



# Rethinking internationalization processes: toward a circular framework

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## Abstract

Why should models and theories that have set images and boundaries of the internationalization process in the past remain constant over time within International Business research? Despite a recent emphasis on its nonlinear nature, many still view internationalization as a forward-moving process, overlooking its dynamic nature involving enter, re-enter, and exit decisions during the process. To discuss this issue, this paper rethinks the existing International Business literature to retain its explanatory power as an essential discipline by developing a circular framework to capture firms' non-linear internationalization process. The authors propose a circular framework with the decision-making process as the unit of analysis and four statuses: Enter, De-Internationalization, Re-Internationalization, and Operation Internationalized. The decision-making process guides firms through the statuses simultaneously or individually, in the same or a diverse temporal dimension. With this circular framework, the authors wish to contribute to future International Business research; research that can keep up with the “real” world.

**Keywords** Non-linear internationalization process · International business · Circular framework · Decision-making process · De-internationalization · Re-internationalization

**JEL Classification** M1

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## 1 Introduction

In today's fast-paced business world, internationalization is critical for firms seeking global expansion. Particularly, high-tech companies with a digital core, such as fintech, are either adopting or evolving in new ways to internationalize. This evolving landscape suggests that a linear or non-linear approach as a forward-moving construct is no longer sustainable for explaining the internationalization process of many companies (Axinn and Matthyssens 2002; Cahen and Borini 2020). Several scholars (e.g., Caputo et al. 2016a, 2016b; Welch et al. 2011, 2022) have highlighted the shortcomings of existing international business (IB) frameworks, specifically regarding critical variables such as time, context, and their interconnection with the internationalization process; aspects we will explore in more depth in this paper.

One can acknowledge that, over the past five decades, IB research has made significant contributions to advance our understanding of internationalization and related concepts. Outcomes of this work are renowned frameworks and models such as Dunning's OLI (Ownership, Location, Internalization) framework (Dunning 1979, 1988) or the Uppsala Model (Johanson and Vahlne 1977). These frameworks and models have demonstrated considerable merits in guiding companies through the internationalization processes and illuminating aspects that facilitate firms' entry into global markets. These aspects include critical factors and processes (Agndal and Chetty 2007; Doh et al. 2016; Blackburne and Buckley 2019; Erramilli and Rao 1993; Gaur and Kumar 2018), optimal entry modes (Anderson and Gatignon 1986; Benito et al. 2009; Brouthers 2016; Canabal and White 2008) and strategies to achieve superior performance in foreign markets (Crick and Crick 2016; Gerrath and Leenders 2013; Hennart and Slangen 2015; Hitt et al. 2016; Johanson and Vahlne 1977; Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul 1975; Ragland et al. 2015; Purkayastha and Kumar 2021). The discussion of these aspects thereby points to a linear understanding of internationalization, i.e., a process that proceeds in predetermined steps focused on entering the market. This seems to have contributed to an internationalization process being seen mainly as a forward-moving construct or process (Hoorani et al. 2023; Welch et al. 2011; Tsoukas 2017). Thus, internationalization has been placed in a scenario dominated by a linear progression, where firms move from lower to higher levels of resource commitment, risk, and control to determine the modes of market entry (Cavusgil et al. 1987; Cavusgil et al. 1979; Johanson and Vahlne 1977, 2009).

However, this scenario changed with the emergence of new forms of companies (e.g., Born Globals or International New Ventures). These companies were able to avoid slow, gradual, and linear internationalization by implementing alternative governance structures (Oviatt and McDougall 1994, 2005; Cavusgil and Knight 2015; Fuentelsaz et al. 2020; Park and LiPuma 2020). Since then, there has been increasing evidence that many companies in sectors such as high-tech (Pham et al. 2017; Saarenketo et al. 2004) do not follow a gradual path in their internationalization process. This emerging path is perceived as a non-linear internationalization process (Hoorani et al. 2023; Welch et al. 2011). This process involves multiple decisions to enter, re-enter, and exit foreign markets,

emphasizing the importance of the time and context variables to better understand the behavior of these companies (Mudambi and Zahra 2007; Vissak and Francioni 2020).

Hence, in this paper it is argued that numerous companies are likely to make the internationalization decisions simultaneously, which in turn, stresses the importance of time and context in this process and questions the conventional thinking of internationalization being a forward-moving process. Although the non-linear internationalization process clearly departs from the traditional step-by-step approach, it is still commonly perceived as a forward-moving process, akin to linear internationalization (Kafouros et al. 2022). As a result, one could argue that the existing IB literature may not comprehensively address non-linear internationalization paths (Bernini et al. 2016; Dominguez and Mayrhofer 2017) and their time and context-responsive decision-making processes.

Against this background, this paper focuses on decision-making processes in conjunction with internationalization within the organization, representing the unit of analysis. These processes hold undeniable importance in today's global markets (Neubert and Van Der Krogt 2017, 2018). Thereby, these decision-making processes are addressed using high-tech firms as an illustrative case considering their different approaches in this regard. We believe that there is a need for studying this new scenario and the growing importance of the decision-making process in more depth. In particular, it seems important to include certain variables such as time more strongly. The existing literature suggests that, firstly, little effort has been made to theorize and enrich our understanding of internationalization from a perspective that goes beyond the prevailing view of a forward-moving process: However, this could be of particular relevance for the high-tech sector. Secondly, the existing literature is largely focused on linear models and seems to only consider time as a speed term and overlook other significant factors or variables (Hoorani et al. 2023; Mandrinos and Lim 2023). Thus, there are open calls for more research to enhance our understanding of contemporary internationalization and develop conceptual foundations in the form of frameworks to inform future IB studies in this area (Lim 2022; Mandrinos et al. 2022; Mandrinos and Lim 2023).

At this stage, our analysis of the current landscape suggests that many companies are deeply engaged in a new internationalization scenario marked by evolving markets triggered by advancements in Information and Communications Technology (ICT). These developments have not only led to decreased transaction costs but also to an ongoing redefinition of company boundaries (Bellucci et al. 2022; Bembom and Schwens 2018; Chen and Kamal 2016; Kafouros et al. 2022). In such an environment, we argue that non-linear internationalizing companies operate beyond traditional timelines, making time a critical variable. Furthermore, we posit that these firms' decision-making processes seek to adapt to current market conditions and opportunities rather than following a deterministic internationalization pattern, underlining the role of context. We believe there is value in rethinking established notions of internationalization to capture this ongoing scenario more effectively (Autio and Zander 2016; Bellucci et al. 2022; Hoorani et al. 2023) and thus advance existing IB research. Such an attempt entails paying particular attention to time, dynamism, context, and the non-linear internationalization decision-making process (Hoorani et al. 2023; Mohr et al. 2018).

We consider that rethinking the current situation is crucial, as IB research would be more comprehensive if it had more knowledge about the complexity of non-linear internationalization behavior. This behavior is driven by a non-deterministic pattern where interconnected elements such as timing, pace, rhythm, choices of market entry modes, foreign market learning, and knowledge recombination assume an important role throughout the internationalization process (Coviello et al. 2017; Laplume et al. 2016). Without this rethinking, the internationalization process could remain a mythical concept (Altissimo 2020; Neubert 2022). To develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of today's internationalization, there have been calls for the need for comprehensive frameworks (Tsoukas 2017). These frameworks should address two specific gaps in the IB literature. They should (1) consider time as a whole temporal dimension and not only as a speed concept and (2) capture the dynamics of non-linear decision-making processes in internationalization (Kafouros et al. 2022; Welch and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki 2014).

Against this backdrop, we propose a dynamic circular framework with the aim of (1) advancing the current IB literature by inviting a shift in perspective and (2) providing a more comprehensive explanation of the non-linear internationalization process, i.e., decision-making processes in this regard. The proposed circular framework accommodates non-linear internationalization with non-deterministic patterns, where firms decide to enter, re-enter, or exit foreign markets without fixed sequences. This study specifically focuses on high-tech firms, with a digital core serving as the illustrative case, addressing the research question: How is the current internationalization process structured, particularly for high-tech firms with a digital core? The framework, named "DYSTA", which stands for a combination of the terms *dynamic* and *status*, is the outcome of a critical analysis and synthesis of the existing IB literature. In developing the framework, we were inspired by a recent paper by Hoorani et al. (2023), which highlights the role of time and context and their intertwining. We added to this interconnection the non-linear internationalization process. DYSTA consists of four statuses: Enter (E), De-Internationalization (DE), Re-internationalization (RE), and Operation Internationalized (OE). These statuses represent various stages or conditions that international companies can encounter during their internationalization process, which involves a significant decision-making process. The circular framework displays the various statuses of international companies, which can coexist or occur independently.

## 2 Theoretical background

In this section, the relevant IB context is briefly outlined.

### 2.1 Main theories, models, and frameworks of international business research

The seminal papers in the field of IB, such as "The Internationalization Process of the Firm: A Model of Knowledge Development and Increasing Foreign Market Commitments" by Johanson and Vahlne (1977) and "Location and the Multi-national Enterprise: A Neglected Factor" by Dunning (1998), have introduced key

theories, models, and frameworks. These include the Nordic or Uppsala School-based approach, the Eclectic Paradigm, Transaction Cost Economics, the Network Corporation's approach, and International Market Orientation. These influential theories and their frameworks have shaped our understanding of IB dynamics. The most popular stream in IB related to the internationalization process until now has been led by the Uppsala model's scenario, which has created a strong streamline that is apparently still valid today. According to this line of thinking, a firm is either entering the international market, developing operations abroad gradually, or following a step-by-step orientation based on a linear internationalization process, i.e., a forward-moving process (Brambilla 2014; Johanson and Vahlne 1977). In this line of research, it is assumed that the first step abroad involves entering the nearest countries. For this reason, the culture of the country in question has become an important factor in the selection process (Hofstede 1983; Shenkar 2001).

In the early 2000s, the practice of entering into collaborative arrangements, e.g., an alliance, together with an increasing digitization indicated that knowledge and resources could be obtained and shared more quickly than the Uppsala model initially estimated. This had the consequence that some steps of the incremental model could be skipped. Therefore, internationalization became more effective through collaborations (Shi and Gregory 1998; Schellenberg et al. 2018). At that time, firms that entered international markets directly, without following the steps recommended by the incremental school, e.g., born globals and international ventures, also emerged (Bell et al. 2003; Coviello 2006; Oviatt and McDougall 1994, 2005; Paul and Rosado-Serrano 2019). In other words, these are companies that follow a potentially non-linear internationalization process. Hence, IB research underwent a significant change in which the traditional step-by-step approach proposed by Johanson and Vahlne was challenged, and now companies of any size could undertake internationalization and achieve success (Chetty and Campbell-Hunt 2004). This shift gave rise to a non-linear internationalization process, characterized by firms utilizing networks and adopting hybrid structures to compete globally (Kujala and Törnroos 2018). This novel approach enabled companies to have a superior networking access to a diverse range of resources that would otherwise be constrained, and to begin a unique and uncharted internationalization process (Kraus et al. 2020b; Stoian et al. 2018).

The other mainstream is the eclectic paradigm, which deals with actions in international markets and traces back to Dunning's eclectic paradigm. The eclectic paradigm identifies a framework with factors such as ownership, localization, and internalization (OLI) as influential in the entry and growth of companies in international markets (Collinson et al. 2006). Furthermore, in conjunction with internalization theory, the eclectic paradigm appears to be one of the two dominant theoretical perspectives on multinational evolution (Dunning and Lundan 2008; Narula and Verbeke 2015; Surdu and Narula 2021). Internationalization theory, specifically the eclectic paradigm, addresses the entry modes into foreign markets, cultural distance, and time dimension, but only from the perspectives of speed and multinational enterprise (MNE) performance (e.g., Anderson and Gatignon 1986; Brouthers and Hennart 2007; Canabal and White 2008; Quer et al. 2007; Sarkar and Cavusgil 1996).

IB scholars have extensively explored various aspects of internationalization, including foreign direct investment (FDI) and its nature (Aharoni 2013; Hymer 1960), the emergence and evolution of MNEs (Dunning, 1979, 1988, 2015; Buckley 2009; Laanti et al. 2009; Mudambi, 2008), and the transition from internationalization to globalization (Buckley et al. 2017). However, these studies have often focused on a static context, utilizing comparative statistics to predict how changes in the business environment at time "t" affect MNE strategies and performance at time "t+1" (Eden 2009). This emphasis on a static perspective is paradoxical considering that IB is founded on the assumption of a constantly changing market (Reuber and Fischer 2021). Consequently, there is a growing recognition within the field that time should be considered as a broader and more relevant dimension (Hoorani et al. 2023; Hassett and Paavilainen-Mantymaki 2013).

Existing IB research often draws from the above-mentioned theories which have evolved, albeit partially, to address contemporary challenges such as non-linear internationalization in dynamic markets (Guercini and Milanese 2022). Most of these theories typically have their origins in a US-American economic perspective (e.g., Axinn and Matthyssens 2002; Bilkey and Tesar 1977; Cavusgil et al. 1979; Cavusgil and Naor 1987; Coviello and Martin 1999; Kafourous et al. 2022; Purkayastha and Kumar 2021) and commonly focus on large manufacturing companies with a linear internationalization process as their main point of reference (Bembom and Schwens 2018; Canabal and White 2008; Crick and Crick 2016; Hennart and Slangen 2015; Morschett et al. 2010). Therefore, it is reasonable to acknowledge that existing IB research highlights a prevalent tendency among many researchers to adopt a narrow perspective and consequently focus on a limited set of research questions and topics. These include inquiries into why and where MNEs exist, early or accelerated internationalization, entry mode decisions, and how they differ in undeveloped countries from developed countries (Buckley et al. 2017; Fuentelsaz et al. 2020; McDougall et al. 1994; McDougall and Oviatt 2000; Park and LiPuma 2020; Werner 2002).

Building upon the information presented above, one can discern that the existing models and frameworks, despite their valuable contributions, offer only partial insights into the complexity of today's dynamic internationalization process. Furthermore, there exists a knowledge gap with regard to the non-linear internationalization process, particularly when dealing with the intricacies of multiple entry and exit decisions and time as a critical variable (Bernini et al. 2016; Domínguez and Mayrhofer 2017; Vissak and Francioni 2013). Even with the continuous evolution of different theories, models, and frameworks, there still seem to be difficulties in adequately researching the specific behaviors of newly emerging companies. Figure 1 highlights the most prominent theories, frameworks, and models over time, as well as the categories within which they have been encompassed, such as the economic view, the ecological view, the behavioral view, the "new" international entrepreneurship, and the integrative models.

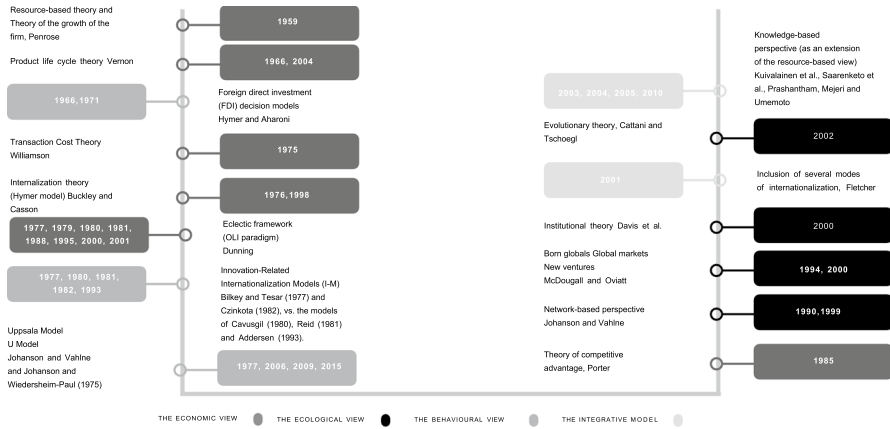


Fig. 1 Theoretical perspectives and frameworks in internationalization. Brief timeline, including later upgrade dates. Source: Authors' work based on Ribau et al. 2015

## 2.2 What to expect from today's international business literature on the internationalization process

For scholars working on the internationalization process, it is essential to understand the multiple aspects of this process. Luo and Tung's seminal work in 2007 underscores the significance of grasping the motivations, intricate dynamics, operational processes, and challenges that are inexorably intertwined with the dynamic and constantly evolving landscape of IB and thus influence the firms' decision-making. Prior research has encountered notable challenges in adapting to more dynamic environments. Such challenges frequently stem from the oversight of the ever-evolving political and sociological dimensions (Arikan and Shenkar 2022; Buckley et al. 2017), which are highly dependent on both time and context variables within IB. By considering these variables, a more holistic context could be offered for understanding the internationalization process. To date, these variables have not received the attention they deserve. Consequently, IB research has faced criticism for losing its direction, indicating a disconnection with changing times, such as a lack of dynamism in the current understanding of the internationalization process (Arikan and Shenkar 2022). Therefore, while this process is inherently a dynamic process, much of the mainstream research has been static and reliant on deterministic frameworks. These frameworks do not adequately explain how new types of companies such as those with a digital core leverage developments in the global market to move beyond the linear steps outlined in traditional theories, models, and frameworks, and embrace non-linear internationalization processes. Figure 2 highlights some of these key challenges.

The world has experienced substantial economic, societal, and institutional transformations over recent decades, yet much of our work remains entrenched in theories developed in the previous century (Arikan and Shenkar 2022; Brambilla

	TITLE OF ARTICLE	YEAR	AUTHOR(S)	CHALLENGES
LEVEL 1	Limits of internationalization theories in an unlimited world. <i>International Marketing Review</i> .	2002	<i>Axinn &amp; Matthysens</i>	<p>Providing current internationalization guidance is more important than ever in a context in which international companies are growing in size at a fast pace.</p> <p>To stimulate debate about how traditional theories, in the context of today's business, are no longer able to encompass firm internationalization practices.</p> <p>To reflect that technology has promoted e-business; a revolution in organizational structures and management in the service economy has arisen, calling into question the fundamental aspects of internationalization theories.</p> <p>To develop new theories and frameworks and reframe a new status due to the incremental view internationalization implicit being hard to uphold in the e-commerce context.</p>
SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW	An empirical examination of factors influencing the internationalization of service firms. <i>Journal of Services Marketing</i>	2003	Javalgi et al.	<p>New theoretical developments are required to gain a better understanding of the critical constructs that lead to internationalization in the services sector.</p> <p>Addressing the dynamic nature of the internationalization process within a service digital context is required.</p>
	Internationalization of firms from Central and Eastern Europe: A systematic literature review. <i>European Business Review</i>	2016	<i>Caputo et al</i>	<p>Based on the notion that internationalization is viewed as a major strategic decision of the firm determining its ongoing development and future changes, how is it possible for a variable determining a firm's evolution (internationalization process) to not have evolved as much as the firm on its own?</p>
LEVEL 1	Rapid multinationalization: Propositions for studying born micromultinationals. <i>International Business Review</i>	2017	<i>Vanninen et al.</i>	<p>Research must keep pace with the evolving patterns in the current business landscape, growing start-ups among other firms is an avenue that merits further investigation (Dimitratos et al., 2014 ).</p>
	International market entry mode—systematic literature review	2018	Schellenberg et al.	<p>Future research should look into how the firm's decision-making procedure for internationalization has changed over time. Therefore, the lack of attention to this means that normative studies neglect how actual decisions are made in this field by firms.</p>
SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW	Foreign market entry decision-making and heuristics: a mapping of the literature and future avenues. <i>Management Research Review</i> .	2022	Guercini & Milanesi	<p>Understanding the nature of current international decision-making remains a key challenge, in particular for non-linear internationalizers.</p>
	Cycles of de-internationalization and re-internationalization: Towards an integrative framework. <i>Journal of World Business</i>	2022	Kafourus et al	<p>Identification of factors influencing re-internationalization, as well as its performance, growth, and the nature of its competitive advantages, including that component of the firm's internationalization portfolio.</p>
	A Systematic Literature Review about the Speed of Internationalization. <i>International Journal of Business and Management</i> ,	2022	Neubert	<p>A comprehensive overview of the determinants of the speed of internationalization is required, which demands first developing an updated vision of the internationalization process.</p>

**Fig. 2** List of some key challenges and big questions for International Business. Source: authors' own preparation based SLR at level 1

2014; Buckley et al. 2017; Canabal and White 2008). Thus, it can be concluded that traditional IB theories or theories from other disciplines are inadequate to explain or predict the behavior of today's businesses. Specifically, IB scholars must move beyond the historical perspective of considering the internationalization process as a linear one, but they should also include non-linear internationalization processes. To sum up, we should expect a contemporary study of the internationalization process to undergo a shift toward a more comprehensive perspective of firm internationalization.



### 3 Methodology

The research methodology entails a systematic literature review (SLR) to establish a rigorous and comprehensive approach. An SLR allows for a thorough evaluation and interpretation of previous research pertaining to the specific theme of interest (Alderson et al. 2004). By utilizing an SLR, this study seeks to improve the reliability of its findings and mitigate bias, as the SLR represents a transparent and reproducible method, as suggested by Kraus et al. in 2020a.

Furthermore, an SLR can provide valuable insights into the existing body of literature and identify future research directions, as scholars often highlight research gaps and unanswered questions (Kraus et al. 2022; Sauer and Seuring 2023; Peticrew and Roberts 2008). In the context of developing a new circular framework, this method is particularly suitable as it allows for the synthesis and assessment of relevant research that meets predefined criteria (Tranfield et al. 2003). Therefore, an SLR enables a more robust examination of the existing literature, providing a solid foundation for the development of the circular framework proposed in this paper.

Additionally, the paper adopts a framework-led approach to synthesize the literature and align it with the current landscape of internationalization processes, following the recommended steps outlined by Denyer and Tranfield (2009) for conducting a systematic literature review. These steps include the problem formulation, literature search, data extraction, data synthesis, and drawing conclusions. The SLR has been effective for reaching conclusions, structuring the relevant research in the IB field, evaluating its contributions, and elaborating clear conclusions regarding existing knowledge gaps (Kraus et al. 2022). This process allowed us to propose a framework that is anchored in the relevant and recent literature.

The concrete steps taken are outlined in the following.

#### 3.1 Step 1 defining the research problem and research questions

Grounded in the philosophical framework of critical realism, this research endeavors to overcome the limitations imposed by positivism and traditional views prevalent in the IB field. Positivism, with its emphasis on linear and forward-moving processes in internationalization, has restricted the exploration of alternative forms of internationalization that deviate from this established trajectory. Drawing insights from "Re-Anchoring the Ontology of International Business" by Norder et al. (2021), it is recognized that positivism has hindered the exploration of IB's intrinsic complexities and the development of new theories, models, and frameworks to capture market intricacies (Poulis and Poulis 2018). To address this, the authors intentionally use critical realism as a theoretical lens to investigate IB's inherent complexities and to develop the proposed circular framework.

To ensure the above-mentioned, the SLR was conducted at two distinct levels. At level 1, the primary focus was on formulating an overarching research question that aimed to explore the underlying mechanisms and steps behind the prevalent view of the internationalization process. This involved a thorough study of relevant

IB frameworks, perspectives and legacies associated with the internationalization process. The findings from level 1 were then synthesized into an initial framework, providing an initial overview of the subject matter. Building upon these insights, the purpose of level 2 was to raise additional research questions in order to come closer to the paper's aim to develop a new circular framework that captures firms' non-linear internationalization processes. Therefore, the SLR conducted at level 2, informed by the understanding generated at level 1, allowed the development of this framework. Table 1 presents the results of these activities.

### 3.2 Step 2 literature search and criteria specification

To ensure a comprehensive SLR, certain keywords were utilized to locate relevant articles. The selected keywords (Table 2) were employed to conduct searches in the Web of Science (WOS) and Scopus databases. These databases are widely acknowledged as authoritative sources for accessing current and pertinent information in the field of business (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent 2016). The inclusion of these databases enhanced the robustness and breadth of the literature search.

The initial number of identified articles was narrowed down from 1341 to 90 articles in Scopus and from 7644 to 120 articles in WOS. More specifically, the focus was on relevant theoretical, conceptual, or empirical articles in economic and business management categories that investigated the internationalization process. Additionally, existing SLRs in the area of interest were included. This proceeding resulted in a final number of 84 articles for the level 1 SLR.

The SLR conducted at level 2 focused on peer-reviewed studies published in academic journals between 2008 and 2022. After applying the initial inclusion criteria at level 2, a total of 322 articles were identified. Articles unrelated to the business domain, such as engineering articles, or those from medical fields were excluded, resulting in 135 remaining articles. The abstracts and conclusions of these articles were read, resulting in a final selection of 68 articles. Another inclusion criterion was that the articles of interest should explore new factors, such as social capital, technological capacity, and regulations in the internationalization process to highlight their potential influence on

**Table 1** Research questions investigated at level 1 and level 2 of the systematic literature review. Source: authors' own preparation

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Level 1 compilation of key considerations from traditional theories on the internationalization process

- (1) What is the structure of the internationalization process as summarized by the main international business streams?

Level 2 development of a new circular framework that captures firms' non-linear internationalization processes without adhering to a deterministic pattern

- (1) How is the current internationalization process structured, particularly for high-tech firms with a digital core?
  - (2) What are the key statuses involved in the entire internationalization process within the circular framework?
  - (3) What are the crucial factors that influence the decision-making process within the circular framework of the internationalization process?
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**Table 2** Terms and combinations used to perform the SLR at level 1. Source: authors' own preparation*Terms (keywords)*

T1: internationalization process	T4: SLR
T2: international growth	T5: international business review
T3: systematic literature review	T6: theor

*Terms combinations/total # articles and database (1341 articles WOS, 7644 articles scopus)*

C1: T1 and (T3 or T4): 105 WOS, 88 scopus
C2: (T1 or T2) and T6: 1,107 WOS, 6,796 scopus
C3: (T1 or T2) and T3 and T6: 109 WOS, 742 scopus
C4: T1 and (T3 or T4) and T6: 20 WOS, 18 scopus

## Terms and combinations used to perform the SLR at level 2

*Terms (Keywords)*

T1: internationalization process	T7: high technology firm
T2: International growth	T8: high-tech service
T3: dynamism	T9: de internationalization
T4: critical factors	T10: re internationalization
T5: success factor	T11: services
T6: determinant	

*Terms combinations/total # articles and database (27,211 articles WOS, 187 articles scopus)*

C1: T1 and T3: 27 WOS 34 scopus
C2: T1 and T4: 113 WOS 95 scopus
C3: T1 and (T7 or T8): 4,256 WOS 20 scopus
C4: (T1 or T2) and (T7 or T8): 1,406 WOS 9 scopus
C5: (T1 or T2) and (T4 or T5 or T6): 21,404 WOS 23 Scopus
C6: T9 and T10: 4 WOS 6 scopus
C7: T9 and T10 and T11: 1 WOS null scopus

The methodological procedures for both SLR1 and SLR2 in this academic article included the application of inclusion criteria

## A. Clarification of inclusion criteria: ensuring alignment and focus

(1) Studies that use IB theory

(2) Definition of relevant constructs and variables:

(a) *Internationalization process* according to Welch and Luostarinen (1988) this is the process of business activities across home country borders with an increasing degree in operations. The term "international business activity" refers to the exchange of resources across national borders (Busch and Fayerweather, 1979). However, the article will find support in that internationalization is seen as a dynamic process where the availability of resources is critical to initiate and grow post-entry. Moreover, this has been challenged by today's businesses that operate in the global market regardless of their availability of resources beyond the slow method of incremental learning and stable proposals for other traditional theories (Rialp et al. 2005)

(b) *Dynamism* in philosophy, dynamism is "the system, theory, or doctrine which seeks to explain the phenomenon of the universe by some immanent force or energy" (Oxford English Dictionary). Furthermore, dynamism is a theoretical viewpoint that holds that a universal, immanent force or energy underpins—either logically or chronologically—practices and forms of association. Business dynamism is an important factor in economic growth, and it is measured by the rates at which firms enter, grow, and exit the market. Stronger dynamism is associated with higher rates of productivity growth, as unproductive firms exit and more productive firms enter or grow (Bartelsman and Doms 2000), but in this article, re-enter and exit decisions are viewed as strategic rather than unproductive

**Table 2** (continued)

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- (c) *Circular framework* the proposal reflects internationalization as a constantly dynamic process in which companies move from one status to another or remain in multiple statuses at the same time
  - (3) Only peer-reviewed journal articles from 2008 to 2022 are eligible for SLR level 2
  - (4) Empirical, conceptual, and review studies
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decision-making. The articles of interest should also have examined new entry modes or non-linear stages of international decision-making. The application of these criteria resulted in a final total of 38 articles. Table 2 summarizes the keyword combinations, selection process, and exclusion criteria used in the SLR.

The SLR at both levels excluded studies primarily focused on economic or financial aspects of IB. Additionally, studies not primarily centered on international growth from an IB perspective, those focused on exclusive entrepreneurship practices, and those measuring marketing strategies were also excluded. These criteria ensured the relevance and quality of the included articles.

### 3.3 Steps 3–4 data synthesis and conclusion: integrating findings for SLR

To adhere to the systematic review practices outlined by Denyer and Tranfield (2009), specific steps were implemented during the analysis at level 1. During this analysis, we identified articles to extract pertinent information concerning the steps, factors, and statements associated with the internationalization process. This process entailed a thorough review of the article content, the extraction of relevant insights, and their systematic organization. By synthesizing this information, we gained a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape surrounding the internationalization process. The level 1 examination involved a rigorous process of critical analysis, key insight extraction, and synthesis to present a comprehensive picture of the prevailing internationalization process in the IB field.

The SLR conducted at level 2 explored how internationalization is approached in today's high-tech companies with a digital core. We investigated current practices and dynamics, concentrating on these specific firms and their strategies. Our data synthesis process involved a thorough examination of a wide range of articles to extract pertinent insights. Through this review, we gained a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary, circular, and dynamic nature of internationalization processes, noting a departure from traditional linear approaches. Companies are increasingly adopting iterative and adaptive methods. Our synthesis methodology unveiled essential content for framework development, as well as critical factors influencing decision-making in high-tech companies expanding into global markets.

#### **4 Findings of the systematic literature at level 1: understanding the internationalization process from the main international business streams.**

The SLR done at level 1 has led to the development of an initial framework that captures the linear steps and critical factors involved in the internationalization process from the main IB streams. This framework consolidates the existing IB body of theories. In essence, the initial framework integrates traditional theories on the internationalization process, which depict a linear progression in firm internationalization, where companies transition from less to more resource-, risk-, and control-intensive entry modes (Johanson and Vahlne 1977, 2009; Cavusgil et al. 1979; Jones 2002; Vahlne and Johanson 2017; Kafouros et al. 2022). This framework notes that international activity evolves through a taxonomy of modes ordered by increasing risk, cost, commitment, return on investment, and so on, as the firm's size, experience, and knowledge grow through experience associated with a step-by-step learning curve.

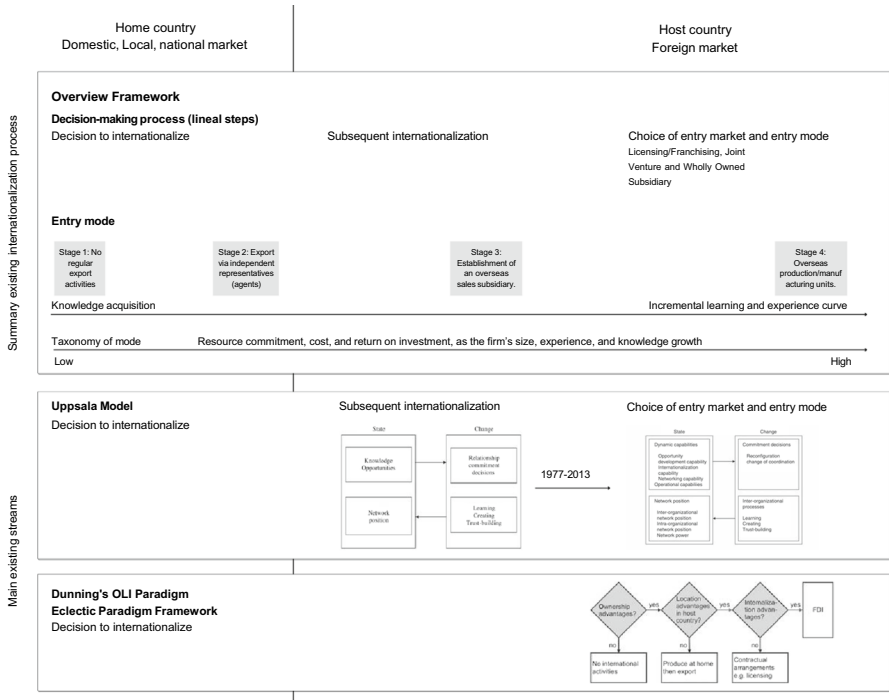
The findings of this SLR underlines that there are firms that have challenged the underlying notion of the traditional frameworks. Some of these companies have pursued international expansion by combining virtual and physical networks, embracing non-linear internationalization processes that have the potential to disrupt industries. This finding underlines again the need for alternative frameworks.

Figure 3 visually illustrates the initial framework presented before. It provides a clear overview of the linear steps, export intensity, and the time dimension involved in the internationalization process from the perspectives of the main international business streams.

#### **5 Findings of the systematic literature review at level 2: a circular framework for understanding high tech's internationalization process.**

The proposed DYSTA framework is the outcome of the two SLRs (see Fig. 5). The internationalization process displayed by DYSTA goes beyond the linear stage approach of the internationalization process but recognizes its complexity and discontinuity (Dominguez and Mayrhofer 2017; Cerrato et al. 2016). The framework also encompasses the integration of novel determinant factors in the internationalization process, specifically for high-tech companies with a digital core. In our article, these companies serve as the illustrative case. The framework identifies distinct non-linear stages, referred to as 'statuses,' that delineate the progression of companies engaging in non-linear internationalization throughout their decision-making process.

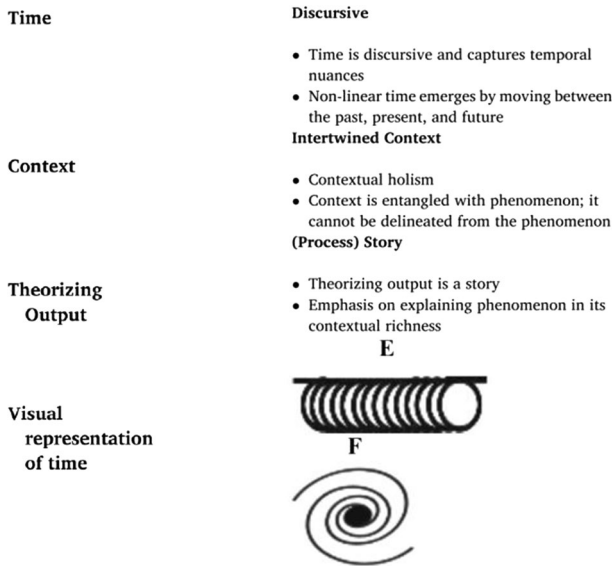
Drawing inspiration from the recent contributions by Hoorani et al. (2023), who presented various temporal theorizing approaches to rethink existing theories



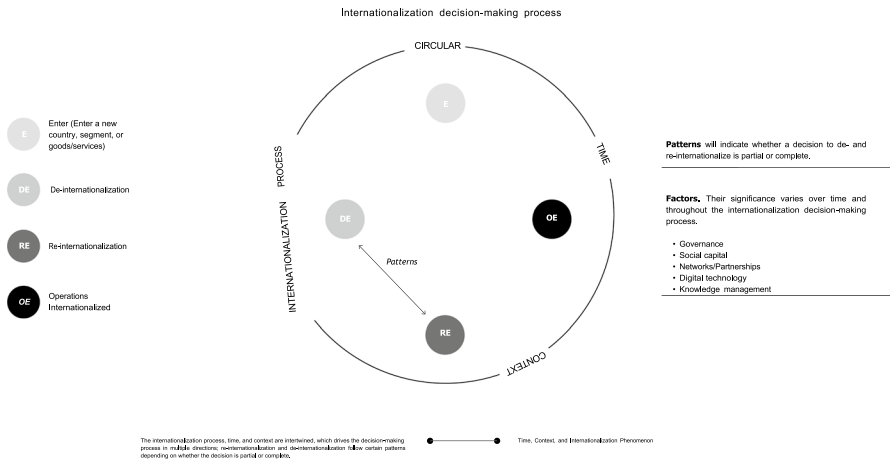
- Firm Resources <sup>1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12</sup>
- Specialized, knowledge-based nature of goods <sup>5, 27, 31</sup>
- International experience <sup>1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 17, 19, 20, 25, 26</sup>
- Networks of formal and informal relationships <sup>18</sup>
- Desire to minimize risk <sup>19</sup>
- Control <sup>7, 14, 19, 20</sup>
- Changes in organizational structure <sup>19, 28</sup>
- Increased management experience <sup>5</sup>
- External Stimuli Lack of domestic growth due to competitive domestic market <sup>20</sup>
- Government trade initiatives <sup>20</sup>
- World Trade Organization Agreements <sup>20</sup>
- Geopolitical aspects <sup>22</sup>
- Client requirements/ followership <sup>24</sup>
- Foreign market size and growth rate <sup>3</sup>
- Geographic location <sup>25</sup>
- Language, culture and level of education <sup>19, 32</sup>
- Level of industrial development <sup>27</sup>
- Home Region Market Orientation <sup>16</sup>
- Administrative Investments Asset <sup>9</sup>
- Domestic Market Growth Rate <sup>8</sup>
- Export Scope Failure <sup>14</sup>
- Foreign asset Ratio <sup>16</sup>
- Foreign Expertise of Employees <sup>6, 13</sup>
- Geographic Diversification <sup>7</sup>
- Global Market Growth Rate <sup>10, 13</sup>
- Globalization Strategy <sup>24</sup>
- Market attractiveness <sup>4</sup>
- Legal environment <sup>2</sup>
- Environmental uncertainty <sup>11</sup>
- Size firm <sup>31</sup>
- Relational capabilities <sup>29, 30</sup>
- Financial, human & tangible resources <sup>15, 29</sup>
- Networking competence <sup>5, 18, 23</sup>
- Activity-related determiners <sup>9, 29</sup>
- Resources commitment <sup>26</sup>
- Productivity <sup>9, 17</sup>
- Corporate Announcement Returns <sup>21</sup>

Agarwal (1994) <sup>1</sup>; Agarwal and Ramaswami (1992)<sup>2</sup>; Andersen (1993)<sup>3</sup>; Anderson and Gatignon (1986)<sup>4</sup>; Arregle et al. (2006)<sup>5</sup>; Blomstermo et al (2006)<sup>6</sup>; Brothurs (2002, 2013) <sup>7</sup>; Brothurs et al. (2008)<sup>8</sup>; Chang and Rosenzweig (2001)<sup>9</sup>; Dow and Iarimo (2009)<sup>10</sup>; Drogendijk and Stangen(2006)<sup>11</sup>; Dunning(1988, 2000)<sup>12</sup>; Erramilli (1991)<sup>13</sup>; Erramilli, Agarwal, and Kim (1997)<sup>14</sup>; Forsgren et al. (2015)<sup>15</sup>; Forsgren (2002)<sup>16</sup>; Gatignon and Anderson (1988)<sup>17</sup>; Gomes-Casseres (1990)<sup>18</sup>; Hennart (1991)<sup>19</sup>; Johanson and Vahlne (1977, 2006, 2009, 2015)<sup>20</sup>; Klein, Frazier, and Roth (1990) <sup>21</sup>; Knight (1997)<sup>22</sup>; Knight and Cavusgil (2004)<sup>23</sup>; Knight and Cavusgil (1996)<sup>24</sup>; Knight and Liesch (2016)<sup>25</sup>; Luostarinen (1979)<sup>26</sup>; Makino and Neupert (2000)<sup>27</sup>; Macharzina and Engelhard (1991)<sup>28</sup>; McDougall and Oviatt (1994, 2000)<sup>29</sup>; Morschett et al. (2010)<sup>30</sup>; Vernon (1966)<sup>31</sup>; Welch and Luostarinen (1988)<sup>32</sup>

**Fig. 3** Initial framework of traditional theories on internationalization processes. Source: authors' preparation from SLR at level I material



**Fig. 4** Theorizing in qualitative IB research. Source: adapted by the authors from Hoorani et al. 2023, p 6



**Fig. 5** Circular framework DYSTA. Source: authors' own preparation

and construct new models and frameworks, Fig. 4 illustrates the chosen approach in this paper. Building upon this work, we emphasize the need for a new framework that takes into consideration these elements (more details are presented in the following sections).

To address the gap outlined in the introduction, the proposed circular framework is positioned in the internationalization process of high-tech companies with a

digital core operating in plural markets. By building on non-linear internationalization and the various exits and re-entries, the framework provides a more comprehensive understanding of the internationalization process (Fig. 5).

DYSTA goes beyond relying solely on prior accumulated experience for making decisions at the international level. The circular framework particularly emphasizes the relevance of incorporating time, context, and internationalization as interconnected elements. Additionally, the framework is based on a non-linear process story, and additionally influencing factors hampering or supporting the non-linear internationalization process.

DYSTA's structure consists of three parts. The first section encompasses time, context, and internationalization process as intertwined and inseparable components (Carney et al. 2016; Goodall et al. 2004; Hoorani et al. 2023; McGaughey 2007; Tsui-Auch 2004). The second section focuses on the "non-linear process story," while the third section proposes a new set of factors that influence the non-linear internationalization process. These parts are presented in the following sections.

### 5.1 Time, context, and internationalization process

Time is a crucial component of internationalization (Mayer and Floriani 2022; Welch et al. 2016). Despite the widely recognized view of firms' internationalization as a process that unfolds over time, most studies have paradoxically overlooked the incorporation of time (Buchnea and Elsahn 2022; Welch and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki 2014), resulting in a lack of dynamism in the existing frameworks and models. Nonetheless, in today's business environment, time continues to emerge as a relevant and explicit dimension (Mayer and Floriani 2022), inseparable from the context. Therefore, in the DYSTA framework time is recognized as a significant factor that influences not only the initial internationalization path but also the transitions of and between the different statuses. Thus, we also respond to Buckley et al. (2017) who stressed that an effective framework for comprehensively capturing the internationalization process is one that incorporates the dimension of time, especially in relation to unforeseen temporal changes that may arise in this area. These changes include global climate change, migration, conflicts, as well as other crises, which reinforce the role of the temporal aspect within the internationalization process. The acknowledgement of the intertwined nature of time, context, and internationalization enables the DYSTA framework to account for both expected and unexpected changes, as it makes possible the interaction with the past, present, and future of the decision-making process inherent in internationalization (Wood et al. 2021). This is especially evident in the domain of internationalizing startups, where a startup's operational context and its evolving decision-making processes are intricately bound to its internationalization journey and, ultimately, its survival. This underscores the critical role this context plays in shaping time-dependent trajectories (Child et al. 2022) and guiding these trajectories. Such pathways can rapidly propel high-tech firms into non-linear internationalization (Child et al. 2022; Musteen et al. 2014). By thoroughly considering these dynamic, time-sensitive trajectories and recognizing the intricate interplay of time, context, and the internationalization process



itself, DYSTA effectively captures the complex and disruptive nature of internationalization processes in today's companies, particularly those operating in the high-tech sector.

DYSTA tries to overcome the rigid vision of time and the underdeveloped discussion of the interconnectedness of time, context, and internationalization in the current literature which has contributed to a situation that still sees the internationalization process as a process that follows a linear step-by-step approach (Poulis and Poulis 2018; Welch et al. 2016). DYSTA embraces a non-linear and intertwined perspective of these three key dimensions. Thus, DYSTA appears to be more inclusive than the other frameworks and models.

## 5.2 Non-linear process story

As mentioned before, DYSTA consists of four statuses. These statuses are presented in more detail in the following.

*Enter (E) status.* This refers to entering or initially entering a new country, region, segment, or with a new or improved goods/services in a new or existing market.

*De-Internationalization (DE) status* This is when the firm decreases or even stops its international commitment (Santangelo and Meyer 2011). It could encompass the total or partial withdrawal from the foreign market (Kafouros et al. 2022; Welch and Welch 2009). De-internationalization does not have a negative connotation in the DYSTA framework but could be the result of a strategic choice (Benito 2005; Vissak and Francioni 2013).

*Re-internationalization (RE) status* This is when the firm re-engages in international operations after having previously exited foreign markets (Vissak and Francioni 2013; Welch and Welch 2009). It describes a process involving a period of international business activity that after an exit is followed by a time-out period of some duration ending up in a re-entry where the international operations are renewed (Kafouros et al. 2022; Welch and Welch 2009).

*Operations Internationalized (OE) status* This is when the firm has already internationalized its operations, i.e., has a presence in that market, and thus is ready to have its goods/services be consumed, produced, or available in the market.

Across all these statuses, a firm could place its decisions and have a presence in several statuses, both at the same time and in different temporal situations. To exemplify this situation, we consider a hypothetical scenario: a company with a diverse product range decides to expand into a new country with a new product while discontinuing the sale of an existing product in another country. From the firm's perspective, this situation involves the statuses of "DE" and "E", as the company withdraws from one country while entering a new one.

However, if the same company enters a country with a new product, after completely de-internationalizing a different product in that country, it would be seen as a re-enter decision since the company had operated there before. From a product perspective, it would be regarded as a new entry since it is a new product being introduced in that country, resulting in the statuses of "RE" and "E". During that previous de-internationalization phase, the company would have

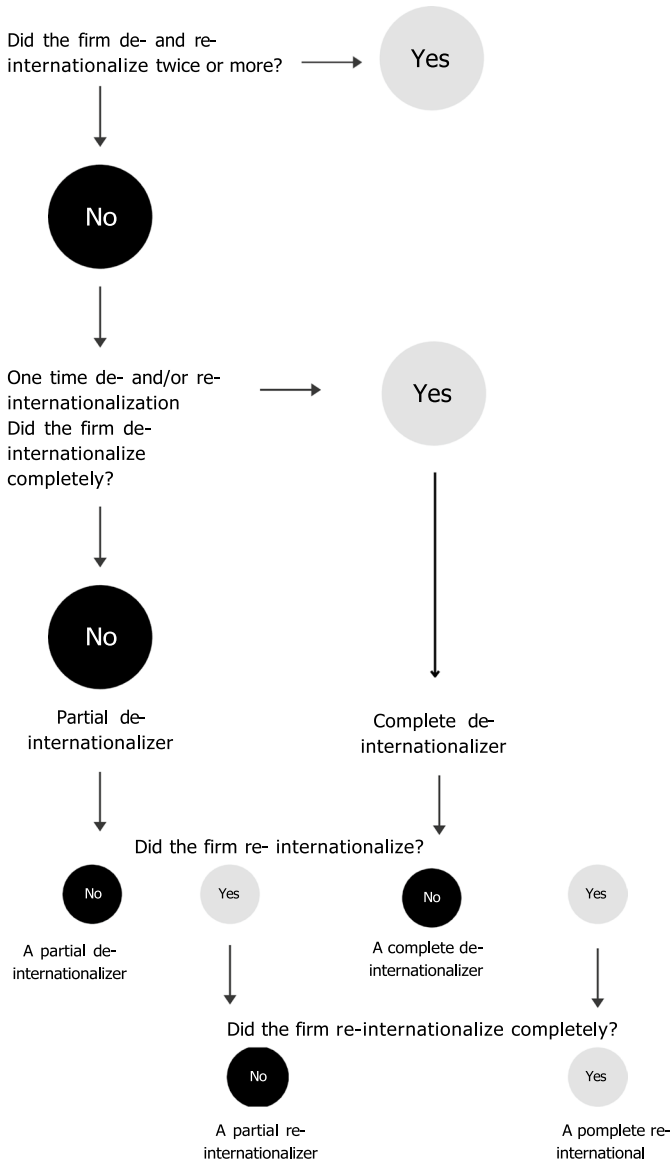
been simultaneously operating in the country while preparing to de-internationalize its product, falling into the statuses of "DE" and "OE" (ongoing operation). It is important to note that other firms may also de- and/or re-internationalize selectively, opting to enter different markets after de-internationalization without re-entering all their previous markets (Javalgi et al. 2011; Vissak and Masso 2015; Welch and Welch 2009).

When considering the circular framework from various perspectives, including those of the firm and the product, it becomes essential to recognize the importance of the decision-making process as the central focus of the framework (its unit of analysis). This decision-making process plays a crucial role in situating the company across different statuses and in understanding the circular framework. On the one hand, when a company chooses to enter a new country with a new product, it is classified under the "E" status. Regardless of the company's existing operations in that country with another product, the introduction of a new product would still result in the company being categorized under the "E" status. Simultaneously, the presence of a different product in that country would place the company in the "OE" status. On the other hand, if the decision is made to de-internationalize a product, the company falls into the "DE" status. Furthermore, if the company subsequently decides to re-enter the same country with a previously de-internationalized product, it transitions into the "RE" status.

Some companies may choose to de-internationalize and/or re-internationalize partially, without re-entering all their previous markets (Javalgi et al. 2011; Vissak and Masso 2015). They may decide to enter different markets after de-internationalization without re-entering all their previous markets. After partial re-internationalization they may become less international than before de-internationalization. Therefore, DE and RE statuses could be fully or partially performed depending on the concrete situation. This is why it is suggested that re- and de-internationalization be considered in two key dimensions: (a) whether the firm's re-entering or exiting from foreign markets is partial or complete; and (b) whether it is voluntary or forced. Partial DE and/or RE refers to situations in which a company exits/re-enters some of its foreign markets (while remaining present in others) and/or reduces its scale of its presence in certain foreign countries. These movements could be seen as a future call for scholars to study how they are used to deploy strategic action, seeking a sustainable competitive advantage (Kafourous et al. 2022).

Another possible scenario occurs where firms navigate through the statuses. For example, when a partial de-internationalizer has reduced operations in one/more foreign market(s), keeping some international activities or entering different countries after exiting previous ones (Blum et al. 2013; Katsikeas 1996; Lawless 2009; Vissak 2010), being in statuses "DE", "RE", "OE", and "E" simultaneously. Figure 6, which builds upon the classification by Vissak and Masso (2015), summarizes patterns that can provide valuable insights for determining whether decisions within the DE or RE statuses are partial or complete. These patterns help explain the networks and serve as a guide in this regard.

**NON-LINEAR INTERNATIONALIZATION PATTERNS  
BETWEEN STATUS DE AND RE**



**Fig. 6** Patterns describing status DE and RE interrelationships. Source: authors' own preparation

**5.3 Factors influencing the circular framework's internationalization process**

This introduces the new factors derived from the SLR at level 2 that can influence the non-linear internationalization process captured by DYSTA, especially for high-tech companies. These new factors are necessary because, as Kalinic et al.

(2014) suggests, traditional factors like risk, control, and resource commitment, which were historically considered drivers of internationalization success due to their role in gaining experience before entering foreign markets, have a uniform and static impact. This static nature restricts the dynamism introduced by the circular framework. Furthermore, some scholars provide evidence that modern companies are now making well-informed international decisions without depending on these conventional success factors (e.g., Kalinic and Forza 2012; Nielsen and Nielsen 2011). These factors identified during the SLR at level 2 were Governance, Social capital, Networks/Partnerships, Digital technology, and Knowledge management. The discussion that follows explores the significance of each of these factors.

*Governance* is a factor present in the circular internationalization process beyond the ownership structure term (Oliva et al. 2022; Wang et al. 2020). For instance, it could be focused on the way that governance shapes the decision-making process across different statuses in case some planned or unplanned extra factors appear, such as economic frictions, or geopolitical conflicts.

*Social capital* has been identified as a key factor that impacts and boosts the internationalization processes of high-tech firms. Studies by Agndal et al. (2008), Lindstrand and Hånell (2017), and Nordman et al. (2011) have shown that social capital is essential in facilitating internationalization in high-tech firms. In particular, the acquisition of foreign market knowledge and building trust within partnerships have been found to be crucial in enabling rapid internationalization (Nordman et al. 2011; Presutti et al. 2007). Social capital plays an important role in helping firms achieve sustainable competitiveness (Hallam et al. 2018; Ul zia et al. 2023), making it an important factor for consideration in the internationalization process of high-tech firms.

*Networks/Partnerships* are a factor that allows certain technological interrelationships between high-tech firms, enabling the sharing of complementary technology resources, facilitating innovation-creating dynamic capabilities, mutually profitable partnerships, and a shortcut to obtaining knowledge about a host environment for developing internationalization plans (Buckley and Casson 2009; Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Kalinic et al. 2014; Lew et al. 2013; Oviatt and McDougall 2005). In short, networks are both weak and strong ties that help overcome the difficulties associated with the entry, re-entry, exit, and operation in a foreign market (Coviello 2006; Johanson and Vahlne 2009) either as a deliberate process or as an unplanned adjustment to the environment changes (Chandra et al. 2009; Gulanowski et al. 2018; Vissak et al. 2020).

*Digital technology* firms leverage digitalization for internationalization to enter, exit and re-enter a foreign market without minimum costs. Also, it is used to achieve a huge spread level of the business across the entire society, quickly building a reputation online (Kraus et al. 2019; Reuber and Fischer 2011). However, digital adoption has not been widely discussed or included in a framework as a factor (Falahat et al. 2018; Lee et al. 2020; Neubert 2017; Zhang and Tansuhaj 2007). As observed by Autio and Zander (2016), digital technology has reduced location dependency, keeping assets in both home and host countries, and enabling greater transferability of firm-specific assets. (Coviello et al. 2017). In addition, digital technology has

drawn new borders between countries, challenging the traditional linear internationalization process (Laplume et al. 2016).

*Knowledge management* is a relevant factor for high-tech services because the firms rely on the creation, configuration, reconfiguration, and transfer of knowledge to achieve a competitive advantage (Ashok et al. 2016; Ganguly et al. 2019; Garrick and Chan 2017), which is the foundation of the internationalization decision-making process (Ashok et al. 2016; Ganguly et al. 2019; Garrick and Chan 2017). The management of knowledge has received substantial research attention in the literature on internationalization as a learning process (Vissak et al. 2020). However, it is time to consider it as an active factor intervening across the statuses in the international growth of a firm.

## 6 Conclusions

The literature on internationalization has undergone a significant development, transitioning from a focus on the incremental view to rapid internationalization. This development has provided valuable insights into the factors contributing to high performance in internationalization processes (Brockman et al. 2022; Findlay et al. 2022; Fuentelsaz et al. 2020; Kafouros et al. 2018, 2022; Park and LiPuma 2020). However, this progression has been primarily driven by linear internationalizers who view internationalization as a step-by-step process with time directly linked to speed. Consequently, non-linear internationalization, especially in high-tech firms with a digital core, has been notably absent in IB research. Non-linear internationalization involves multiple entries, exits, and re-entries in the international expansion of companies (Guercini and Milanesi 2022; Parente et al. 2018), following a non-deterministic pattern. Therefore, neglecting the distinctive trajectory of non-linear internationalization processes represents a significant gap in our understanding of the complexities of today's global market.

To address the gap in the relevant IB literature, our paper makes three contributions. First, we introduce a circular framework called DYSTA, tailored to align IB research with the real-world dynamics of companies such as high-tech firms. This framework stands out from traditional approaches by emphasizing the non-linear internationalization decision-making process within these companies, as demonstrated in our article. DYSTA consists of four statuses: Enter (E), De-Internationalization (DE), Re-Internationalization (RE), and Operations Internationalized (OE). Within this framework, time is considered a multidimensional variable closely intertwined with context and the internationalization process (Hoorani et al. 2023).

This triad, consisting of context, time, and the internationalization process, is relevant for two primary reasons. First, time and context are intricately linked and influenced by internationalization when companies enter new markets, shaping local contexts, and prioritizing time in their decision-making. Second, context and time actively guide internationalization, affecting various statuses in the process, as depicted in our circular DYSTA framework. This reciprocal relationship between internationalization, time, and context is underscored by some scholars (e.g., Child et al. 2022; Mayer and Floriani 2022) who highlight how this dynamic

interconnection accommodates more effectively both anticipated and unforeseen changes that influence the past, present, and future of internationalization decision-making (Wood et al. 2021). Consequently, further exploration of DYSTA's implications for IB research is warranted, as its capacity to unravel these intricate connections offers substantial promise for enriching our understanding of internationalization and its broader implications for global market strategies and dynamics.

Secondly, our paper contextualizes non-linear internationalization beyond the traditional lens of a forward-moving process. Instead, we propose a simultaneous process where fluctuations can occur without undoing previous decisions, thus challenging the notion of a straightforward back-and-forth movement. This perspective is based on the concept of non-linear cyclical movement and emphasizes the significance of the decision-making process within a circular framework. This decision-making process is pivotal for situating the firm within various statuses and comprehending the circular framework. For instance, when a company chooses to enter a new country with a novel product, it assumes the "E" status. Irrespective of any pre-existing operations involving a different product in that country, the introduction of a new offering still classifies the company under the "E" status. Concurrently, the presence of a distinct product in that country positions the company within the "OE" status. Opting to de-internationalize a product shifts the company to the "DE" status, and subsequent decisions to re-enter the same country with a previously de-internationalized product leads to transition into the "RE" status. By addressing this situation, we have taken steps to address the pressing requirement of reevaluating the status of the internationalization process within today's global market, a concern underscored by some scholars (e.g., Kafouros et al. 2022; Tsoukas 2017; Welch and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki 2014).

Our third contribution lies in the circular framework's capacity to bridge gaps in IB and frameworks. It achieves this by integrating re-entry and exit decisions, along with considerations of time and context. This enhances our comprehension of the internationalization process. The four proposed statuses encompass the complexities of contemporary internationalization processes, characterized by multidisciplinary and strategic decisions in companies. Additionally, our paper provides some insights into significant factors such as governance, social capital, networks/partnerships, digital technologies, and knowledge management that influence the decision-making process for internationalization, warranting further investigation.

While this paper makes valuable contributions, it does have some limitations that could be addressed in future research. First of all, DYSTA and the situation of this framework has not been tested for relevance and robustness yet. Additionally, a more detailed explanation of the interrelationships among context, time, and the internationalization process within the framework is needed. Hence, this work calls for broader debates across multiple dimensions, including how firms can leverage the circular framework's statuses to navigate the various challenges brought about by the internationalization process and the surrounding factors. Future research could explore the factors highlighted in the DYSTA framework and their impact on the internationalization process more comprehensively. Furthermore, future research is encouraged to assess the reliability of the proposed statuses through empirical studies, such as conducting in-depth case studies to observe how effectively the circular

framework represents the internationalization process and whether it enhances the strategic decisions of contemporary companies. We hope that the circular framework proposed in this article serves as a starting point for more research.

In summary, this paper questions the prevailing belief that traditional internationalization theories, frameworks, and models, often grounded in linear perspectives, can be universally applied to explain emerging internationalization processes. It is important to acknowledge that these traditional models and frameworks were never intended to serve as universal theories of internationalization. While they may retain relevance in specific cases, their adaptability and transferability to diverse contexts and the ever-evolving dynamics of the present are in doubt, even within their original domains. However, our study makes a significant contribution by enhancing our comprehension of the dynamic, discontinuous, and heterogeneous nature of internationalization processes, aligning with Hoorani et al.'s 2023 groundbreaking work on understanding time in qualitative IB research. This contribution holds particular relevance within the context of high-tech firms with a digital core which are challenging traditional assumptions about internationalization (Yu et al. 2022). We underscore the importance of recognizing the behavior of non-linear internationalizers, those who follow a non-linear cyclical movement in the context of international growth. To address this, we introduce the circular framework DYSTA, which encompasses re-enter, enter, and exit decisions in the form of statuses, challenging traditional assumptions about international growth. DYSTA provides a comprehensive understanding of internationalization by considering past, present, and future perspectives, intertwined with the context and the internationalization process. Therefore, by bridging the gap in the existing literature, our research offers valuable insights for scholars and practitioners, and it also opens new avenues for further exploration in the field of international business.

**Author contributions** We, the authors of the manuscript titled Rethinking internationalization processes: Toward a circular framework, hereby declare our authorship contributions in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Journal and Publisher. EDR (First Author): Substantial contributions to conception, design, literature review analysis, and interpretation. Drafting and critical revision of the manuscript. Approval of the final version for publication. Accountability for the work's accuracy and integrity. SD (Second Author): Substantial contributions to conception, design, literature review analysis, and interpretation. Critical revision of the manuscript. Approval of the final version for publication. Accountability for the work's accuracy and integrity. ANG (Third Author): Revision of the manuscript. Approval of the final version for publication. Accountability for the work's accuracy and integrity. We adhere to the guidelines regarding authorship and have ensured that all contributors meet the criteria for authorship. Contributors not meeting all criteria have been acknowledged as per the provided guidelines. The corresponding author, SD, has taken primary responsibility for communication with the journal and will oversee all administrative requirements and authorship details. All authors collectively endorse the accuracy and integrity of the work.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** All authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials dis-

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