With regard to product standardisation, the fact that digitalisation helps toward converging buying preferences and behaviours and homogenising market characteristics across different countries, as well as boosts a firm's ability to reach and serve multiple foreign markets at the same time, implies that international marketers are now in a better position than earlier to reap the benefits of offering uniform products across countries. On the other hand however, digitalisation offers tremendous opportunities for international firms to adapt their products to individual customer requirements across various countries, through the personalisation and customisation properties of online marketing (Sheth and Sharma, 2005).

In the same vein, advances in technology that provide precise information, at each moment and for each channel, of each client's context (Berman and Thelen, 2018) have precipitated the use of omnichannel strategies in the business-to-business (B2B) market segment. Thus, purchasing processes in B2B are changing. Whereas, in the past, the manufacturer or distributor sales team was the first point of contact for buyers, today's businesses want to buy online and take advantage of personalisation as well as have a digital paper trail (Berman and Thelen, 2018; Costa Climent et al., 2021). Changes in consumer behaviour, as well as new technologies, have fostered a transition from multichannel to omnichannel marketing in the B2B market segment (Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013; Cai and Lo, 2020; Mudambi, 2002). Verhoef et al. (2015, p.176) define omnichannel management as "the synergetic management of the numerous available channels and customer touchpoints, in such a way that the customer experience across channels and the performance over channels is optimized". This synergistic management is what differentiates an omnichannel strategy from multichannel management.

One recent paper (Alonso-Garcia et al., 2022) focuses on omnichannel management in the B2B sphere (Alonso-Garcia et al., 2021a; Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013; Mudambi, 2002). Unfortunately, few studies cover the B2B field (Alonso-Garcia et al., 2021b), so the existing models published to aid omnichannel decision-making do so from the point of view of retail.

The present study was conducted in a global, high-tech engineering group with approximately 35,000 employees and sales in about 150 countries. Through its unique expertise and solutions for the manufacturing, mining and infrastructure industries, the case firm, which has been anonymised here, maintains a strong focus on enhancing customer productivity, profitability and sustainability. The study was undertaken to investigate a manufacturing company's approach to internationalisation in terms of its ability to customise products for different markets for its customers in the B2B context. This topic is highly relevant today due to an increase in technological innovations, to factors such as Industry 4.0, and to the ease with which production lines and products can be altered (Lasi et al., 2014; Benitez et al., 2021).

Against this background, as Industry 4.0 becomes increasingly prominent with respect to how technology is used to enhance product lines, firms must be sensitive to the customer's needs. This newfound customisation has led to customers becoming more demanding as the concept becomes ever more important in our continually globalised world economy (Ndubisi and Nataraajan, 2016).

For many decades now, extant literature has focused on supply chain (SC) configuration when evaluating new customisation possibilities (Beamon, 1998; Macchion and Fornasiero, 2021). This evidence has contributed to more studies on the factors that push companies to locate their manufacturing in different geographical regions and their

respective choices with regard to balancing local versus global production (e.g., Ketokiwi et al., 2017; Macchion et al., 2017; Macchion and Fornasiero, 2021). Marketing strategies are a crucial part of international expansion. Firms are able to base their marketing strategy on their product range and standardisation of marketing across countries, both of which can lead to successful internationalisation (Gabrielsson et al., 2012).

Companies also have the option of leaving their products as is, which can be a cheaper way to export and represents a form of product standardisation. Or, alternatively, they can make changes to product characteristics such as design or packaging, increasing the cost of their exports by way of product development and marketing. It is important for a firm to consider whether the revenue generated through product customisation is sufficient to outweigh the costs incurred (André, 2021; Calantone et al., 2004).

Several calls have been made to combine the fields of international business and digitalisation (e.g., Vahlne and Johanson, 2017; Coviello et al., 2017; Manyika et al., 2016). The digital revolution affects organisations as a whole, thereby redefining their strategies, entrepreneurial processes, and governance mechanisms or structures (Fremont et al., 2018; Eklinder-Frick et al., 2020). Calantone et al. (2004) emphasise the process of international product adaptation and research into the different types of product customisation that a company can undertake. Hyder and Fregidou-Malama (2009) have also acknowledged similar gaps in literature. As the field of B2B manufacturing is rapidly changing due to automation and digitalisation, one of the main drivers of the need for more research is increased technology (Ferrás-Hernández, 2020; Lasi et al., 2014). In addition, the full potential of omnichannel marketing has not been fully utilised by practitioners (Rodríguez-Torrico et al., 2021). Omnichannel represents a cross-channel business model and content strategy that companies use to improve user experience (ibid.). The current study attempts to fill some of the research gaps in the B2B industry through a single case study.

The aim of the study is to understand what factors influence companies to customise their products in order to meet the demands of international customers and markets. The company under study is SteelCorp, based in Stockholm, Sweden, and the research question we seek to answer is:

RQ What are the predominant factors influencing international product customisation strategy (IPCS)?

2 Literature review

In the times of the birth of Industry 4.0/digitalisation, technological development is key to finding lasting solutions to economic, environmental and regional development challenges (Adak, 2015; Albaladejo and Martínez-García, 2013). The diffusion of digital technologies has enabled a notable transformation in firms' processes, structures, roles and networks. This digital revolution affects the organisation, thereby redefining its strategies, entrepreneurial processes, and governance mechanisms or structures (Fremont et al., 2018; Eklinder-Frick et al., 2020).

With advances in information, communications and transportation technologies, coupled with intensified use of the internet and social media on a worldwide scale (Javalgi et al., 2012), impediments to conducting business activities beyond national boundaries have been increasingly surmounted. Thus, the ways in which firms now

conduct business with buyers in foreign markets have been transformed by new digitalised technologies, through providing significant help in searching for, targeting, serving and communication with customers anywhere in the world.

There are a number of ways in which this new digital era can support firms conducting or planning to tap into business opportunities in the international marketplace (Vrontis and Christofi, 2021; Heinberg et al., 2020), such as: in the creation and development of business relationships with industrial customers in various and distant foreign markets, irrespective of economic, political, cultural or other differences; in the marketing of products in markets with low and high psychic distance (i.e., where 'distance' has to do with problems that can arise due to differences in culture, level of development, political systems and/or business practices) (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977, 1990 cited in Osarenkhoe, 2009); in collecting reliable and useful information about buyers, competitors and environmental conditions in different countries, thus helping firms to make better informed international marketing decisions; in obtaining cost-effective personalisation and customisation of market offerings across different countries; in faster, cheaper and more straightforward managing of business transactions across borders, thus increasing the firms' competitive edge and improving financial performance; and in simplifying the way international business is conducted, for instance, through electronic data transfers, electronic payments and online export assistance (Gregory et al., 2017; Yip and Dempster, 2005; Kaynak et al., 2005, cited in Heinberg et al., 2020).

The omnichannel strategy (defined in the previous section) has also been boosted by the latest technological advances that provide precise information – at each moment and for each channel – of each client's context (Berman and Thelen, 2018). The corporation's value proposition can therefore be adapted within a specific channel and at a specific time (Cai and Lo, 2020). B2B commerce has been reshaped by B2C's quick and efficient buying journey (Alonso-Garcia et al., 2022). Hence, creating a consistently high-quality buying experience, across all touchpoints, is critical for digital business leaders (ibid.). Considering this, B2B commerce businesses must navigate the shift to a more dynamic, digital-first buying journey – an omnichannel digital strategy that serves customers where they are and when they are in need (Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013; Cai and Lo, 2020; Mudambi, 2002).

It is acknowledged, in this light, that the business world is more dynamic than it has ever been (Mi et al., 2020; Rosenbloom and Larsen, 2003; Eklinder-Frick et al., 2020). Prevailing developments in information and communication technologies and widespread use of disruptive technologies have transformed ways of doing business and changed the competition landscape in many industries (Alsadi et al., 2021). To remain competitive in the market, actors in the global marketplace must continually adapt to changing market conditions.

Although understanding innovation in the context of the current changing industrial landscape in the age of digitalisation has become cumbersome, and poses serious challenges for traditional internationalisation models (Cavusgil, 1980; Bilkey and Tesar, 1977; Leonidou and Katsikeas, 1996; Dunning, 2000; Johanson and Vahlne, 1977, 1990, 2003, 2009), the central tenets of the model remain organisational investment behaviour and how organisations learn (Forsgren, 2002). For manufacturing companies, the internationalisation process, which can be started early, is fundamental to their business development (Matthyssens et al., 2008; Osarenkhoe, 2009). Internationalisation is a

step-by-step process, where each step constitutes another stage of deeper market participation (Gabrielsson et al., 2012), with further resources invested and products developed (Calantone et al., 1996). Decisions regarding market selection and market entry mode are crucial to a company's internationalisation plan (Awuah et al., 2011; Osarenkhoe et al., 2020). Along with committing the necessary resources, this also allows a firm to pursue perceived business opportunities (Eriksson et al., 2000).

The Uppsala model (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977) has been used to describe patterns of foreign market selection and is highly recognised due to its straightforward use of explanatory variables to account for the internationalisation of firms and the model's applicability to different industries (Childs and Jin, 2014). The model proposes that different levels of knowledge and commitment to foreign markets impact a firm's decision regarding business activities and internationalisation (Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975).

When it comes to internationalisation, culture is one fundamental aspect that needs to be considered. Leung et al. (2005) also identify culture as a crucial factor in international business and the impact of national culture on international business activities. In order to fulfil the wants and needs of international customers, cultural literacy can also dictate business activities by adapting products and services.

The establishment of long-term relationships is essential for B2B marketing (Čater and Čater, 2010). Production capabilities influence the quality and diversity of products that can be marketed. To operate efficiently, manufacturers rely on marketing to gain exact sales forecasts for every product in their product line (André, 2021). A company's strategy plays a vital role in its business development; it is something that should be under constant review to ensure that the company is heading in the right strategic direction (Thomé and Medeiros, 2016).

To achieve the above-stated strategic intent, a quality culture that is sustainably implemented and lived up to by the workforce, and which also generates a positive dynamic within the supply chain, are prerequisites (Seepana et al., 2021). In relation to the customer, a pronounced quality culture can be a further unique selling point (Prajogo, 2007). In interactions with suppliers, a procure-to-pay process based on quality measurement can also have a positive effect (Massaro et al., 2015; Chang et al., 2003). Quality culture connects suppliers and customers and creates room for a sustainable culture of trust (Henri, 2006; Cronemyr et al., 2017; Mi et al., 2020).

Against this background, culture is crucial in how businesses strategise – not only national culture but also corporate culture (Hofstede, 1994). As evidenced in a study by Hyder and Fregidou-Malama (2009), who looked at the impacts of marketing strategy adaptation in the healthcare industry, adapting one's strategy for culturally different markets is vital to the success of international business.

Calantone et al. (2004) show that there are two prominent marketing strategies – standardisation and adaptation. Standardisation, using a uniform product in every market, is a strategy companies can use to reduce costs and create a brand identity. However, this strategy may not always be implementable due to different rules and regulations, as well as the different needs of different markets. Product adaptation, on the other hand, means changing one's products to meet the specific criteria of different markets, for example, moving a car's steering to the right side for certain commonwealth countries (Calantone et al., 2004). A further complexity of expansion into international markets, with regard to the B2B market, is the higher degree of customisation needed (Yang and Gabrielsson, 2017).

As globalisation advances, firms face challenges and opportunities in the increasingly international, dynamic and interdependent environment (Mi et al., 2020). Modern media can help firms to gain customer trust as it provides them the opportunity to connect with customers more directly (Neti, 2011). Enhancing a firm's engagement in digital marketing requires a focus on communication based on relationships with the customers (Ferrás-Hernández, 2020; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). A business's revenue, brand advocacy and growth are greatly influenced by the firm's engagement with consumers via digital channels (Straker and Wrigley, 2016). Social media can be used to communicate with customers, receive direct feedback, and hence be able to deliver specifically tailored solutions for the consumer (Royle and Laing, 2014).

Digitalisation extends beyond mechanisation and automation; it includes connectivity, data analytics, the use of the internet of things (IoT) and artificial intelligence (AI), and autonomous operations. It is fundamentally disrupting traditional industries, labour markets, and the global economy. For companies, this opens opportunities for business model development. Traditional business models and value chains are challenged as digitally performed activities allow for increased availability, shorter lead times, faster time-to-market, and lower transaction costs (Coreynen et al., 2017). Industry 4.0 has ushered in a new era of management and organisation of entire supply chains over a product's lifecycle (Ferrás-Hernández, 2020; Glas and Kleemann, 2016; Yang et al., 2021). In industrial practice, a remarkable push in technology has been noted, such as further development of mechanisation, automation, digitalisation, networking and beyond. In the case of mechanisation and automation, physical work is supported by technical assistance and automated solutions take on the performance of flexible operations composed of operational, dispositive and analytical elements (Ferrás-Hernández, 2020; Lasi et al., 2014). With respect to digitalisation and networking, digital processes develop as an outcome of increased networking of technical elements. With the advancement of digitalisation of services and manufactured goods, entirely digitalised environments are also created (Lasi et al., 2014).

2.1 Theoretical framework

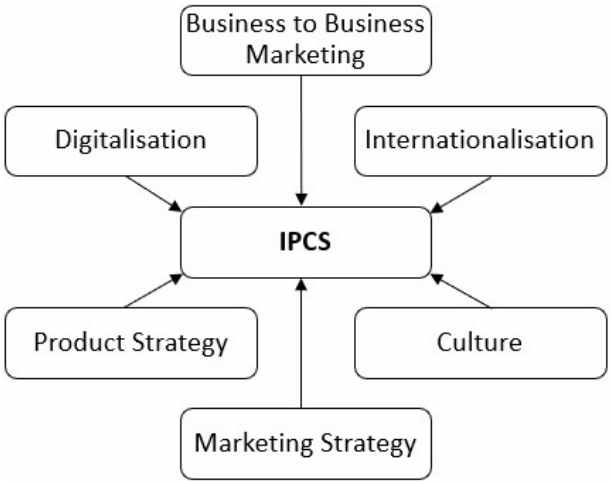
This section links the different theories mentioned above in the literature review, with the aim of organising and clarifying their connections. We do this by showing the key components of each section of the theory and how they connect (see Figure 1).

Business-to-business marketing is an important aspect of any business. It lays the groundwork for expansion as it helps to drive sales and, similarly to other activities, also presents challenges and opportunities (Čater and Čater, 2010). Internationalisation is a key component of international strategy customisation and cannot exist unless a company is active in different markets. The Uppsala model expands on internationalisation (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977; Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975), showing the reasons why companies internationalise. A major factor in any approach to internationalisation is culture, both corporate and national culture (Wild and Wild, 2016). Decisions regarding product mix and the linkage between marketing and manufacturing, which can be vital to marketing strategy success, are also needed (Xie et al., 2018). In order to maintain a strategic market position, companies need to focus on product quality and service quality, the people factor, and communicating with the customers (Blankson et al., 2017). They need to set realistic targets and understand their current customers as

well as future potential. A company's focus should be cross-functional, and knowledge- and technology-based (Asseraf and Shoham, 2019).

The aforementioned factors, combined with continual reappraisal of the firm's strategy, will help to contribute to successful internationalisation (Thomé and Medeiros, 2016). Digitalisation is becoming an ever more essential part of business strategy and a necessity in international expansion (Ferrás-Hernández, 2020; Shaughnessy, 2018). It is a major factor in customisation and can allow firms to offer tailored solutions to customers (Royle and Laing, 2014). Once all of this is taken into account, a business can then create a development strategy that combines all of the factors that will help it succeed in international product customisation.

Figure 1 Theoretical framework for international product customisation strategy



3 Methodology

3.1 Research strategy

We chose a qualitative approach in order to study an emerging phenomenon and collect data-rich information regarding a specific topic (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2009; Yin, 1981; Doz, 2011). Qualitative studies are also used when researchers want to apply new and existing theories to the scenario investigated (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Qualitative research is grounded in existing theories and how individuals understand the world, often referred to as 'constructionism' (Andrews, 2012), and forms part of an ontological outlook (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018).

3.2 Research design

Saunders et al. (2009) present a number of different approaches to research design. For the purpose of this research, we chose a single-case study, an appropriate design for both simple and complex studies (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Gummesson, 2005). The single-case

design allows for a thorough and intensive analysis and is a useful tool for proving or disproving a theory (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Siggelkow, 2007). It furthermore provides a richer understanding of the particular case and its context.

The case chosen for this study was an international multinational enterprise with a history of over 150 years and more than 35,000 employees worldwide. The enterprise, SteelCorp, is a Swedish B2B manufacturing company in the steel industry, with three main areas of business: stainless steel, mining, and machine solutions. Each business area is further divided into three to five divisions responsible for their respective customers, research, development, manufacturing, and profits and losses, with each division required to follow SteelCorp's global guidelines for branding. As an industry leader that has developed experience and knowledge from both local and international operations, the company possesses the ability to develop international product customisation strategies. SteelCorp's annual report for 2020 lists the organisation's revenue at 86,404 million SEK.

3.3 Research approach and data collection

The study started from theory. The knowledge developed enabled the identification of the gap in the literature (IPCS) on the B2B industry. The research questions was then formulated, followed by development of the theoretical framework, taking into account the research area and research question (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The research is based on existing literature and theory and a qualitative study in the form of ten semi-structured interviews with employees that had experience at SteelCorp. As noted, the firm has three main areas of business (stainless steel, mining, and machine solutions). Data collection took place mainly in one of these areas, focusing on mining. The interviews were conducted based on open-ended questions to encourage further discussion and, due to their nature, the questions did not change over time.

The interview material formed the primary data, and secondary data was collected via publicly available information regarding SteelCorp, the steel industry in general, books, scientific articles and the internet. In our case, gaining access to primary data from the case company (Table 1) was extremely easy. We are aware that in a time when data is becoming easily accessible to researchers all over the world, the practicality of utilising secondary data for research is becoming more prevalent, at the same time as its authenticity, when compared with primary data, can often be questioned. Since the internationalisation of firms often has a historical element, however, in this study we used secondary data to familiarise ourselves with the context before collecting the primary data.

Most secondary data comes from external organisations (Horn, 2018). In this study, however, secondary data refers to the data collected from the organisation itself, which was then repurposed and re-examined (Goel, 2022) by the authors. We are aware that secondary data has both benefits and drawbacks (Horn, 2018). While secondary data can tick many boxes concerning its relevance to a business problem, this is not always the case (ibid.). For instance, secondary data may have been collected from a geographical location or time ill-suited to one's analysis. In cases where those analysing the data were not present when the data was initially collected, the insights the analysts can extract may be limited (Goel, 2022, Šerić and Ljubica, 2018). A structured, well-ordered secondary dataset may appear to be sound. It is, however, not always possible to know what issues

might have occurred during the data collection that impacted their quality. Poor response rates, for example, provide a limited view (Šerić and Ljubica, 2018). Being aware of these drawbacks is the first step towards mitigating them. Nevertheless, if one is aware of the risks associated with using secondary datasets, benefits generally outweigh the drawbacks.

In this study, the secondary data used included existing data such as internet content, books, or articles that supported our choice of study design and the context behind it. According to the literature (Goel, 2022), secondary research can also be used to further validate user insights from primary research and create a stronger case for an overall design. In this study, secondary sources have helped us to understand more about SteelCorp's strategy before we collected the primary data, as well as providing a background to how and why the historical event (SteelCorp's internationalisation process) occurred in the first place.

Sources of secondary data we consulted prior to collecting the primary data include books, documents, journals, newspapers, the case company's website, annual reports, and company brochures. With the advent of electronic media and the internet, secondary data sources have become more easily accessible. Some of these sources are highlighted below and include activities on the case company's social media platforms such as: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram, TikTok, etc. In our study, however, gaining access to primary data directly from the case company (Table 1) was extremely easy.

Semi-structured interviews are a highly effective form of data collection (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007), and open-ended questions were used to encourage open dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Gephart, 2013). The wording of the interview questions was kept as simple as possible to minimise misinterpretation, and to make sure the questions did not shape the answers (Kvale, 1996). Access was also taken into consideration, as this can be a deciding factor when choosing an organisation for a case study. To ensure optimal access, non-academic, everyday language was used, so as not to confuse the interviewees (Fjellström and Guttormsen, 2016).

Secondary data is a rich source of data and, in the current study, was accessed without having to rely on others such as the interviewees (Gephart, 2013), and provided empirical depth to the case study (Poulis et al., 2013).

3.4 Interviewees and experience

The criteria used for interviewee selection were that: they be English-speaking, have experience of interactions with international customers at some point in their career, and have a minimum of five years of experience at SteelCorp. Details about the interviewees and interviews are presented in Table 1.

3.5 Data analysis

The analysis used an open coding approach, which helped us to organise the data collected (Bryman and Bell, 2015) with the support of digital software. Interim summaries and researchers' notes were also used in the process, to keep track of any ideas identified in the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Eisenhardt, 1989; Saunders et

al., 2009). This helped us to categorise and cross-check the data, to identify patterns, and analyse the data. (Yin, 1981).

Table 1 Interviews with key respondents

Respondent	*Time at SteelCorp*	*Time in current role*	*Time in industry*	*Role within SteelCorp*	*Interview location*	*Interview date*
1	16 years	1.5 years	16 years	Training coordinator	University	15/04/2019
2	16 years	4 years	16 years	Sales	Phone	23/04/2019
3	15 years	3 years	15 years	Training coordinator	SteelCorp Offices	26/04/2019
4	11 years	1 year	11 years	Production and planning	University	29/04/2019
5	10 years	1.5 years	10 years	Change management	Phone	02/05/2019
6	8 years	5 years	8 years	Product management	Phone	15/05/2019
7	17 years	3 years	17 years	Product management	Phone	16//05/2019
8	10 years	1 year	10 years	Manager at SteelCorp	Phone	17/05/2019
9	5 years	2 years	5 years	Product manager	Phone	17/05/2019
10	11 years	2 years	11 years	Sales and marketing	Phone	20/05/2019

3.6 Trustworthiness

With regard to trustworthiness, four measures were used in the research and data collection for the study (Bryman and Bell, 2015): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Different criteria were used to maintain credibility, including making sure that appropriate research methods were used, peer review, interviewee knowledge and expertise, research experience, etc. (ibid.). Publicly available sources of information helped, in addition, to establish the credibility of what the interviewees told us (Gummesson, 2005). In order to better facilitate transferability, we worked to ensure that the data and theoretical framework were thick and descriptive (Anney, 2014; Shenton, 2004). This, in turn, demonstrated the usefulness of the theory and the research (Lietz and Zayas, 2010). Dependability was taken into account when formulating the research questions to ensure that if the same research were performed in a similar setting with different people similar answers would be obtained (Anney, 2014; Gummesson, 2005; Shenton, 2004). And lastly, confirmability was enhanced by ensuring that the study was conducted objectively and from a neutral standpoint to avoid influencing or manipulating the participants' answers, thereby reducing bias (Gummesson, 2005; Shenton, 2004).

3.7 Ethics

Ethics refers to the moral guidelines followed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018) and, in this study, ethical considerations were taken and guided the formulation of the research questions, the design of the study, and how the data were collected, stored and analysed (Saunders et al., 2009). In keeping with these ethics, the respondents and company were anonymised and pseudonyms assigned to the company – SteelCorp, and to the divisions – Metal Cutting and Custom Created. All participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they were under no obligation to take part.

4 Empirical findings

4.1 Internationalisation

Internationalisation is "built into SteelCorp's DNA" (respondent 7) and the company opened its first overseas sales office in the 1950s. Many of SteelCorp's overseas locations include manufacturing and sales. Currently a large part of the company's sales approach includes having salespeople who travel to different sites around the world and interact with local sales teams. These local sales teams are what have given SteelCorp a competitive advantage. This is due to the owners' refusal from the outset when the company opened to work with agents and "to have its own sales department and distribution" (respondent 1). This, in turn, has led to strong relationships between SteelCorp and its customers. SteelCorp's current method of expansion relies largely on following "a customer that moves from one country to another country" (respondent 2), which is both a factor and symptom of the strong working relationship the company maintains with its customers.

SteelCorp's acquisition of GWS Tool Group in the USA and Chuzhou Yongpu in China, and ground support and rock reinforcement product supplier DSI Underground enabled SteelCorp to establish a strong presence in North America and Asia, giving SteelCorp a world-leading position in an area of utmost importance for its mining customers. With the signing of an agreement to acquire Deswik, the leading supplier of mine planning software, SteelCorp also intends to broaden its digital offering. Thus, 2021 was a year with high acquisition activity and significant new additions that further strengthen the company's position, both geographically and technologically in terms of exposure to various customer segments. As a result of its successful acquisition activities, SteelCorp successfully delivered on its strategy and made important progress in the shift towards growth.

4.2 Segmentation of customers

SteelCorp's customer base tends to be segregated by division, industry and product. And while industry segmentation does occur, for example, between aerospace and automotive, and product segmentation occurs within divisions, with the exception of China and India (where SteelCorp must compete on price rather than quality due to high competition in these markets), segmentation by market does not occur (respondent 6).

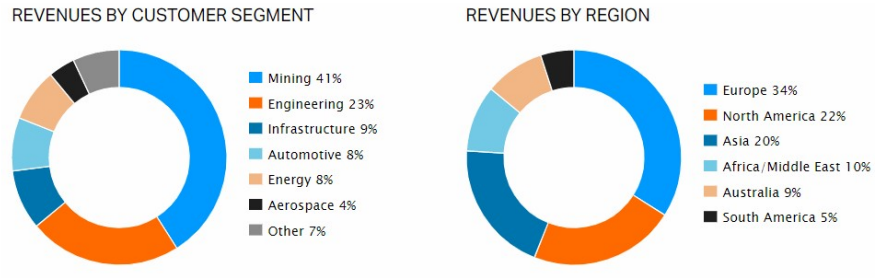
SteelCorp is a global leader in the manufacture of tools and tooling systems for advanced industrial metal-cutting. In recent years, it has expanded into the areas of digital

manufacturing solutions, additive manufacturing, and inline metrology. The Machine Solutions business area consists of two segments – SteelCorp Machining Solutions and SteelCorp Manufacturing Solutions (source: data provided by key informants in Manufacturing Solutions).

The SteelCorp Machining Solutions segment provides tools, tooling systems and services, including logistic solutions and productivity improvement programs that optimise machining operations such as turning, milling and drilling. The segment's offerings in metal-cutting consist of several market-leading, independently operating brands (source: data provided by key informants in Manufacturing Solutions).

SteelCorp's Manufacturing Solutions segment covers the areas of digital manufacturing and software solutions, additive manufacturing and industrial metrology. Due to its extensive industry experience and expertise in advanced materials and materials shaping, SteelCorp is uniquely positioned in these areas, where its offerings span the entire component-manufacturing value chain – from design and planning to preparation, production and verification (source: secondary data provided by the president of the Manufacturing Solutions). According to the respondent, demand drivers in this segment include: global manufacturing, material evolution, new manufacturing technologies, complex component designs and functionalities, sustainability, and automation (source: data provided by key informants in Manufacturing Solutions).

Figure 2 Contributions from customer and geographic segments (see online version for colours)



Source: Based on secondary data provided by Secondary data provided by key informants in Manufacturing Solutions

As shown in Figure 2, SteelCorp's mining segment (the main focus of our study) represents 41% of company revenues. Mining products and services include drill rigs, rock-drilling tools and systems, load, and haul machines, tunnelling equipment, continuous mining and mechanical cutting equipment, service and digital solutions, and sustainability driving technologies to increase digitalisation, automation, safety and customer productivity (source: secondary data provided by key informants in Manufacturing Solutions)

Engineering, which delivers tools and tooling systems for metal-cutting, manufacturing software, and advanced materials and components used in engineering industries worldwide, represents 21% of revenues. These products and services are aimed at improving the customer's productivity, profitability, quality and safety, as well as reducing environmental impact. SteelCorp is also a global leader in high-alloy metal powder (source: secondary data provided by key informants in Manufacturing Solutions)

The target industries for the company's industrial offerings are mining, construction, automotive, aerospace and general engineering – industries that benefit greatly from SteelCorp's vast knowledge in materials technology, customer applications, and industrial processes. This means SteelCorp creates value for its industrial customers through, for example, offering products and services that enhance the customer's productivity, help to ensure worker safety, and reduce environmental impact (source: data provided by key informants in Manufacturing Solutions).

According to the respondents, SteelCorp is fortunate in that its products and solutions are widely known and used throughout the world and its expansive user base provides feedback on products used in their workshops. On the other hand, SteelCorp wants to operate in an open ecosystem, where its products interact well with complementary products in the industry, so that all the pieces work together. A noted example of this is the recognised and respected landmark of lighthouses. To address modern challenges throughout manufacturing, SteelCorp created a lighthouse program, an area in which to date, such open cooperation has led to predictable and positive results, such as improved efficiency, enhanced quality, and reduced waste for the customer. By leveraging technology, this digital initiative has engaged customers and supports their pursuit of zero downtime and maximum efficiency across all departments. Secondary data from SteelCorp shows that the manufacturing program, SteelCorp Lighthouse Factories, is evolving at an increasingly exponential pace. With COVID-19, digital transformation was accelerated, shifting the nature of manufacturing to a seamless workflow through automation.

4.3 Culture and strategy

SteelCorp is a global team of over 35,000 employees bound together by its purpose and strong company culture and offers a wealth of career opportunities in many different areas. Made up of three main business areas (stainless steel, mining, and machine solutions), our main focus was the area of mining, where most of the data collection took place. With respect to culture, SteelCorp has rules in place to help with cultural differences, such as having a local salesperson present at all local meetings, a local employee who has already established contact with the end customer, i.e., "local people working with local customers" (respondent 2). There are cultural differences when it comes to what SteelCorp's customers want, with some customers placing greater emphasis on employee safety and satisfaction, which in turn impacts the company's product offerings. One example of this given was that Australian mines place greater emphasis on employee comfort and well-being than mines in China. This was attributed in part to cultural factors such as price sensitivity, as well as to employee education, where Australian employees tend to have high education and are able to perform more complex tasks with machines and achieve greater output.

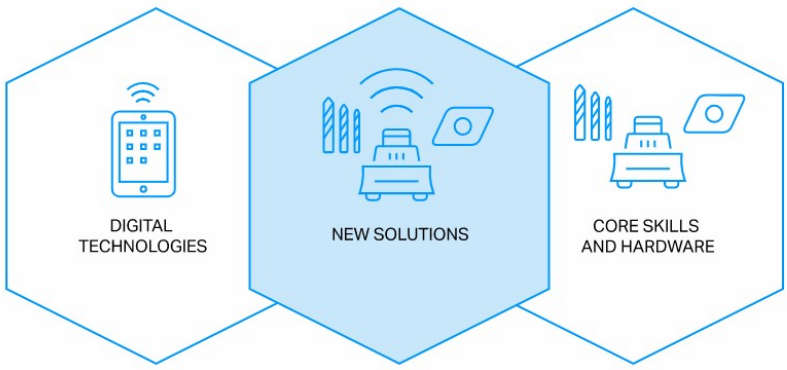
During 2021, SteelCorp made progress in several of its 2030 sustainability targets. For example, greenhouse gas emissions decreased 16.4 percent, despite higher levels of activity. In December 2021, SteelCorp joined the Science-Based Targets Initiative, a global climate action initiative through which companies emission targets are validated by a third party. This means SteelCorp has set ambitious targets with the aim of reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 at the latest. This is an important step for SteelCorp and emphasises its commitment to environmentally sustainable business practices. SteelCorp also continues to support the principles of the UN Global Compact

to contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. During the year, the company also launched a new statement of purpose: "we make the shift – advancing the world through engineering". The new slogan summarises how SteelCorp innovative solutions are creating value for its customers and employees, as well as for society and the planet, which builds shareholder value. The stated purpose is meant to uphold the SteelCorp culture, helping to build and clarify its future direction and strategy, at the same time as generating employee engagement. SteelCorp also updated its strategy, citing six objectives with well-defined and measurable targets for 2025. The idea underlying the strategy is to facilitate important shifts that are taking place around the world, such as digitalisation and sustainability.

4.4 Product customisation strategy

As stated on SteelCorp's website, the company's business model is: "based on close customer cooperation where we create value through products and services contributing to enhanced productivity and sustainability. Together with our customers, we drive innovation and digitalisation to unlock large-scale value, improve operations, create safer operating conditions, and achieve more with less. We are focused on advancing the world through engineering, continuously developing both our customer offerings and core competencies, for instance by adding new digital technologies".

Figure 3 Digital transformation of manufacturing in SteelCorp (see online version for colours)



Source: Based on secondary data provided by a guest speaker from SteelCorp

Combining SteelCorp's core skills and hardware with new digital technologies enables new customer solutions. The business model also generates value for employees and society, which together with the high value for the customer ultimately leads to shareholder value. Its decentralised organisation with clear governance implies that SteelCorp is a decentralised organisation. Company operations are conducted in four business areas, each with several divisions individually responsible for the research and development (R&D), production and sales of their respective products and services. The nature of each business determines its production set-up and go-to-market strategy. An established governance framework that includes group policies and procedures, as well as other governing documents dictates the way the company conducts its business, with SteelCorp's purpose and values shared across the entire organisation.

Uniquely positioned to create stakeholder value, SteelCorp's expertise and offerings rest on more than 150 years of customer focus and innovation. Combined with its collaborative work methods and digitalisation capabilities, the company is also uniquely positioned to help its customers become more productive and sustainable.

As one key informant put it: "through this journey, we are maintaining a customer first approach, inspiring innovation, addressing needs and providing solutions to a range of pain points. … steadily gaining ground on the gaps that exist in customer operations". The informant continues, citing that the company's top priorities "include cost and time savings, improved production and equipment effectiveness, and better control from the shop floor", all of which is helping to reduce waste, establish sustainability, and increase profitability, while the company learns from and teaches others it goes forward "with frequent engagement, installation, and analysis". These combined and shared efforts help to build awareness of future technologies in manufacturing.

According to the findings reported above, it seems SteelCorp posted strong organic growth, demonstrating the strength of the company's innovative product portfolio. It successfully launched a number of new products, such as a completely battery-driven electric truck, a digitally connected cone crusher engineered to increase efficiency and lower costs, and a newly developed way of laser tagging inserts with scannable data matrix codes for full traceability. In 2021, the company's order intake increased 30 percent organically and revenues rose by 15% ompared with 2020. SteelCorp's overall growth for the year totalled 18%, clear proof of a well-executed growth strategy, with strong growth both organically and through acquisitions.

Product customisation occurs at various levels in SteelCorp. Some parts of the business are designed for mass production and others for highly customised products. The drilling division, for example, is set up for mass production for one customer, though customisation can be achieved quickly and easily. SteelCorp's construction division, on the other hand, offers no product customisation, in part due to the speed with which customers need the products they order. The Metal Cutting division has a subsection called Custom Created that works specifically with customisation. For Custom Created products, there is "no human actually creating drawings or manufacturing that product. It's a fully automated and computerized process" (respondent 8), all done through an online tool.

When customisation does occur, various departments need to be involved – R&D for development, production planning to plan the product, purchasing to secure the raw materials, and technicians to create a program to manufacture the product. That is, it is not just the products that are customised but also the production itself. For example, SteelCorp Metal Cutting looks for ways to improve production and also pre- and post-production for the customer, the focus being how to increase productivity and "cut costs for the customer in the production process" (respondent 5). SteelCorp also endeavours to improve its own work and systems through customisation, with specific teams responsible for finding better ways of working and implementing them, whether through automation or other means.

4.5 Reasons for customisation

According to one respondent, integration of the CRM system with other company processes poses a challenge, "especially the web experience of our B2B customers". The respondent goes on to say that "traditionally, there has been no connection between the

web usage and shop, and the CRM system", explaining that what SteelCorp's industrial customers do off-line relative to the company "is not reflected in the online experience and vice versa". The is an issue that SteelCorp is addressing through its new IT landscape that "includes the possibility to provide our industrial customers with more transparent data regarding, i.e., their orders with us, the commercial relationship, etc.". In the respondent's opinion the integration of CRM would enable a clearer view of customer requirements and "connect the characteristics of customers (industry, size, nationality etc.) with their need for different product solutions". Knowing this has created a better understanding of what the customer needs and thus helps the company's R&D and product planning target areas where they can create the most customer benefit. As noted by the respondent:

> "Good understanding of customer profiles and purchasing patterns can further improve our logistical planning. SteelCorp uses central warehouses and has the ambition to have ordered products at the customer within 24 hours of order in most parts of the world. This means that we need to plan stock levels well to balance customer service with the cost of capital for keeping products on the shelf."

There are many reasons for customising SteelCorp products but, ultimately, when it comes to customisation, "the end customer is everything" (respondent 8). One of the main reasons behind customisation is the strong relationship between SteelCorp customers and its salespeople, which is a direct result of the previously mentioned owners' decision not to use outside agents. The lines of communication are kept open. SteelCorp can send R&D teams to on-site situations to come up with the best possible solution to problems that arise.

Customisation also occurs as a result of SteelCorp's proactive monitoring of the market. Several factors are involved here, such as competitors, trends, what customers will want in the future (respondent 3). Local staff gather information about the current market situation and transfer this knowledge back to headquarters. Rules and regulations also play a role in customisation, as regulations on emissions and safety vary from country to country.

With regard to customisation, quality is never compromised. It is something that is used to enhance customer loyalty.

4.6 Marketing aspects

SteelCorp marketing is based on quality. And when it comes to quality, the company's aim is to be number one in all of its products. Quality forms part of its brand and allows SteelCorp to charge premium prices for its offerings. Its marketing strategy is handled by the parent company and, as such, the different divisions have very little say in terms of brand or brand perception. Regional offices handle local marketing, such as inviting potential customers for site and manufacturing facility visits to show what they are capable of (respondent 2).

According to respondent 2, omnichannel marketing, an overall business strategy that delivers a seamless experience from the customer's perspective, is the marketing utilised by every department in SteelCorp. Every time and every way a buyer interacts with the company – online, in-store, via mobile app, email, or other channel – the user experience (UX) is connected. To deliver this seamless UX, SteelCorp ties sales and marketing

activities into a central data hub, shifting to a customer-centric approach in all areas, and employing analytics at all levels. This means that the omnichannel marketing strategy is customer-centric and connects all activities to create a seamless buyer experience, with every department in SteelCorp using digital marketing and social media tools as a marketing channel.

Our B2B case company respondents say that omnichannel works – and even surpasses past approaches. The pandemic (crisis) accentuated the urgency of the shift to omnichannel and made using the omnichannel strategy imperative going forward. A majority of the respondents say that omnichannel is as- or more effective than traditional methods – a sentiment that has grown sharply throughout the past year. The respondents believe, moreover, that omnichannel selling is a more successful way to prospect and secure new business than traditional, 'face-to-face only' sales approaches – a notable sign of confidence, given the higher cost and hurdle of acquiring new customers. All departments provide information about what they do online so that potential customers can educate themselves before making a purchase decision. Each department has its own website and online tools that it uses to interact with customers.

Furthermore, according to a key informant interviewed, "purchasing processes in business to business (B2B) are changing". Whereas, in the past, the manufacturer or distributor sales team was the buyer's first point of contact, businesses today want to make their purchases online and take advantage of personalisation as well as have a digital paper trail. The key informant went on, adding that:

> "A survey conducted by our business intelligence unit shows that B2B customers are already 57% of the way down the purchase path before contacting a sales representative. This means that self-directed online purchasing is the norm and B2B commerce sites have to focus on the end-to-end experience. There are also purchasing processes in B2B in which no people are involved at all. API standards like OCI and EDI allow businesses' ERP systems to communicate with each other. For instance, if a company needs spare parts, its internal systems can send orders to vendors with just a single mouse click or are even fully automated."

4.7 Knowledge transfer

Although research and development are the responsibility of each individual division, there is still cooperation, communication, and data-sharing regarding the development of products inside the company as a whole. The data collected is added to a global SteelCorp system. This has helped to contribute to new product offerings. There is also knowledge-sharing between departments when working for and with customers. SteelCorp Metal Cutting has different ways of sharing knowledge, such as application centres and productivity centres (respondent 3). The application centres offer various applications that customers can connect to, where different aspects of the product and process can be discussed and adapted. Productivity centres serve as a forum where customers can go with materials, products, ideas or current products, and make suggestions directly to SteelCorp. SteelCorp also offers free online courses for its different tools. This makes it easier for the customer to self-educate, and make a more informed decision on what to buy.

Knowledge transfer within SteelCorp is encouraged through classroom training seminars. This is done to ensure that its departments are up to date on the capabilities of different products, particularly when changes are made to a product (respondent 8).

An established governance framework including group policies, group procedures and governance documents lays out the way SteelCorp conducts its business, underpinning the same purpose and shared values across the entire organisation. With reference to SteelCorp's purpose and strategic objective, the respondent 6 goes on to say:

> "We make the shift – advancing the world through engineering. We are forward thinkers, driven by our passion to continuously innovate smarter solutions and enable important shifts. We aim to advance society and the planet, creating benefits for all our stakeholders – our customers, our employees, our communities – ultimately leading to shareholder value."

In everything from big, shift-inducing advancements to small, everyday improvements – SteelCorp applies its core competence and collaborative ways of working with customers and partners to build more resilient, stronger businesses in various market segments. Our findings show that the company's role entails driving innovation and digitalisation to unlock large-scale value, improve operations, create safer operating conditions, and achieve more with less. Through its diverse teams, strong culture, and leading-edge skills, SteelCorp enhance works to enhance efficiency and sustainability in a world that needs to evolve. Through every action, every day, SteelCorp's expressed purpose is to advance the world through engineering.

4.8 Upskilling and reskilling

SteelCorp is taking the lead in upskilling and reskilling both its own workforces and their surrounding communities to be the next generation of the workforce with skills for the future. One example is SteelCorp India, which is providing young people with a springboard for careers in manufacturing and access to some of the industry's most cutting-edge technologies. "The younger generation of India holds significant potential to close the skills gap, once they are trained with the technical knowledge needed for modern jobs", notes one key informant. SteelCorp has partnered with the Indian government to establish the SteelCorp School of Manufacturing Excellence to train youth from underprivileged and marginalised backgrounds. Based at the Industrial Training Institute in Pune, the school educates students in advanced metal-cutting techniques.

4.9 Long-term strategy

The demand for greener products is growing. Lower emissions mean less ventilation needed in mines, which can save money. Due to high fuel costs, more efficient engines also save money for mines. This has led to a current focus on electric engines, and there is a strong sentiment within SteelCorp that, in the future, all machines will become electric. SteelCorp is therefore investing more in electrical motor R&D. Remote-controlled vehicles are also predicted to become mainstream in the future (respondent 1).

In many areas of business and industry today, personal relationships between the company and the customer are not what they used to be. With standardised products, customers can place their orders online and human interaction is not necessarily needed. With 'hyper-customisation' (respondent 2) and 'mass-customisation' (respondent 8) becoming the norm, this is also becoming a possibility for customised products.

Improvements in web interfaces, digital platforms, Industry 4.0 and automation of product lines have made this a reality today, with expanded possibilities in the future.

The future is also predicted to hold a whole-package offering by SteelCorp – involving product, services, and any other customer needs – in the form of a digital offering (respondent 8). Digital offerings are therefore gaining in importance and contribute to further customisation.

With the acquisition of CNC Software – the creators of Mastercam – and of Cambrio and ICAM, according to one respondent, SteelCorp now has a leading global position in CAM, giving the company a digital presence with access to hundreds of thousands of workshop customers and a golden opportunity to further improve their productivity and automate their manufacturing processes. Round tools also constitute a key area for SteelCorp expansion. In line with its ambition to expand its presence in North America and Asia, during the year, SteelCorp acquired GWS Tool Group in the USA and Chuzhou Yongpu in China. SteelCorp also took another step forward in industrial metrology through its acquisition of DWFritz Automation and Dimensional Control Systems. In addition, SteelCorp completed its acquisition of ground support and rock reinforcement product supplier DSI Underground, giving the company a world-leading position in an area of utmost importance for its mining customers. It also signed an agreement to acquire Deswik, the leading supplier of mine planning software that will broaden its digital offering. According to the respondent 4, the SteelCorp Manufacturing Solutions segment raised its growth target for 2025 from 4 billion to 6 billion SEK as a result of these successful acquisition activities.

5 Discussion of the findings and linkage to theoretical framework

5.1 Internationalisation

The literature describes international activities as fundamental for manufacturing companies, stating that they start the process of internationalisation at an early stage in business development (Matthyssens et al., 2008). This is supported by internationalisation being built into the DNA of SteelCorp and to SteelCorp opening its first overseas sales office in the 1950s. According to the literature, the Uppsala model explains that when companies expand they usually begin by choosing countries close to their home markets and then gradually expand to countries further away (Clark and Pugh, 2001; Seepana et al., 2021). SteelCorp, however, did not set up its first subsidiaries in markets closest to home, but in the USA.

These findings, coupled with a growing body of literature on the non-sequential internationalisation process are in line with the increasing criticism (Osarenkhoe, 2009; André, 2021) of stage models and their core assumption, i.e., that the internationalisation process is path-dependent. Furthermore, the salient features of the current market environment pose serious challenges to traditional internationalisation models (Osarenkhoe, 2009; Awuah et al., 2011; Seepana et al., 2021). Our findings show that SteelCorp did not develop its international activities in incremental stages, but began by entering very distant markets and multiple countries right from the start, without prior experience. The magnitude of the speed of internationalisation, however, may be dependent on the ability of a firm to take advantage of enablers of non-sequential internationalisation patterns. This observation is in line with the findings of Johanson and

Vahlne (2003) that the experiential learning–commitment interplay as the driving mechanism of their previous internationalisation process model (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977, 1990) combines with a similar experiential learning-commitment mechanism that focuses on business network relationships. The 'eclectic paradigm' proposed by Dunning (2000) explains the extent, form and pattern of the value chain operations that firms own abroad. The paradigm specifies three conditions that determine whether firms will internationalise through foreign direct investment (FDI), the way SteelCorp did, or not: ownership-specific advantages, location-specific advantages, and internalisation advantages. And while these studies are interesting, they have contributed little to our understanding of how SMEs actually use internationalisation as a means of becoming or remaining competitive (Osarenkhoe, 2009).

Furthermore, SteelCorp's international network relationships (Osarenkhoe et al., 2020) were found to be important. This also encompasses the company's approach to market expansion, which includes market studies that pay special attention to competitors and competitive markets. SteelCorp's corporate culture includes international standards in terms of decision-making, marketing and a generally globalised communication structure. These standards are decided at a global level by SteelCorp's department heads. This has allowed for a well-integrated, natural internationalisation and a fully integrated internationalisation approach.

5.2 Segmentation of customers

Though the literature says little about customer segmentation, in our study we found segmentation of the industries SteelCorp sells to, for example, the aerospace industry versus the automotive industry. According to the findings presented above, SteelCorp's mining segment continued to develop strongly and general engineering recovered to a favourable level during the year, while the oil and gas, automotive and aerospace segments noted slower recoveries. However, SteelCorp's strong organic growth shows the strength of its innovative product portfolio. Having identified a number of key areas in its customers' value chains (Macchion and Fornasiero, 2021) where they want to establish leading positions, and where SteelCorp helps customers to further enhance their productivity, shows SteelCorp's strong focus on growth. Key strategic growth areas in which SteelCorp has significantly advanced its position include CAM software, industrial metrology, round tools, ground support, and mine planning. According to secondary data provided by a guest speaker from SteelCorp to students in one of our courses in 2022, the acquisition of CNC Software and ICAM has given SteelCorp "a leading global position in CAM, giving SteelCorp a digital presence with access to hundreds of thousands of workshop customers and a unique opportunity to further improve customers' productivity and automate their manufacturing processes".

Such collaboration benefits both the customer (e.g., SteelCorp's lighthouse partner in the lighthouse program) and SteelCorp. Partners benefit from continuous learning and solutions that target their needs (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977, 1992, 2003). They see the power of digitalisation and get their hands on multiple integrated solutions for a more automated manufacturing flow (Macchion and Fornasiero, 2021). Aspects noted include improved part quality, quickly resolved problems, and operators that benefit from automation, alleviating some of their responsibilities. Previous findings (Gabrielsson et al., 2012; Johanson and Vahlne, 1977, 1992, 2003) also support our finding that, on an

individual level, operators, managers, and every worker involved in the interactions are truly contributing, as well as gaining further experience and skills.

SteelCorp customers provide invaluable feedback from real-world installations, addressing additional needs and pain points and improving in-house efficiency (see also Gök, 2020; Karacali and Salman, 2020). How customers respond to a product is one of the better indicators of how the product will fare overall, in that it helps to predict future acceptance by exposing flaws in usability, enabling a smoother, more integrated experience, and providing an early shift for collaborating partners or significant influencers. A greater understanding of customer needs and market trends also increases engagement with both customer partners and the larger market in which to replicate.

5.3 Culture

Culture, not only national cultures but also corporate culture, plays an important role in how businesses strategise (Leung et al., 2005; Wild and Wild, 2016). That is not to say that one approach to culture and international business strategy is more correct than another, but rather that each situation should be looked at individually and decisions on how to approach culture should be open to all possibilities.

SteelCorp is very sensitive to the cultures it interacts with and sells to and, as such, has rules in place to aid this, such as always having a local salesperson present at local meetings and having local people work with local customers. SteelCorp's interaction with other cultures and enabling of smooth business relationships can be seen as a fixed asset. Cultural differences are something the company takes into consideration and integrates in its international business strategy.

The company's quest to deliver value-creating offerings to its customers is facilitated by a more flexible corporate business strategy and continued to show the positive impact of organisational flexibility and agility in its organisation. As mentioned earlier, during 2021, a year of recovery with high demand, SteelCorp successfully managed the challenges that arose in the supply chain in the form of component shortages and a more strained situation in, for example, freight and logistics (Macchion and Fornasiero, 2021). Moreover, SteelCorp delivered its cost-cutting programs announced in 2020. Its continuous focus on cost implies a strive for more efficient ways of working. That is, SteelCorp realised that in a turbulent business environment flexibility was more important than ever (Karacali and Salman, 2020). Many of the countries in which SteelCorp operates were impacted by the pandemic throughout most of 2021. Consequently, SteelCorp took major steps forward in virtual collaborations during the pandemic, which facilitated better and more efficient interactions with customers and working in a more flexible manner.

5.4 Product customisation

In order to introduce and test new products, research and the efficient management of resources are a must for product development and entering new markets (André, 2021; Calantone et al., 1996). Thus, to achieve better results when creating and assessing products, highly trained employees in R&D are necessary. When internationalising, companies should apply more resources and expertise to product development (André, 2021; Calantone et al., 1996). This need for sound R&D to create products that fit different markets is supported in the finding of SteelCorp's strong focus on R&D.

Yang and Gabrielsson (2017) point out that expansion into international markets in the B2B context is more complex due to the need for a higher degree of customised products and solutions. Customisation of products occurs at various levels in SteelCorp, differing by department. Some parts of the business are designed for mass production and others for highly customised products. Thomé and Medeiros (2016) also suggest that adapting one's strategy for different markets can be essential to the success of an international business.

Companies have the option of making no changes to products, which can be a cheaper way to export and constitutes a form of product standardisation (André, 2021). It is important for firms to consider whether the revenue generated through product customisation outweighs the costs incurred (Calantone et al., 1996; Xie et al., 2018). In SteelCorp's construction segment there is no customisation of products. SteelCorp Metal Cutting, on the other hand, has a division called Custom Created that is specifically geared to customisation, where everything is fully automated and done via a web-based tool. This gives the customer ultimate control over what they want. Thus, SteelCorp evaluates and assesses where customisation is required and profitable.

As suggested in the literature, SteelCorp focuses on R&D and undertakes research not only to create suitable products for international markets but also to stay ahead of market development (Gabrielsson et al., 2012). The key to the company's different levels of customisation is that it must be profitable. SteelCorp's lighthouse journey indicates that the company is maintaining a customer-first approach, inspiring innovation, addressing needs, and providing solutions to a range of pain points (Costa Climent et al., 2021; Rodríguez-Torrico et al., 2021), thereby steadily gaining ground on the gaps that exist in customer operations as well. As noted above, SteelCorp's therefore prioritises cost and time savings, production and equipment effectiveness, and control from the shop floor, all of which contribute to waste reduction, sustainability, and increased profitability. In line with Forsgren's (2002) concept of learning, SteelCorp learns from – and teaches its partners as it moves ahead, working with others to develop and refine its products and services, and thereby build an awareness of the technologies of manufacturing's future.

5.5 Marketing aspects

SteelCorp has successfully positioned its products in the premium brand segment. On this point, SteelCorp is consistent, being either number one or two in the market in terms of product quality. The case of SteelCorp supports the literature in that the company has a globalised marketing function that manages the overall brand (Matthyssens et al., 2008) and each division has strict marketing rules it must comply with. Long-term relationships are essential for B2B marketing (Čater and Čater, 2010). This is something that is evident in SteelCorp, as it maintains close relationships, and trust is so evolved that the company works directly with customers to develop plans and products. The internet has changed the way that companies and customers communicate, and the literature states that this can be risky since intellectual property might be lost and relationships may be more difficult to manage online (Matthyssens et al., 2008). This is in direct contrast to SteelCorp's approach to relationships, where some customers interact solely online and it works extremely well; everything they need can be found in SteelCorp's web-based tools. There is notably also a contradiction with the literature, however, which states that companies delocalise customers in order to lower production costs and offer the customer a cheaper

product (Matthyssens et al., 2008). In SteelCorp's case, the opposite is true, where the company localises the Indian market and the Chinese market, the only two markets where SteelCorp does not follow its global brand image and tries to offer a cheaper product by segregating them from its global strategy. This, in itself, is a customisation of strategy, driven by high competition and low sentiment for quality in these markets.

According to the findings based on data collected from the respondents (presented in the reasons for customisation section above), customers want the ability to interact with brands across multiple channels on the platform of their choice (Rodríguez-Torrico et al., 2021). These shifting expectations have made way for two unique but easily confused approaches to marketing: omnichannel and multichannel (Costa Climent et al., 2021). A brief definition of omnichannel management is presented in the 'Introduction' and 'Literature review' sections above [a more exhaustive explanation can be found in Verhoef et al. (2015, p.176)]. The findings from SteelCorp and insights from the literature (Alonso-Garcia et al., 2021a, 2021b; Verhoef et al., 2015) indicate that changes in consumer behaviour, as well as new technologies, have fostered the transition from multichannel to omnichannel marketing in the B2B market segment (Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013; Cai and Lo, 2020; Mudambi, 2002). Whereas the multichannel world mainly considers retail channels, the omnichannel environment places more emphasis on the interplay between channels and brands. It keeps customers moving around within the brand ecosystem, with the various channels working in harmony to nurture more sales and engagement (Castaldo and Grosso, 2020). The omnichannel strategy has been boosted by recent technological advances that provide precise information, at each moment and for each channel, of each client's context in the B2B and B2C market segments.

Hence, creating a consistently high-quality buying experience, across all touchpoints, is critical for digital business leaders (Alonso-Garcia et al., 2022). Considering this, B2B commerce businesses are navigating the shift to a more dynamic, digital-first buying journey – an omnichannel digital strategy that serves customers where they are and when they are in need (Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013; Cai and Lo, 2020; Mudambi, 2002).

5.6 Knowledge transfer

Although market knowledge receives mention as an important aspect of internationalisation (Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975), knowledge transfer is not something we found especially evident in the internationalisation literature. Based on our interviews, however, it emerged as an important aspect of SteelCorp's internationalisation strategy. SteelCorp has production and application centres where information is shared between different departments and customers, which have been made possible and accessible by digitalisation (Alsadi et al., 2021). It is, however, evident that more knowledge transfer occurs in SteelCorp, for example, through R&D, and is the responsibility of each individual department. This data is then added to a global system and made easily accessible to those who need it, and thus also helps with international product customisation. SteelCorp also has specific teams that travel to different locations around the globe to identify best practices and then implement them on a global scale. Thus, knowledge transfer constitutes an essential part of SteelCorp's internationalisation process. It greatly assists in product customisation and successfully unites ideas across different departments and, due to Industry 4.0, is something that offers benefit and holds great possibilities for the future (Ferrás-Hernández, 2020).

SteelCorp's community involvement and sponsorship are focused on areas such as education, health and safety. As a responsible and engaged global corporate citisen, it is critically important that SteelCorp contribute to and have a positive influence in the communities around the world where it operates. Community involvement projects are viewed as investments – with contracts, clear target groups and objectives, and measurable results. The findings presented above show that SteelCorp partnered with the Indian government to establish the SteelCorp School of Manufacturing Excellence to train Indian youth from underprivileged and marginalised backgrounds in advanced metal-cutting techniques. Thus, SteelCorp is taking the lead in upskilling and reskilling its own workforces as well as their surrounding communities, equipping what they hope will be the next generation of its workforce with skills for the future.

5.7 Long-term strategy

The business world is constantly changing and, as such, ongoing adaption of strategy is needed (Rosenbloom and Larsen, 2003). To remain competitive, firms need to stay ahead of trends (Ndubisi and Nataraajan, 2016). In the case of SteelCorp, this is evident from the shift in the company's focus to different areas of development, such as greener products. Shifting trends are also evident in every part of SteelCorp, and each division has a different strategy for the future.

These turbulent times (COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing war in Ukraine) have been successful and eventful for SteelCorp, times during which the company delivered on its strategy and made important progress in the shift to growth. 2021 was a year with high acquisition activity and significant new additions that further strengthen its position, both geographically and technologically, in terms of exposure to various customer segments. Thus, SteelCorp has a strong focus on growth and seems to have identified several key areas in its customers' value chains where it wants to establish leading positions, and where it can help its customers further enhance their productivity. Key strategic areas of growth in which SteelCorp has significantly advanced its positions include CAM software, industrial metrology, round tools, ground support, and mine planning.

Customer expectations have changed in recent years. Customers now want to be able to interact with brands across multiple channels on the platform of their choice. This shift in expectations has made way for two unique but easily confused approaches to marketing: omnichannel and multichannel (Rodríguez-Torrico et al., 2021; Costa Climent et al., 2021).

Findings presented earlier that are in line with the principal findings of Hadjikhani and LaPlaca (2013), Cai and Lo (2020) and Mudambi (2002) are that optimal omnichannel management must involve a customer-centric proposition forming the basis for individualised marketing that tailors the company's portfolio of solutions to suit each client. To ensure this, customer knowledge at each touchpoint is essential. Hadjikhani and LaPlaca (2013) also show that the main predictor, even above channels, of B2B omnichannel management is sales and marketing. Hence, good omnichannel performance is measured by the performance of the industrial buyer (Alonso-Garcia et al., 2021a, 2021b). Loyalty and experience are primary measures of this customer's performance.

The findings show that omnichannel works in the B2B context and is more effective than traditional methods. The omnichannel approach has gained popularity during the ongoing crisis. Moreover, omnichannel selling is a more successful way to prospect and

secure new business than traditional, 'face-to-face only' sales approaches – a notable sign of confidence, given the higher cost and hurdle of acquiring new customers (Gök, 2020; Alonso-Garcia et al., 2021a, 2021b). The internet has had a major impact on business and communication (Matthyssens et al., 2008). Digitalisation involves the use of digital technologies to change a business model and provide new revenue and value-producing opportunities (Bajpai and Misra, 2021). This trend has led to the emergence of new ways of organising firms' value networks and inter-firm relationships (Matalamäki and Joensuu-Salo, 2021), which now increasingly occur in networks that enable value creation and value capture as actors engage in transactions during the innovation process.

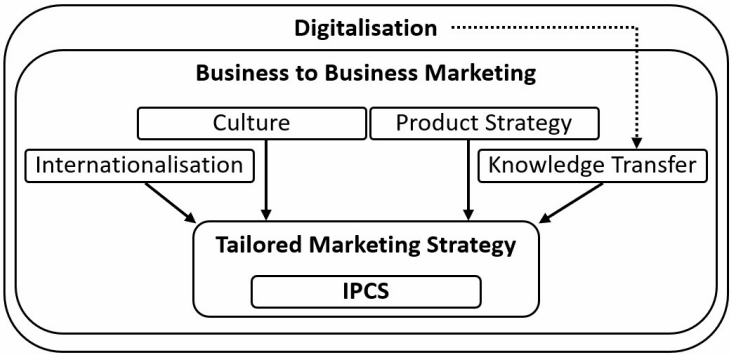
The same can be said for SteelCorp, whose personal relationships with its customers are largely changing from face-to-face interaction to online interaction. Customers are now able to order and customise most products through web interfaces. With hyper-customisation and mass-customisation becoming the norm, this is predicted to continue. A focus on adaption is, in part, made possible by Industry 4.0 through automation of production lines (Lasi et al., 2014; Alsadi et al., 2021). Web interface improvements and digitalisation constitute another instrument that is pushing Industry 4.0 (Ferrás-Hernández, 2020; Lasi et al., 2014; Matalamäki and Joensuu-Salo, 2021).

With the above in mind, we acknowledged a need to change the theoretical framework model. The IPCS model presented in Figure 4 was created in place of the original theoretical framework model. The revised model incorporates some of the different aspects that create a successful international product customisation strategy, such as internationalisation, culture and product strategy, based on a combination of the findings in the literature as well as our own empirical findings. The model also incorporates the aspect of knowledge transfer, which was found to be lacking in the internationalisation literature yet formed an important aspect of our empirical findings. In our case, we found that B2B marketing was not one of the direct factors in the SteelCorp's product customisation strategy, though it did underlie every aspect of the firm's business strategy. Also, digitalisation is becoming a more prominent aspect for business as a whole and encompasses almost every aspect of it. Knowledge transfer is directly enabled and brought to the fore by digitalisation, and is an aspect that stands to gain greatly from digitalisation.

Digitalisation – represented by the dotted arrow to illustrate that the diffusion of digital technologies, e.g., IoT, cloud computing, blockchain, big data – has enabled a notable transformation in firms' boundaries, processes, structures, roles and interactions (Shaughnessy, 2018). Digitalisation affects organisation by redefining its strategies, entrepreneurial processes, innovation and governance mechanisms (Fremont et al., 2018; Shaughnessy, 2018). This has led to the emergence of new ways of organising firms' value networks and inter-firm relationships, which now increasingly occur in networks that enable value creation and value capture as actors engage in transactions during the innovation process (de Vasconcelos Gomes et al., 2018). Knowledge sharing is hence essential both to customer relationship management systems and master data management in global networks to facilitate transparency in the supply chain (Castaldo and Grosso, 2020; Karacali and Salman, 2020). Our case company's marketing strategy was found to need to be tailored to each department and, as such, can be seen as impacted by each individual factor of the product customisation strategy. As a result, efforts should be made to use customer data to drive omnichannel marketing. Hence, the creation of an omnichannel marketing strategy that boosts revenue through AI and data unification, telling exactly what channels convert for each customer segment (Rodríguez-Torrico et

al., 2021), and to guide the customers through a tailored, multichannel journey based on customer data, ensuring they get the most relevant messages. Overall, the model acts as a guide to understanding what makes an international product customisation successful. It identifies different areas of a business to target and consider as part of one's strategy.

Figure 4 International product customisation strategy model



Globalisation, digitalisation, and the accelerating pace of change challenge organisations to become more agile and continuously innovate and improve their processes (Eriksson et al., 2016). Today, customers are empowered to seek out and compare products and services from around the world. When customers are dissatisfied they can easily alert fellow consumers about quality problems by social media. As a result of this, managers must find a new approach to quality management (QM) that moves away from the common, often short-term, view of various tools and techniques. Managers should instead explore how their organisations can create a strong culture based on quality – one of the major future challenges that organisations face in the QM area (Henri, 2006).

6 Conclusions

The current study shows how internationalisation can impact products and how they are developed and altered. In the case studied, many factors resulted in customisation of products, including close relationships between the customer and the firm, and knowledge transfer. B2B marketing was also explored as a factor but was found to influence each aspect of the business, i.e., it was not exclusive to the IPCS. Moreover, it was found that tailored marketing strategies, which were also impacted by the factors mentioned, were in place for different divisions of SteelCorp. These tailored marketing strategies then influenced the IPCS. With increased technological advancements, it is becoming harder and harder to differentiate products, and customisation is therefore becoming ever more important as a competitive tool for SteelCorp.

6.1 Factors that influence international product customisation strategy

This study has shown the core factors influencing IPCS to be: internationalisation, culture, product strategy, and knowledge transfer. In addition to these, underlying and

overlying factors also contribute. The overlying factors are digitalisation and business-to-business marketing, factors that impact every aspect of the business. They are therefore not independent factors of IPCS, although digitalisation has had a direct, enabling impact on knowledge transfer. Another important factor is tailored marketing strategies. Tailored marketing strategies are influenced by the core factors but also encapsulate IPCS. Customisation and/or adaptation of products occur on many different levels within the company and in some business divisions more than others.

Strong organic growth shows the strength of SteelCorp's innovative product portfolio. Having identified a number of key areas in its customers' value chains where it wants to establish a leading position, and where SteelCorp helps its customers to further enhance their productivity shows SteelCorp's strong focus on growth. Key strategic growth areas where SteelCorp has significantly advanced its position include CAM software, industrial metrology, round tools, ground support, and mine planning. With the acquisition of CNC Software and ICAM, SteelCorp now is now a global leader in CAM, giving SteelCorp a digital presence with access to hundreds of thousands of workshop customers and a unique opportunity to further improve customers' productivity and automate their manufacturing processes.

There are many different aspects of current market trends that affect IPCS. This research has identified digitalisation and tailored marketing strategies as the two most important aspects. Tailored marketing strategies have been made much more accessible thanks to digitalisation. This is due to a number of factors, including increased communication and web capabilities. These new tailored marketing strategies can be used as an important tool in targeting customer-specific needs.

Tailored marketing also adds to the demand for digitalisation. Companies want further digitalisation as it can enhance the benefits of their tailored marketing strategy. This demand creates a need for increasing digitalisation in order to stay at the forefront of tailored marketing. Digitalisation has, in addition, been an enabling force for knowledge transfer and, as such, will allow for rapid growth of knowledge transfer in the near future. Part of digitalisation also encompasses Industry 4.0, a trend of great importance not only to the international business literature but also to the practicalities of the business world. Automation of product lines also contributes to product customisation and product customisation strategy capabilities. Automation has increased the speed of customisation and enhancements and will continue to do so in the future. Industry 4.0 has expanded the capabilities of firms to customise their products, and thus firms have increased their product customisation offerings.

7 Practical/managerial implications

There are different types of B2B offerings in the manufacturing industry and the results of this study are difficult to generalise to the industry as a whole. Our findings can, however, be applied to other companies in the steel industry and used as an example for those that operate in the same sphere. The study should also be of particular interest to manufacturers wanting to internationalise or to customise their product offerings to international customers and markets. The IPCS model can be used as a tool to aid managers in decision-making that can lead to holistic and informed international product customisation strategy.

A major implication for practitioners is that while, to date, multichannel marketing and omnichannel marketing appear to have commonly been used interchangeably, our study shows that they are actually quite different and, moreover, that the value creation properties of omnichannel marketing are not being fully utilised by practitioners. Omnichannel is a cross-channel business model and content strategy that companies use to improve their user experience. It is an integrated way of thinking about customers' relationships with companies (Rodríguez-Torrico et al., 2021), where, rather than working in parallel, communication channels are designed to cooperate and build a coherent, evolving, cross-channel experience. Omnichannel supersedes multichannel and includes channels such as physical locations, FAQ webpages, social media, live web chats, mobile applications and telephone communication (Costa Climent et al., 2021). Companies that use omnichannel contend that a customer values the ability to be in contact with a company through multiple avenues at the same time (Karacali and Salman, 2020). Efforts should therefore be made to use customer data to drive omnichannel marketing – hence, to create an omnichannel marketing strategy that boosts revenue through AI and data unification, telling exactly what channels convert for each customer segment.

Many businesses today engage with customers across different channels. That being said, the level of service provided across multiple channels is often inconsistent and data can remain siloed. For this reason, customer demands and business capabilities are often misaligned. This misalignment provides the starting point needed to differentiate and transition between the two approaches discussed earlier: multichannel and omnichannel.

The term 'quality culture' refers to the goal of an organisation and its members to permanently ensure and sustainably develop quality (Henri, 2006). The concept of quality is usually defined from the top down, by organisational management. The term 'culture', on the other hand, refers to a bottom-up process (Eriksson et al., 2016). Accordingly, quality culture includes perspectives from management that incorporate cultural aspects from the workforce (Cronemyr et al., 2017; Mi et al., 2020). In concrete terms, quality culture means creating a culture of trust, participation and communication in which quality goals are underpinned by employee participation.

Digitalising one's business has proven to be almost essential for business success nowadays. As stated by Gartner (2022), digitalisation is the use of digital technologies to change a business model and provide new revenue and value-producing opportunities; it is the process of moving to a digital business. We can say that it includes every activity and process that is made possible by digital technologies. With reference to SteelCorp, digitalisation in business has contributed to the company's success. From automating marketing activities to processing orders, businesses can fully leverage digital technologies. Digitalisation of a business helps to improve the efficiency of its operations, making automation possible (Bajpai and Misra, 2021). The decreased need for human resources means fewer human errors and reduced operational costs (Osarenkhoe and Fjellström, 2021; Matalamäki and Joensuu-Salo, 2021). To fully understand digitalisation in business, it is essential that we study and understand the role technology plays in the whole process.

8 Theoretical implications and contributions to the literature

This study has presented and discussed previous work done on related topics, looking at different concepts, such as the Uppsala model by Johanson and Vahlne (1977), throughout the paper. It also adds to these concepts and applies them to day-to-day business, giving them further support. Internationalisation has received focus in the literature, by Rosenbloom and Larsen (2003), for example, and the findings of this study deepen our understanding by helping to show how product customisation impacts internationalisation and vice versa. In doing so, the study has revealed the importance of knowledge transfer in IPCS and its growing impact due to digitalisation. It has also shown how B2B marketing and a tailored marketing strategy are not separate aspects of IPCS but, rather, overarching themes within it. This serves to close the gap in the literature acknowledged by Calantone et al. (1996), Calantone et al. (2004), Hyder and Fregidou-Malama (2009) and Ferrás-Hernández (2020), while at the same time identifying new gaps in areas such as digitalisation and knowledge transfer. For example, the study showed knowledge transfer to be directly impacted by digitalisation, an area not yet addressed in the internationalisation literature. Further and more in-depth studies are required on this topic. Some literature (e.g., Ferrás-Hernández, 2020; Lasi et al., 2014) is available on digitalisation and automation but, due to factors such as Industry 4.0, it is a rapidly changing topic and more is needed.

8.1 Limitations and suggestions for future research

The study has a number of limitations, the first being that it is based on a single case. A multi-case study would provide a broader range of results and add to the credibility and reliability of the findings. A further limitation is that the study's empirical data is comprised of only ten interviews. A larger dataset would provide further insights. Also, the study conducted was on a Swedish-based company. A more diverse set of results could be obtained by studying different companies based in different countries. Nevertheless, a rich set of data was obtained and the findings provide a starting point for more in-depth study to fill in the gaps.

Suggested avenues for further research would be to replicate this qualitative study in the form of a multiple-case study, using companies based in both different countries and culturally different locations. This would allow researchers to add to the validity of the findings of the current study. Further studies to fill the empirical gaps in the literature identified in the study, one being knowledge transfer, would also be of benefit. More research on how knowledge transfer impacts internationalisation and product customisation strategy is needed. Further research in digitalisation and automation holds additional promise. More research is also required on tailored marketing strategies in B2B, another area identified in our empirical findings. And finally, the customisation of B2B services as a strategy and the benefits that such services have for a firm's international strategy would be another interesting aspect to explore. We noted in the Empirical Findings section that SteelCorp's orientation is trending increasingly toward offering whole package solutions that include products and services. Examination of combined product-service customisation as an intertwined strategy could offer the ultimate study into customisation strategy.

Despite the fact that quality as a source of competitive advantage has received enormous coverage in literature (Gale and Klavans, 1985; Cronemyr et al., 2017; Mi

et al., 2020), little attention has been given to examine how quality performance can be effectively employed as a basis for realising firms' competitive strategy. More importantly, there is no consensus in the literature concerning the strategic orientation that drives quality performance, particularly between differentiation and cost leadership (Prajogo, 2007; André, 2021). Some researchers support the argument that quality fits differentiation strategy and others argue that quality is positively related to cost reduction, which would fit the objective of cost leadership strategy (Chang et al., 2003; Prajogo, 2007; Massaro et al., 2015).

In light of the above discrepancy, it is important to examine the link between quality performance and the two competing strategies – cost leadership and differentiation – to provide a better understanding of the extent to which quality can serve the underlying intent of each of the two strategies.

Acknowledgements

Unfortunately, the name of a co-author, Tena Dukic, was mistakenly omitted during the initial submission of the first version of the manuscript for this article. Thus, the authors of this article would like to acknowledge the role played by Tena Dukic during the conceptualization and data collection process of the first phase of version of this article. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Editor-in-Chief Associate Professor Marco Opazo Basáez for his patience during the life cycle of the manuscript, and the anonymous reviewers for their very constructive comments. Consequently, the quality of the paper was enhanced considerably.

References

Adak, M. (2015) 'Technological progress, innovation and economic growth: the case of Turkey', *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 195, pp.776–782, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.06.478.

Albaladejo, I.P. and Martínez-García, M.P. (2013) 'An endogenous growth model of international tourism', *Tourism Economics*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp.509–529.

Alonso-Garcia, J., Pablo-Martí, F. and Nuñez-Barriopedro, E. (2021a) 'Omnichannel management in a B2B context: concept, research agenda and bibliometric review', *International Journal of Industrial Engineering and Management*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp.37–48.

Alonso-Garcia, J., Pablo-Martí, F. and Nuñez-Barriopedro, E. (2021b) 'Omnichannel management in B2B. Complexity based model, empirical evidence from a panel of experts based on fuzzy cognitive maps', *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 95, pp.99–113, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2021.03.009.

Alonso-Garcia, J., Pablo-Marti, F., Núñez-Barriopedro, E. and Cuesta-Valiño, P. (2022) 'Digitalization in B2B marketing: omnichannel management from a PLS-SEM approach', *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-09-2021-0421.

Alsadi, A.K., Alaskar, T.H. and Mezghani, K. (2021) 'Adoption of big data analytics in supply chain management: combining organizational factors with supply chain connectivity', *International Journal of Information Systems and Supply Chain Management*, Vol. 14, No. 2, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9404-405X.

André, N.M.Q. (2021) 'Sector productivity and geographical diversification as export enhancing factors: the case of Portugal', *International Journal of Business Environment*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp.1–17.

Andrews, T. (2012) 'What is social constructionism?', *Grounded Theory Review: An International Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp.39–46.

Anney, V.N.V. (2014) 'Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: looking at trustworthiness criteria', *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS)*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp.272–281.

Asseraf, Y. and Shoham, A. (2019) 'Crafting strategy for international marketing: outside-in or inside-out?', *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 36, No. 6, pp.859–886, https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-01-2018-0016.

Awuah, G.B., Gebrekidan, D.A. and Osarenkhoe, A. (2011) 'Interactive (networked) internationalization: the case of Swedish firms', *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 68, No. 7, pp.272–281, https://doi.org/10.1108/03090561111137633.

Bajpai, A. and Misra, S.C. (2021) 'Barriers to implementing digitalization in the Indian construction industry', *International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management*, ahead-of-print, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJQRM-09-2020-0318.

Baxter, P. and Jack, S. (2008) 'The qualitative report qualitative case study methodology: study design and implementation for novice researchers', *The Qualitative Report*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp.544–559.

Beamon, B.M. (1998) 'Supply chain design and analysis: models and methods', *International Journal of Production Economics*, Vol. 55, No. 3, pp.281–294.

Benitez, G.B., Ferreira-Lima, M., Ayala, N.F. and Frank, A.G. (2021) 'Industry 4.0 technology provision: the moderating role of supply chain partners to support technology providers', *Supply Chain Management*, ahead-of-print, https://doi.org/10.1108/SCM-07-2020-0304.

Berman, B. and Thelen, S. (2018) 'Planning and implementing an effective omnichannel marketing program', *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, Vol. 46, No. 7, pp.598–614, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJRDM-08-2016-0131.

Bilkey, W. and Tesar, G. (1977) 'The export behavior of smaller-size Wisconsin manufacturing firms', *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp.93–98.

Blankson, C., Ketron, S. and Darmoe, J. (2017) 'The role of positioning in the retail banking industry of Sub-Saharan Africa', *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp.685–713, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJBM-04-2016-0055.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp.77–101, https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2015) *Business Research Methods*, 4th ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.

Cai, Y-J. and Lo, C.K.Y. (2020) 'Omni-channel management in the new retailing era: a systematic review and future research agenda', *International Journal of Production Economics*, Vol. 229, p.107729, DOI: 10.1016/j.ijpe.2020.107729.

Calantone, R.J., Cavusgil, S.T., Schmidt, J.B. and Shin, G.C. (2004) 'Internationalization and the dynamics of product adaptation – an empirical investigation', *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp.185–198, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0737-6782.2004.00069.x.

Calantone, R.J., Schmidt, J.B. and Song, X.M. (1996) 'Controllable factors of new product success: a cross-national comparison', *Marketing Science*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp.341–358, https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.15.4.341.

Castaldo, S. and Grosso, M. (2020) 'Towards omnichannel retail management: evidences from practice', in Pantano, E. (Ed.): *Retail Futures*, pp.97–110, Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83867-663-620201013.

Čater, T. and Čater, B. (2010) 'Product and relationship quality influence on customer commitment and loyalty in B2B manufacturing relationships', *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 39, pp.1321–1333, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2010.02.006.

Cavusgil, S.T. (1980) 'On the internationalization process of firms', *European Research*, Vol. 8, No. 6, 273–281.

Chang, S.C., Lin, N.P., Yang, C.L. and Sheu, C. (2003) 'Quality dimensions, capabilities and business strategy: an empirical study in high-tech industry', *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp.407–421.

Childs, M.L. and Jin, B. (2014) 'Is Uppsala model valid to fashion retailers? An analysis from internationalisation patterns of fast fashion retailers', *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp.36–51, https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-10-2012-0061.

Clark, T. and Pugh, D.S. (2001) 'Foreign country priorities in the internationalization process: a measure and an exploratory test on British firms', *International Business Review*, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp.285–303, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0969-5931(01)00017-8.

Coreynen, W., Matthyssens, P. and Van Bockhaven, W. (2017) 'Boosting servitization through digitization: pathways and dynamic resource configurations for manufacturers', *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 60, pp.42–53, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2016.04.012.

Costa Climent, R., Haftor, D.M. and Chowdhury, S. (2021) 'Value creation through omnichannel practices for multi-actor customers: an evolutionary view', *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, ahead-of-print, https://doi.org/10.1108/JEC-07-2021-0100.

Coviello, N., Kano, L. and Liesch, P. W. (2017) 'Adapting the Uppsala model to a modern world: macro-context and microfoundations', *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 9, pp.1151–1164.

Cronemyr, P., Bäckström, I. and Rönnbäck, Å. (2017) 'Quality culture deployment – using behaviours to explain, diagnose and improve a quality culture', *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*, Vol. 9, Nos. 3–4, pp.498–518, https://doi.org/10.1108/IJQSS-02-2017-0008.

de Vasconcelos Gomes, L.A., Figueiredo Facin, A.L., Salerno, M.S. and Kazuo Ikenami, R. (2018) 'Unpacking the innovation ecosystem construct: evolution, gaps and trends', *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Vol. 136, pp.30–48.

DiCicco-Bloom, B. and Crabtree, B.F. (2006) 'The qualitative research interview', *Medical Education*, Vol. 40, No. 1, pp.582–590, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02418.x.

Doz, Y. (2011) 'Qualitative research for international business', *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 5, pp.582–590.

Dunning, J.H. (2000) 'The eclectic paradigm as an envelope for economic and business theories of MNE activity', *International Business Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp.163–190.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., Jackson, P. and Jaspersen, L. (2018) *Management and Business Research*, 6th ed., Sage, Los Angeles.

Eisenhardt, K.M. (1989) 'Building theories from case study research', *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp.532–330, https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1989.4308385.

Eisenhardt, K.M. and Graebner, M.E. (2007) 'Theory building from cases: opportunities and challenges', *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 1, pp.25–32.

Eklinder-Frick, J., Fremont, V., Åge, L-J. and Osarenkhoe, A. (2020) 'Digitalization efforts in liminal space – inter-organisational challenges', *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 35, No. 1, pp.150–158.

Eriksson, H., Gremyr, I., Garvare, R., Bergquist, B., Fundin, A., Wiklund, H., Wester, M. and Sörqvist, L. (2016) 'Exploring quality challenges and the validity of excellence models', *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, Vol. 36, No. 10, pp.1201–1221.

Eriksson, K., Majkgard, A. and Sharma, D.D. (2000) 'Path dependence and knowledge development in the internationalization process', *Management International Review*, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp.307–328.

Ferrás-Hernández, X. (2020) 'Rethinking Industry 4.0: is there life beyond manufacturing?', *International Journal of Business Environment*, Vol. 11, No. 4, pp.404–416.

Fjellström, D. and Guttormsen, D.S.A. (2016) 'A critical exploration of 'access' in qualitative international business field research: towards a concept of socio-cultural and multidimensional research practice', *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp.110–126, https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-05-2014-1225.

Forsgren, M. (2002) 'The concept of learning in the Uppsala internationalization process model: a critical review', *International Business Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp.257–277.

Fremont, V.H.J., Frick, J.E., Åge, L-J. and Osarenkhoe, A. (2018) 'Interaction through boundary objects: controversy and friction within digitalization', *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp.111–124.

Gabrielsson, P., Gabrielsson, M. and Seppälä, T. (2012) 'Marketing strategies for foreign expansion of companies originating in small and open economies: the consequences of strategic fit and performance', *Journal of International Marketing*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp.25–48, https://doi.org/10.1509/jim.11.0068.

Gale, B.T. and Klavans, L. (1985) 'Formulating a quality improvement strategy', *Journal of Business Strategy*, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp.21–32.

Gartner (2022) [online] https://www.gartner.com/en/information-technology/glossary/digitalization (accessed 5 January 2022).

Gephart, R.P. (2013) 'Doing research with words: qualitative methodologies and industrial/organizational psychology', *Modern Research Methods for the Study of Behavior in Organizations*, pp.291–344, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203585146.

Glas, A.H. and Kleemann, F.C. (2016) 'The impact of Industry 4.0 on procurement and supply management: a conceptual and qualitative analysis', *International Journal of Business and Management Invention*, Vol. 5, No. 6, pp.55–66, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procir.2016.03.162.

Goel, A. (2022) 'Using secondary data in research on social sustainability in construction project management: a transition from 'interview society' to 'project-as-practice'', *Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management*, ahead-of-print, https://doi.org/10.1108/ECAM-10-2021-0905.

Gök, Ö.A. (2020) 'How does omnichannel transform consumer behavior?', in Dirsehan, T. (Ed.): *Managing Customer Experiences in an Omnichannel World: Melody of Online and Offline Environments in the Customer Journey*, pp.27–42, Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80043-388-520201005.

Gregory, G.D., Ngo, L.V. and Karavdic, M. (2017) 'Developing e-commerce marketing capabilities and efficiencies for enhanced performance in business-to-business export ventures', *Industrial Marketing Management*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/.

Gummesson, E. (2005) 'Qualitative research in marketing: road-map for a wilderness of complexity and unpredictability', *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 39, Nos. 3–4, pp.309–327, https://doi.org/10.1108/03090560510581791.

Hadjikhani, A. and LaPlaca, P. (2013) 'Development of B2B marketing theory', *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 42, No. 3, pp.294–305, DOI: 10.1016/j.indmarman. 2013.03.011.

Heinberg, M., Katsikeas, C.S. Ozkaya, H.E. and Taube, M. (2020) 'How nostalgic brand positioning shapes brand equity: differences between emerging and developed markets', *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 48, No. 5, pp.869–890.

Henri, J-F. (2006) 'Organisational culture and performance measurement systems', *Accounting, Organisations and Society*, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp.77–103.

Hofstede, G. (1994) 'The business of international business is culture', *International Business Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp.1–14, https://doi.org/10.1016/0969-5931(94)90011-6.

Horn, N. (2018) *The Immense Value behind Data Enrichment with Secondary Data*, 1 June, inzata.com.

Hyder, A.S. and Fregidou-Malama, M. (2009) 'Services marketing in a cross-cultural environment: the case of Egypt', *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 23, No. 4, pp.261–271.

Javalgi, R.G., Todd, P.R., Johnston, W.J. and Granot, E. (2012) 'Entrepreneurship, muddling through, and Indian internet-enabled SMEs', *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 65, No. 6, pp.740–744.

Johanson, J. and Vahlne, J-E. (1977) 'The internationalization process of the firm – a model of knowledge development and increasing foreign market commitments', *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp.23–32.

Johanson, J. and Vahlne, J-E. (1990) 'The mechanism of internationalization', *International Business Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp.11–24.

Johanson, J. and Vahlne, J-E. (1992) 'Management of foreign market entry', *Scandinavian International Business Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp.9–27.

Johanson, J. and Vahlne, J-E. (2003) 'Business relationships, learning and commitment in the internationalization process', *Journal of Entrepreneurship*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp.83–101.

Johanson, J. and Vahlne, J-E. (2009) 'The Uppsala internationalization process model revisited: from liability of foreignness to liability of outsidership', *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 9, pp.1411–1431.

Johanson, J. and Wiedersheim-Paul, F. (1975) 'The internationalization of the firm – four Swedish cases', *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp.305–323, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.1975.tb00514.x.

Karacali, O. and Salman, G.G. (2020) 'Application and integration of omnichannel decisions to customer relationship management', in Dirsehan, T. (Ed.): *Managing Customer Experiences in an Omnichannel World: Melody of Online and Offline Environments in the Customer Journey*, pp.153–176, Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80043-388-520201013.

Kaynak, E., Tatoglu, E. and Kula, V. (2005) 'An analysis of the factors affecting the adoption of electronic commerce by SMEs', *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 22, No. 6, pp.623–640.

Ketokiwi, M., Turkulainen, V., Seppälä, T., Rouvinen, P. and Ali-Yrkkö, J. (2017) 'Why locate manufacturing in a high cost country? A case study of 35 production location decisions', *Journal of Operations Management*, Vol. 49, pp.20–30.

Kvale, S. (1996) 'An introduction to qualitative research interviewing', *Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Lasi, H., Fettke, P., Kemper, H.G., Feld, T. and Hoffmann, M. (2014) 'Industry 4.0: the future of productivity and growth in manufacturing industries', *Business and Information Systems Engineering*, Vol. 6, No. 4, pp.239–242, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12599-014-0334-4.

Leonidou, S.C. and Katsikeas, C.S. (1996) 'The export development process: an integrative review of empirical models', *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp.517–551.

Leung, K., Bhagat, R.S., Buchan, N.R., Erez, M. and Gibson, C.B. (2005) 'Culture and international business: recent advances and their implications for future research', *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4, pp.357–378.

Levitt, T. (1983) 'The globalization of markets', *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 83, No. 3, pp.92–102.

Lietz, C.A. and Zayas, L.E. (2010) 'Evaluating qualitative research for social work practitioners', *Advances in Social Work*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp.188–202.

Macchion, L. and Fornasiero, R. (2021) 'Global-local supply chain configurations for different production strategies: a comparison between traditional and customized productions', *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp.290–309.

Macchion, L., Fornasiero, R. and Vinelli, A. (2017) 'Supply chain configurations: a model to evaluate performance in customised productions', *International Journal of Production Research*, Vol. 55, No. 5, pp.1386–1399.

Mangold, W.G. and Faulds, D.J. (2009) 'Social media: the new hybrid element of the promotion mix', *Business Horizons*, Vol. 52, No. 4, pp.357–365, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2009.03.002.

Manyika, J., Lund, S., Bughin, J., Woetzel, J., Stamenov, K. and Dhingra, D. (2016) *Digital Globalization: The New Era of Global Flows*, McKinsey Global Institute, New York [online] http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/digital-mckinsey/our-insights/digital-globalization-the-new-era-of-global-flows (accessed 27 March 2021).

Massaro, M., Dumay, J. and Bagnoli, C. (2015) 'Where there is a will there is a way: IC, strategic intent, diversification and firm performance', *Journal of Intellectual Capital*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp.490–517, https://doi.org/10.1108/JIC-07-2014-0091.

Matalamäki, M.J. and Joensuu-Salo, S. (2021) 'Digitalization and strategic flexibility – a recipe for business growth', *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, ahead-of-print, https://doi.org/10.1108/JSBED-10-2020-0384.

Matthyssens, P., Kirca, A.H. and Pace, S. (2008) 'Business-to-business marketing and globalization: two of a kind', *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 25, No. 5, pp.481–486, https://doi.org/10.1108/02651330810904044.

Mi, L., Kang, Y. and Liu, Y. (2020) 'Wanted: strategic partners for young firms eager to enter foreign markets', *Journal of Business Strategy*, Vol. 41, No. 1, pp.3–10, https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-11-2018-0196.

Mudambi, S. (2002) 'Branding importance in business-to-business markets', *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 31, No. 6, pp.525–533, DOI: 10.1016/S0019-8501(02)00184-0.

Ndubisi, N.O. and Nataraajan, R. (2016) 'Marketing relationships in the new millennium B2B sector', *Psychology and Marketing*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp.227–231, https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20871.

Neti, S. (2011) 'Social media and its role in marketing', *International Journal of Enterprise Computing and Business Systems*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp.1–15.

Osarenkhoe, A. (2009) 'An integrated framework for understanding the driving forces behind non-sequential process of internationalisation among firms', *Business Process Management Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp.286–316.

Osarenkhoe, A. and Fjellström, D. (2021) 'The oxymoron of digitalisation – a resource-based perspective', *Journal of Information Technology Research*, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp.1–17.

Osarenkhoe, A., Fjellström, D., Abraha, D. and Awuah, G. (2020) 'Networked establishment processes in transition economies', *Global Business and Economics Review*, Vol. 22, Nos. 1/2, pp.161–177.

Poulis, K., Poulis, E. and Plakoyiannaki, E. (2013) 'The role of context in case study selection: an international business perspective', *International Business Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp.304–314, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2012.04.003.

Prajogo, D.I. (2007) 'The relationship between competitive strategies and product quality', *Industrial Management & Data Systems*, Vol. 107, No. 1, pp.69-83.

Rodríguez-Torrico, P., San José Cabezudo, R., San-Martín, S. and Trabold Apadula, L. (2021) 'Let it flow: the role of seamlessness and the optimal experience on consumer word of mouth in omnichannel marketing', *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, ahead-of-print, https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-06-2021-0154.

Rosenbloom, B. and Larsen, T. (2003) 'Communication in international business-to-business marketing channels. Does culture matter?', *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 32, No. 4, pp.309–315.

Royle, J. and Laing, A. (2014) 'The digital marketing skills gap: developing a digital marketer model for the communication industries', *International Journal of Information Management*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp.65–73, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2013.11.008.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2009) 'Research methods for business students', *Research Methods for Business Students*, 5th ed., https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004.

Seepana, C., Huq, F.A. and Paulraj, A. (2021) 'Performance effects of entrepreneurial orientation, strategic intent and absorptive capacity within coopetitive relationships', *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp.227–250.

Šerić, N. and Ljubica, J. (2018) 'Motives for market research in the sports industry', *Market Research Methods in the Sports Industry*, pp.7–49, Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78754-191-720181002.

Shaughnessy, H. (2018) 'Creating digital transformation: strategies and steps', *Strategy & Leadership*, Vol. 46, No. 2, pp.19–25.

Shenton, A.K. (2004) 'Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects', *Education for Information*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp.63–75, https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201.

Sheth, N.J. and Sharma, A. (2005) 'International e-marketing: opportunities and issues', *International Marketing Review*, Vol. 22, pp.611–622. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02651330510630249.

Siggelkow, N. (2007) 'Persuasion with case studies', *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 1, pp.20–24, https://doi.org/10.5465/AMJ.2007.24160882.

Straker, K. and Wrigley, C. (2016) 'Emotionally engaging customers in the digital age: the case study of 'Burberry love'', *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp.276–299, https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-10-2015-0077.

Thomé, K.M. and Medeiros, J.J. (2016) 'Drivers of successful international business strategy', *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp.89–110, https://doi.org/10.1108/ijoem-09-2012-0120.

Vahlne, J-E. and Johanson, J. (2017) 'From internationalization to evolution: the Uppsala model at 40 years', *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 9, pp.1087–1102, DOI: 10.1057/s41267-017-0107-7.

Verhoef, P.C., Kannan, P.K., Inman, J.J. (2015) 'From multi-channel retailing to omni-channel retailing, introduction to the special issue on multi-channel retailing', *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 91, No. 2, pp.174–181.

Vrontis, D. and Christofi, M. (2021) 'R&D internationalization and innovation: a systematic review, integrative framework and future research directions', *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 128, pp.812–823.

Wild, J.J. and Wild, K.L. (2016) *International Business: The Challenges of Globalization*, 8th ed., Pearson, Wisconsin.

Xie, H.Y., Xie, Q.J. and Zhao, H. (2018) 'Foreign firms' strategic positioning and performance in a host market: A resource partitioning perspective', *Multinational Business Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp.173–192.

Yang, J., Liu, H., Xiao, F. and Wang, J. (2021) 'Identification of Key drivers for sustainable supply-chain management of fresh food based on rough DEMATEL', *International Journal of Information Systems and Supply Chain Management (IJISSCM)*, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp.1–29.

Yang, M. and Gabrielsson, P. (2017) 'Entrepreneurial marketing of international high-tech business-to-business new ventures: a decision-making process perspective', *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 64, pp.147–160.

Yin, R.K. (1981) 'The case study crisis: some answers', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp.58–65.

Yip, G. and Dempster, A. (2005) 'Using the internet to enhance global strategy', *European Management Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp.1–13.