

Who creates international marketing agility? Diasporic agility guiding new market entry processes in emerging contexts

Abstract

International marketing agility is a crucial dynamic capability in international business. The purpose of the paper is to examine who creates it and how exporters and partners leverage diasporic agility. We employ case study research on two diaspora entrepreneurs acting as ambidextrous strategic channel partners and playing a central role in taking the exporter to new markets. In both cases, the role of the diaspora entrepreneurs as channel partners was decisive in providing multi-stage agility for the exporter while employing their specific market drive and understanding as a source of competitive advantage. While the exporters concentrated on their core business, the partners sensed, seized and reconfigured resources to enable the market entry and growth under culturally and politico-economically demanding conditions. The diasporic understanding of the markets was a unique form of this agility and fundamental for right strategies and exporter's international marketing. Diaspora channel partners facilitated entry and lowered the cost of international marketing by providing advanced and more locally legitimate knowledge fostering ambidexterity. We contribute to the conceptualization of the role of diaspora as an international marketing agility actor.

Keyword: International marketing agility, Ambidexterity, Diasporic agility, Diaspora entrepreneurship, New market entry, Channel partner

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of agility is applied and approached especially in large multinational corporations as a response to employing resources well in changing times for the future. Denner (2015)¹, for instance, used

¹ see more on corporate views in Denner, V. (2015) Agility at Bosch: mission impossible? blog.bosch-si.com, 16.6.2015, retrieved 25.6.2018

the metaphor of a speedboat referring to the speedboat that is agile to maneuver while an ocean-going tanker is not so. However, small size does not equal international marketing agility (IMA) as especially smaller firms face internal capability and resource-related challenges in exporting and addressing new foreign markets (Leonidou, 2004). Agility is considered result from a blend of dynamic capabilities, such as strategic sensitivity, leadership unity, and fluidity of resources, that allow firms to make strategic commitments while staying nimble and flexible (Doz & Kosonen, 2008). Fourné et al. (2014) adopted the concept in the study of MNEs, referring that strategic agility is a meta-capability that creates and deploys a dynamic balance between sensing local opportunities, enacting global complementarities, and capturing local value over time (Fourné et al. (2014: 14)). The ability to remain flexible in facing new developments, to continuously adjust the company's strategic direction, and to develop innovative ways to create value, is also called of strategic agility by Weber & Tarba (2014). When companies are internationalizing and exporting to new and emerging markets, they are exposed to a fast-changing global arena, where the ability to execute such rapid movements in the business markets across its stages is relevant (Vedel, Geersbron & Ritter, 2012); this international marketing agility is a crucial capability for the process. Changing direction and doing it at paces that may differ according to the circumstances is often crucial. Hence, agile companies identify new ways to manage business transformation, develop dynamic capabilities, create imitation abilities, maintain a high level of flexibility of international marketing strategies and ambidexterity, and/or develop learning and knowledge transfer skills (Doz & Kosonen, 2010; Shenkar, 2010; Teece, 2018). For the purpose of this study, this would be considered international marketing agility (IMA).

In the era where aspects of global business, such as data access and institutional environments are rapidly changing, agility and the human resources building organizational ambidexterity are increasingly

important and partly intertwined (Hajli et al., 2019; Junni et al., 2013; 2015). As such, agility blurs organizational and activity boundaries and is not limited to the interests of large firms. Firms of all sizes and in different fields need to assess their dynamic capabilities to compete in international markets (Teece, 2018) and to be able to constantly develop and reconfigure their resources and capabilities, as these influence the decision of whether or not to innovate in their international marketing approach (Vendrell-Herrero et al., 2016a). Thus, the ownership and locus of the “speedboat” and resulting ambidexterity becomes theoretically interesting as it may originate from employees- or external partners- with multilevel backgrounds (cf. Junni et al., 2015).

Traditionally, decision making of firms’ strategies on their international marketing is perceived to be primarily a firm internal process (cf. Kotler, 1999), and one that happens controlled within the boundaries of the organization (Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Kotler, 1999; Merchant, 2001). Nonetheless, these boundaries have been punctuated (cf. Vedel et al. 2012). Due to technological advances and the enabling role of the internet, other participants have entered the marketing processes forming the views on the product and its features (Banyte, Gudonaviciene, & Grubys, 2011). Customer integration, open innovation and customer co-creation are just some examples of these novel systems shaping the decisions on product development, innovation, adaptation and branding that shift the focus towards the user-end, their roles and experiences (Andrus & Hall, 2003; Payne, Storbacka, Frow, & Knox, 2009).

Such bi-polar approach addressing international marketing just between the “manufacturer-exporter”- firm and the end-customer has its shortcomings. The influence and agility of external channel partners and sales networks “in the middle” remains without much attention, as a black box in scope and depth (Banyte et al., 2011; Paswan, Blankson, & Guzman, 2011). This is particularly risky for new market entry processes, and for smaller firms that operate without an armada of “speedboat”- resources. Additionally, the bi-polar approach in international marketing strategy fails to incorporate the problems

of complexity, speed and “noise” (cf. Kozinets, 1999), and most importantly, it does not elucidate where and by whom IMA is actually created. Turning the exporter viewpoint around and examining channel partner participation can assist in discovering previously invisible agile speedboats operating in the “in-between waters”. In this paper, we introduce a hybrid channel participant in the international marketing and market entry process: the “diaspora actor” that connects new and emerging contexts. Diasporas are dispersed social formations of diasporans who are migrants and their descendants who maintain transnational relationships to their country of origin and often span two or more country contexts, for example, as consumers and entrepreneurs (Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011).

There is prior evidence that especially transnational diaspora entrepreneurs whose business activities connect both the home and the host markets succeed in bridging and bonding the contexts, and may also perform differently as strategic channel partners (Drori, Honig, & Wright, 2009; Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Riddle, Hrivnak, & Nielsen, 2010; Elo et al., 2020). The structure of IMA creation has multiple levels: Interorganizational-cooperative (Gomes et al. 2011), firm (Sousa & Bradley, 2006), entrepreneur (Dimitratos, Buck, Fletcher, & Li, 2016) and employee (Junni et al., 2015). We argue that there is a form of *diasporic agility* representing a particularly agile interplay for new markets with ambidextrous roles among channel partners and multilevel actors (Junni et al., 2015). This diasporic IMA is especially interesting in demanding new and emerging settings and for smaller exporters. Therefore, the following questions are put forward:

- How can external channel members-actors, especially diaspora actors, (co-)create IMA and strategy for the exporter when their new products enter and penetrate new markets?
- What specific diasporic agility and capabilities transnational diaspora channel partners offer that foster export success?

Reflecting internationalization theory, we challenge the idea of international marketing agility being an *exporter firm-internal resource*, and we claim that IMA can be created outside the firm, externalized to trustworthy and committed channel partners who are more than just resellers (cf. the “in” and “out” in Welch and Luostarinen, 1993). Actually, a particularly interesting type of such partners is transnational diaspora entrepreneurs in the target markets who match the country set and bridge both markets with their marketing relations and capabilities (Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011). These entrepreneurial firms and the transnational entrepreneurs — often inseparable entities of small size- may possess unique firm specific advantages for market entry. Thus, building on Welch and Luostarinen’s idea on “inward internationalization process” by buyer (1993, 51), this paper shifts the focus from the exporter to the importing channel partnership. It follows a structuralist-relational approach in addressing the “making” of IMA and its actor-geographic locus (cf. Elo & Servais, 2018; Masurel, Nijkamp & Vindigni, 2004).

This study describes how new market entry processes unfold, who decides and organizes marketing strategy and adaptation, creating and “holding” the agility. These angles have remained with less attention, while other dynamics have been explored (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Silva, Bradley and Sousa, 2012; Sousa & Bradley, 2006, 2008; Sousa & Lengler, 2009; Tan & Sousa, 2013). To explore this process empirically, we present two firms entering two opposite new contexts. We examine the relationships of the manufacturer firm with their channel partner and the co-creation of the IMA. Previously, mainly the roles of transnational diasporas and -entrepreneurs are examined as markets and distributors in marketing ethnic products (cf. Elo et al., 2020), while the “fast lane” capabilities and marketing activities in complex settings have remained with less attention. The two cases of this study provide insights to the workings of diasporic channel partners as agile speedboats.

The study is organized as follows: next, we discuss theories addressing agility, international marketing strategy and -ability, firm size, and co-created market responses. Here, we present diaspora actors:

diasporas and transnational diaspora entrepreneurs as IMA co-creators. We link the agility of the activities by the diaspora entrepreneur in the market entry and penetration and the ambidextrous collaboration between channel partner and exporter. Then, the interpretative research approach and the two contextualized cases are presented. Finally, the findings and implications are discussed.

2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

We review the discussion on the actors involved in new market entry through a broader multi-stage inter-organizational and network view (Agarwal, Shankar, & Tiwari, 2007; Chang, Chiang, & Pai, 2012; Ghauri, Lutz, & Tesfom, 2003; Ibeh & Kasem, 2011; Vedel et al., 2012). By doing so, we address specifically diaspora networks and -entrepreneurs that co-create agile marketing using dynamic diaspora resources and ethno-cultural capabilities² in new market entry and product diffusion (Basu & Virick, 2015; Ojo, 2013; Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Silva & Elo, 2017).

There seems to be an inherent “ownership” or locus of IMA developed in a specific organizational framework (Agarwal et al., 2007; Poolton, Ismail, Reid, & Arokiam, 2006). According to several authors (see e.g. Birkinshaw, Zimmermann, & Raisch, 2016; Fourné et al., 2014; Teece, 2018), agility can come in the form of intangible firm specific advantages or dynamic capabilities. As such, we can say that IMA is often conceptualized as a firm-specific advantage, something that is internal to the firm, i.e. the exporter, and employed by the firm for its international marketing strategy and operations (Fourné, Jansen, & Mom, 2014).

However, the partner knowledge can be a critical asset. Due to their growing impact, global diaspora and diasporic capabilities combined with intermediary functions provide fruitful angles to address the

² Cf. multilayered individuals as in Junni et al., 2015

concept of IMA as an asset and resource in dispersion (cf. Rana & Elo, 2017). Furthermore, examining the relational landscape contributes to opening up the black box of the “in-between advantage” (Brinkerhoff, 2016) and underscores the central structural-relational³ role of the diverse channel partners - such as representatives, importers, distributors, and resellers – in foreign market entry and the product adaptation (Alam et al., 2010). Channel partner types and tasks differ and have various roles for agility (Banyte et al., 2011; Zentes, Swoboda, Morschett, & Schramm-Klein, 2012). Local channel partners in the target market are often the primary information sources on local preferences, traditions, legitimacy, and purchasing potential as well as on the ways of marketing the product in a locally legitimate manner (Castells, 1996; Reimann, Ehr Gott, Kaufmann, & Carter, 2012; Tadajewski, 2009). Diasporic channel partners form a significant element for the firm’s agility and dynamism in responding to new foreign markets as these markets are not foreign to them (Narver, Slater, & MacLachlan, 2004; Elo et al., 2020).

2.1. International marketing strategy and decision-making ability - The role of agility

The contemporary era, with its advanced technological opportunities, global interconnectedness and increasing mobility, has changed the fundamentals in many business operations and strategies, but also requirements for mindsets on international strategy (Kotabe & Mudambi, 2009; Meyer & Nguyen, 2005; Teece, 2010). International marketing is one of the aspects in business that has been influenced immensely by these changes; moreover, new challenges and competition have emerged that challenge also local and domestic firms while mixing and merging markets and businesses (Banyte et al., 2011; Hill & Mudambi, 2010). The meaning of an organization’s capability to perform efficiently in international marketing is crucial (Kaleka & Morgan, 2017). Thus, the way resources and inward-outward connections are optimally compiled and used, particularly when they are limited, is crucial for high performance (Welch & Luostarinen, 1993). In the past, the level of agency and independency of a

³ Often discussed as centralized or decentralized in terms of organizational capabilities

single firm-actor was higher, and therefore, the unit of decision-making being the firm and its departments (within organizational boundaries) was adequate to address international marketing decision making top-down (e.g. Duverge, 2015).

On the contrary, the current formations of decision making for international marketing strategy have become more complex, more multi-actor-driven and more exogenous, as there are various channel and marketing partners involved in the process, making it a more bottom-up management (Fraser, Dougill, Mabee, Reed, & McAlpine, 2006; Kim, Sting, & Loch, 2014; Paswan et al., 2011).

Agility in decision making is linked to a firm's size, and it is suggested that small companies are more agile while large multinationals (“ocean going tankers”) are less agile unless they have cultivated this meta-capability (Andersen, 2012; Fourné et al., 2014; see also Denner, 2015). The agility concept relates to three dynamic capabilities that are essential for operations across different markets; these are: sensing local opportunities, enacting global complementarities, and appropriating local value (Fourné et al., 2014). Sensing and enacting requires understanding and data (e.g. Hajli et al., 2019). An agile company is keen on opportunities and their development - i.e., is ambidextrous (Birkinshaw et al., 2016; Filiou & Windrum, 2008) - but also able to manage the respective business transformation (Degbey et al, 2021), produce abilities to imitate, develop the necessary dynamic capabilities, and uphold a flexible international marketing strategy while progressing in learning and knowledge transfer (Fourné et al., 2014; Shenkar, 2010; Hughes et al, 2020). In this sense, the concept of agility (“speedboat”) in international marketing refers to a constant ability to adapt and change the course of action in order to retain and sustain a competitive position in the market, while being ambidextrous suggests that the firm has the ability to cope with both sides of exploration and exploitation to its benefit (Fourné et al., 2014; Lubatkin, Simsek, Ling, & Veiga, 2006). This way, not only MNEs can be ambidextrous in their operations and strategies (Lubatkin et al., 2006). However, the more limited resources of smaller firms

may delimit their IMA and ways of facing high market volatility, market discontinuities, institutional changes and technological disruptions (Anderson & Ullah, 2014; Spillan & Parnell, 2006; Sui & Baum, 2014). These partly contradicting views are linked to the diverse origin and types of firms operating in international markets; where we can simultaneously find companies of all shapes and dimensions, with pros and cons associated to all.

Following the network view in internationalization (Johanson & Mattsson, 1988), networks and positions in them may enable and foster internationalization. Multi-stage marketing offers additional depth to network view; as Vedel et al. (2012) point out, knowledge of and influence on the customer's customer are increasingly central in explaining a firm's success. However, the development of "network" interaction as a basis for export marketing may take considerable time, thus diasporic fast access and insights are strategically relevant (Johanson & Mattsson, 2015a; Welch & Luostarinen, 1993; Elo et al., 2020). Beyond the capabilities and resources, the element of time/speed is highly important for IMA as it needs to be dynamic and constantly developing with the rate and complexity of the contextual changes (Ibeh & Kasem, 2011; Kothari, Kotabe, & Murphy, 2013; Oviatt & McDougall, 2005; Santos-Álvarez & García-Merino, 2010). In a rapidly changing and volatile context the market specific information and knowledge needs to be transferred or employed continuously in the marketing strategy and operations, it cannot afford to remain reactive, too hierarchical or to get diluted by the market noise. Time responsiveness and flexibility in responding to the customers' needs and feedback are crucially important but difficult for exporters without market presence.

In fact, the organizational challenges surrounding international marketing strategy and application have become highly complex as the demands on high agility in supplying the market, or driving the market (Ghauri, Wang, Elg, & Rosendo-Ríos, 2016), are no longer responded to in-house but often as a network of partners shaping the offering, roles and responses (Bustinza, Parry, & Vendrell-Herrero, 2013; Lee et al., 2010; Parry et al., 2012). Thus, there are exogenous dynamics and multiple decision-making parties

and stakeholders that need to be accounted for. This creates complexity; a blurring of agency, roles/tasks, organizational boundaries and even time processes that require ambidextrous ways of working interorganizationally (O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2013). This way, we can say ambidexterity supports firms' competitiveness on the basis of their capability of being simultaneously efficient in handling day-to-day business (alignment) as well as effective in managing changing environments (adaptability) (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996). As such, competitive international firms' decision-making process display IMA.

2.2. Co-creating marketing agility for international marketing - Transnational diaspora entrepreneurs as channel partners

In particular, smaller and less internationally experienced firms struggle with their abilities to address international markets and their demands (Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009a; Turunen & Nummela, 2016). One reason is their limited international marketing experience and lack of market specific knowledge, as well as the perceived uncertainty and risk they face in markets new to them (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009a). One way of approaching international marketing strategy (e.g. market entry mode, adaptation and standardization dilemmas) for new foreign markets is to join forces with ethnic and transnational diaspora entrepreneurs and create external speedboats with them. These assist in bridging the two areas and in overcoming problems and liabilities as local channel partners and intermediaries (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Riddle et al., 2010; Elo et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2020). Diaspora entrepreneurs have been central in fostering economic development and developing growth strategies in demanding contexts (Minto-Coy, 2016, 2019) Engaging internationally seasoned entrepreneurial partners with migrant-diasporic resources provides a strategic shortcut to needed agility with low costs while sharing the entrepreneurial risk as diasporans have per se agile

capabilities (Canagarajah & Silberstein, 2012; Minto-Coy, 2019). Such collaborations may also merge or develop into formal alliances to increase their competitive edge (cf. Gomes et al. 2011).

Transnational diaspora entrepreneurs who act in the target country (i.e. their country of residence) perceive dual country business contexts and hence sense respective opportunities and potential differently employing *immigrant effect*, a form of dynamic capability (Enderwick, Tung, & Chung, 2011). They have first-hand experiential knowledge from both contexts and deep understanding that goes way beyond the expatriate perception and also the second-hand knowledge (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Silva, Pacheco, Meneses, & Brito, 2012). More importantly, diaspora entrepreneurs have particular motivations and entrepreneurial aspirations for transnational business with advanced commitment to succeed (Minto-Coy, 2016, 2019, Elo & Minto-Coy, 2018). Integrating them into the international marketing strategy as marketing and channel partners is a viable market entry strategy from the exporter side and a transnational business model for the entrepreneurial side (Dimitratos, Buck, Fletcher, & Li, 2016; Drori, Honig, & Ginsberg, 2010; Drori et al., 2009). Indeed, transnational diasporans bridge markets and build international business, particularly in contexts considered highly complicated, isolated or in developing countries, and develop outward marketing competences (cf. Brinkerhoff, 2009; Elo & Riddle, 2016; Vendrell-Herrero et al., 2017).

Transnational diasporans and migrants often form a piggybacking-entry approach for firms entering new markets, as they carry the products with them and use their networks in the host context, similarly as in network internationalization (Elo, 2016; Johanson & Mattsson, 2015; Terpstra & Yu, 1990). This organizational and hybrid internationalization strategy (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003) enables an agile system where the transnational diasporans may select, filter and adapt the products and the strategies to the market needs while the principal exporter firm may benefit from exporting its standard products and limited resource investment, remaining passive or reactive in its internationalization. One strategy is

market-driving (Ghauri et al., 2016), but operates as a kind of Trojan horse regarding the target market when the beginning of the entry takes place through the dimension of “ethnic product” and ethnic markets (Silva & Elo, 2017). When ethnic products or products for specific narrow markets are considered, this spreading to new domains is referred to as crossover (Grier, Brumbaugh, & Thornton, 2006a). While preparing for crossover (Elo et al., 2020), transnational diaspora and migrant entrepreneurs function as developers and deplorers of IMA and take over the hurdles of entry on behalf of the exporting firm (Alam et al., 2010; Riddle et al., 2010). These entrepreneurs are well equipped to adapt their local marketing to appeal to target segments in the “foreign” markets representing their adopted home market (i.e. country of residence). They have gained expertise in local culture, language, regulations and institutions, target customer segments and their preferences (Kumar & Petersen, 2005; Riddle et al., 2010), which allows the exporter and the channel partner to function ambidextrously and adapt only where it is truly necessary. Moreover, transnational diaspora entrepreneurs are embedded in dual contexts sharing similar micro socio-psychological mechanisms that foster commitment in customer relations and inter-organizational agility in learning how to cope with the market (cf. Carmeli et al. 2017). Diaspora entrepreneurs have successfully developed their learning in the particular context, hence, their firms have often even higher capabilities in addressing local challenges and ways of doing business than many multinational enterprises (Elo, 2017; Teece, 2018). This makes them theoretically interesting consulting and market-linking partners. However, their capabilities are yet underexplored in research as they are often approached from the disadvantaged immigrant lens (Enderwick, Tung & Chung, 2011).

Many SME firms starting exports, entering and penetrating new markets are not doing new foreign markets alone (Silva & Elo, 2017). In this process, we suggest that the entry mode through transnational diaspora entrepreneurs and their operations is theoretically interesting in bringing new products and services into the market they “possess”, with diasporic agility and specific capabilities. The interplay

between diaspora and marketing provides both a multilayered view on IMA and novel insights for IMA that involves ethnic and socio-cultural features and capabilities (Teece, 2018).

2.3. Smaller firms navigating international market challenges

International marketing strategy is a very central concern particularly for smaller and more resource-limited firms (Jain, 1989; Szymanski et al., 1993; Tan and Sousa, 2013; Knight, 2000). International marketing and market entry processes are costly and complex, suffering from various liabilities and impediments (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Knight, 2000; Rana & Elo, 2017; Silva & Elo, 2017). There is a significant body of literature on large multinational companies and their ways of tackling these challenges, but also literature debating the approaches of smaller firms marketing across borders and across networks, whether in products or services (Andrus & Hall, 2003; Fourné et al., 2014; Parry et al., 2012; Vasilchenko & Morrish, 2011). In the era of globalization, firms that have previously followed a more domestic or neighboring country focus in their foreign marketing have been pushed to compete on a different level (Knight, 2000). This means that the pressures for competitiveness and internationalization also push smaller actors to be agile in addressing their market needs, whether they operate outward or inward (Welch & Luostarinen, 1993). Thus, becoming the agile speedboat in international waters is challenging for many smaller firms.

In practice, the contemporary demands on market knowledge and customer care are often rapidly changing and overwhelming to the marketers, regardless of their size. From demographic changes to technology, the pace of change and the emerging micro-segments of particular customers world-wide are making it difficult to stay attuned to market information and respond to it (Narver et al., 2004). In addition, especially smaller firms are not aware of the preferences they should satisfy, options of the “how to” market or the success-factors in being competitive over others. Thus, many rely on their entrepreneurial networks (Vasilchenko & Morrish, 2011). Entrepreneurial firms illustrate that

entrepreneurial marketing differs from classic marketing and builds more on the newness of the product and the idea (Freiling & Kollmann, 2008).

A situation where there is no prior market generates a vast challenge for marketing and developing the right business response (Coviello & Joseph, 2012; Teece, 2010), especially for smaller exporters. Introducing a proprietary value proposition satisfying the latent needs of customers, while applying only minimal adaptation to local preferences, can offer a market driving option for strategy, instead of being driven by the markets (Ghauri et al., 2016; Narver et al., 2004; Slater, Mohr & Sengupta, 2010). This requires deep understanding of the local customers. The dynamics between market orientation and market driving firms are dissimilar. A transnational diaspora entrepreneur may sense and employ those latent local needs while this is highly complex and noisy to capture by the exporter (Kozinets, 1999). The location of entrepreneurial agency and action may be transnational or co-created. In the context of international joint ventures, such marketing and strategy issues have embodied complicated agency structures in decision making (Rana & Elo, 2017). Previous findings point out that market driving firms possess particular capabilities that allow them to reconcile conflicting demands between the local markets and the global strategy of the firm (Ghauri et al., 2016).

Developed and more mature markets have higher stability for planning, while developing and emerging markets produce more uncertainty and face various turbulences (Cantwell, Dunning, & Lundan, 2010; Dicken, 1992). So, the dynamism of the context for international marketing differs⁴. There are often unforeseen changes and discontinuations or challenges that require strong resource networks to assist the firm to cope with their internationalization and international marketing operations (Birkinshaw, Zimmermann, & Raisch, 2016). Transnational diaspora entrepreneurs and their firms have country-specific knowledge about marketing operations (“how to”) and specific relational linkages between

⁴ The concept of VUCA regarding the target market reflects these differences, see more in Bennett, N., & Lemoine, J. (2014). What VUCA really means for you. *Harvard Business Review*, 92(1/2).

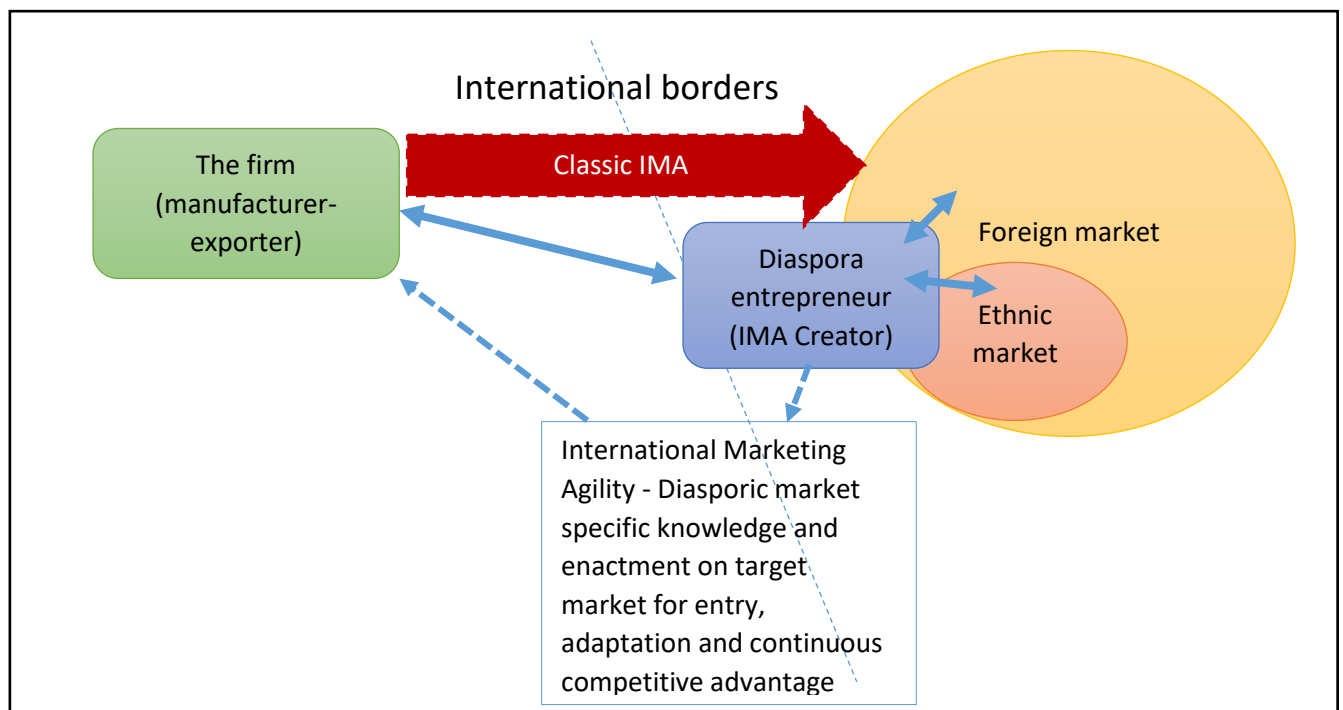
countries and market constellations that are superior to others or form special dynamic assets (Buckley, Forsans, & Munjal, 2012). Hence, new market entry and international marketing strategy needs to be perceived more holistically (Lim et al., 2006). Firms need dynamic, focus-shifting and responsive responses to act like a speedboat (Grier, Brumbaugh, & Thornton, 2006b; Narver et al., 2004). The agility builds on the firm-specific resources and advantages both for the exporter and the channel partner, but it needs to respond to the changing business environment and target market - and their heterogeneity in a collaborative manner to avoid marketing conflicts (Poulis & Poulis, 2013).

The business actor matters. International marketing strategies are linked to the mindsets of the respective managers (Levy, Beechler, Taylor, & Boyacigiller, 2007; Nummela, Saarenketo, & Puumalainen, 2009; Sousa & Bradley, 2006; Sousa & Lengler, 2009), just like innovation strategies that can be very open, multi-actor shaped processes, or simply imitative but effective strategies within the firm (Lee et al., 2010; Shenkar, 2010; Teece, 2010). Previous studies have pointed out that the managers' psychic distance influences the firms' international marketing strategies (Sousa & Bradley, 2006), which further underlines the significance of the people who are involved in knowing, shaping, deciding and executing the firm's strategy for international marketing (Sousa & Lengler, 2009; González-Loureiro & Vlastic, 2016). Thus, we claim that the nature of actors involved is crucial for the outcome. The managers have the agency to possess the agility and respective strategy building making the individual manager and employee level important (Cavusgil & Evirgen, 1997; Coviello & Joseph, 2012; Riddle et al., 2010).

Understanding existent real-life IMA, especially diasporic agility, requires insights to the activities and responses of both exporters and diaspora entrepreneurs and the settings. That is why we theorize two opposite contexts and cases of IMA. Usually, agility is considered as an (intra) organizational capability. However, we perceive diasporic agility with capabilities that originate in transnational diaspora entrepreneurship, in the cultural and social embeddedness of these diaspora actors, this links to the

enactment of the immigrant effect. The marriage of agility refers to a transnational inter-organizational collaboration where information, knowledge, and practices are exchanged to explore and exploit opportunities. Here, the strategic marketing is nearly outsourced to the diasporic channel partner that possesses the agile capabilities needed. Geographically, the agility and ambidexterity operate transnationally as the setting spans the home country of the exporter being the country of origin of the transnational diaspora, while the exporter’s foreign target market represents the country or residence, the new home country of the transnational diaspora. Thus, diasporic agility has a different origin and “locus” in relation to the usual IMA (see in Figure 1). Therefore, we assume that diasporic agility moderates the market entry and the usage of other organizational capabilities of the firm to support the entry, i.e. it is different from the exporter agility applied on foreign markets by its elements, contents and links to the market.

Figure 1. Marketing context, actors and locus of international marketing agility



3. RESEARCH APPROACH

A case study method based on qualitative research was chosen for this theme because it is a relatively unknown and complex phenomenon that takes place in an inter-organizational setting across different countries and cultural contexts (Alasuutari, 1995; Caprar, 2011; Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005; Stake, 1995; Dana & Dana, 2005). The phenomenon that we are theoretically interested in represents a marketing process with its agility actors, therefore, we build on Stake's (1995, p.239) idea that each case should "tell its own story". Following the view of Bartlett and Vavrus (2016, 2017) that a processual case study approach can be employed for understanding and comparing phenomena, we examine, over time, two very different contexts and processes, i.e. polar cases (Mills et al., 2010), reflecting mainstream entry modi and marketing.

The cases have unusual behaviour, unique resource constellations and extreme conditions of entry, making them fruitful for theorizing and broadening the theory lens and interpretations (cf. Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Stake, 1995, see also (Alasuutari, 1996; Eisenhardt, 1989; Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2011; Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, & Welch, 2010). By contrasting the two cases horizontally (processes), we aimed at tracing and exploring elements of IMA, reflecting on the context (country-economy), and transversally comparing the processes to the extant views (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). By doing this we theorize building on the process comparison and design the study. Case study is considered suitable for theorizing a process (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016; Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2011), understanding embedded actors within the case idea (Halinen, Törnroos, & Elo, 2013; Yin, 2013), and developing propositions for further investigation based on its particularities and interpretations (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016; Jones, Ram, Edwards, Kiselincev, & Muchenje, 2014). According to Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) theory building from cases and related empirical evidence builds usually on one or more cases that enable the creation of theoretical constructs, propositions, and mid-range theory.

Two in-depth cases are purposefully selected from a data set of a larger project on diaspora business based on their theoretical relevance: a) matching the outward internationalization- market entry phase and b) the respective partnership with a diasporic channel partner that enabled the expansion to take place and launched the product onto the market. The cases are selected for their potential contribution to theory as they are both long-term channel partner for new products. The process orientation takes a lens addressing people, situations, events and the processes connecting these elements, and explains how these form influencing mechanisms (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016). Further, the two cases are also selected being contextually suitable cases for comparison and validation of the type of IMA, as they have two “polar” i.e. very opposite markets (e.g. economic development, ideological settings, consumerism) - one with a focus in the US and the other with a focus in the former USSR, e.g. Russia and other “new independent states”. These markets offer certain extreme conditions regarding the business environment in the host country setting, the USA being a highly competitive, developed and more mature market with high purchasing power, the former USSR area being a kaleidoscope of countries with lower level of economic development, under economic turmoil and transition, with inexistent institutions of private entrepreneurship and low purchasing power. Therefore, both conditions are particularly hard for the entry of new products but differently, as a result each case serves as a distinct process that stands on its own merits as an analytic unit but offer the same entry-marketing phenomenon for comparison (cf. Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Thus, it is expected that if the same effect is found in both contexts, it is likely to be more universal.

3.1. Design and data collection

The study is designed as follows: first, to explore more inductively the market entry and penetration with an international marketing lens, and second, to then reflect and interpret the two empirical cases and their findings on the theoretical concepts explaining their IMA and strategy. There is an interchanging data-

and theory-driven reflection, no a priori hypotheses or framework to test. There is a co-creation and an interplay between international marketing strategy and the business actors shaping the strategy (i.e. the participants of exploring, exploiting and decision-making). The main data collection took place 2013-2016, but the retrospective data goes back over 50 years in one case and over 40 years in the other case to capture the situations and motivations at the time the diaspora entrepreneurs began to have entrepreneurial aspirations and develop their diasporic agility.

As the data set consists of diverse types of data we systematically organize and work our way through the data, see the figure 2. We have two main layers in the research (understanding-interpreting and theorizing) that are linked through a progressive focus (cf. Piekkari et al., 2010; Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012). Hence, we continued to collect data and triangulated it over the process as loops. The study started from the grassroot level generating an understanding of the business development and activities, working later towards more abstract and theoretical layers of understanding.

The interpretative approach started with the use of semi-structured and unstructured interviews, as it was central to capture and identify the perceptions and viewpoints that the channel partners assigned to their role and activity (Johnstone, 2007; Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005; Rich, Health, & Hons, 2013). Research team members have carried out over 10 months ethnographic research in both settings. The interview material was triangulated with ethnographic research on the communities and businesses, employing classic observations and participant research (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016; Dana & Dana, 2008).

The approach matches the context of entrepreneurship and firms, since here too, the lived experience may offer valuable understanding of the thoughts, mind-sets, commitments, perceived roles, activities and cooperation (Johnstone, 2007). The data collection followed ethnographic qualitative tradition. In this process, a team of four researchers have been involved in collecting the longitudinal material (see Table 1.) Longitudinal research addressing how ambidexterity and agility evolve over these decades is

valuable (Pereira et al., 2018). It is important to notice that locally embedded researchers have carried out interviews and material collection that require specific linguistic and contextual sensitivity and “belongingness” in the local societal setting, which increases the trustworthiness and quality of the data interpretation and access to nuances that remain closed for outsiders (Salmi, 2010).

Table 1. Data collection

Data	Ethnographic observations	Photographic	Semi-structured interviews	Discussions and follow up questions	Participation in community activities	Firm-based material, reports, announcements, communication and advertising	On-line material including company related reports, newspaper articles and other	Social media, LinkedIn, Facebook, other
Location of data collection	USA, Finland, Uzbekistan, Israel	USA, Finland, Uzbekistan, Israel	USA, Finland, Uzbekistan, Israel	USA, Finland, Uzbekistan, Israel	USA, Finland, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Israel	USA, Finland, Uzbekistan, Israel, Russia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan	USA, Finland, Uzbekistan, Israel, Russia	Globally

Number/amount of data	Four sets of field notes, one set per each research, email communication of observations	Approximately 20 photos and videos related to the	40 overall interviews, 4 firms specific individuals interviewed from the diaspora entrepreneur and family	About 15 during the research period	In total 133 months presence in the target markets by researchers, both permanent and non-permanent participation	Numerous different items, in total approximately of 81 MB	Numerous items, regular such as annual reports and irregular such as newspaper articles (approx. 40 items)	N.A. (triangulation source, not collected physically)
Period of data collection	2012-2018	2012-2018	2012-2016	2012-2018	On-going period: incl. before and after the research project (2012/18)	2012-2018	2012-2018	2013-2018

3.2. Analysing and presenting the data

The cases are approached through a retrospective logic, interpreted in the given context and its dynamics, that underlines their specific nature regarding international marketing (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004, 2011; Piekkari et al., 2010). The data collection has built on qualitative sources and methods, such as in-depth personal interviews (semi-structured and unstructured), company materials, internet sites, documents, marketing material and prospectus, and on ethnographic and netnographic (Jayanti, 2010)

data based on visits, observations, photos, events and communication within the context (Dana & Dana, 2008; Johnstone, 2007; Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2011). An on-going ethno- and netnographic participant research has guided the analysis and management of the tangible data. The approach used involves on-going interpretation and that may draw from a range of theoretical perspectives that are developed to explain the phenomenon examined (Reid et al., 2005). The going between the empirical material and extant research literature allows for interpretation that is first respondent-driven and second, on the theory-interpretation level, researcher-driven (Halinen et al., 2013). Cultural and contextual setting in data analysis is taken into consideration for better contextualization (Zahra et al., 2014). The arrows in Figure 2 illustrate the analysis loops contributing to understanding the agile and ambidextrous ways of entering new markets. The data from the actors (multiple perspectives, see supporting data bubbles in Figure 2) was organized to follow leads that indicated saturation of views on processes or confirmed triangulation across sources (Heath, 2015).

Figure 2. Research design reflecting the two cases



Both cases are parts of a larger research project (Diaspora Networks in International Business). The data has been collected by an international-local team on the site, in four countries representing the home and host countries. Their linguistic-contextual competences of the native has reduced the danger of misinterpretations and increased the trustworthiness of the process, the quality of the data, and later its analysis (Salmi, 2010). Once an understanding of the actors' involvement in the marketing and entry process was developed, a problematizing of the current research and its explanations was started (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2017; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2014). This analysis and organisation of the tangible material level concentrated on the contexts, roles, and activities by reading, assessing, coding and categorizing the material from various sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The analysis and reporting were organized into a retrospective chronological, processual framing by actor (Halinen et al., 2013; Miller, Cardinal, & Glick, 1997). This is applicable as the purpose is to identify the participants and understand their role and activities over time, from their perspective and compare the development across the two cases (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2016, 2017). The analysis interprets the enfolding

and events of the process over the research cycle (cf. Cepeda & Martin, 2005). The analysis followed a double coding process in which marketing process and content-dimension was coded first and then the time-event location of the activity was clustered into phases in the overall process (Lim et al., 2006; Saldana, 2009). This was organized manually with two researchers and NVivo was used to store and organize the data. The rich and in-depth material from these multiple sources and perspectives (e.g. firm, management, customer, community) are presented as a reconstructed processual narrative (Silverman, 2006).

4. TWO CASES OF ENTERING A NEW MARKET WITH DIASPORIC IMA

The marketing entry and penetration process and the respective strategy formation of the cases in the context of USSR and the USA constitute the logic. Both cases represent a situation where the exporter has not exported to the target market before (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009b) and the market needs to be created, i.e. “driven” by the entrant and its international marketing (the latent customer needs) (Ghauri et al., 2016; Narver et al., 2004). Thus, there is no prior system, channel network or other structure to be exploited. This means that the first mover needs to start from the scratch and fast enough to gain markets. Additionally, there is tremendous complexity and noise in how to address such markets rapidly where no real points of reference exist and no user community can be leveraged (cf. Kozinets, 1999).

Furthermore, in these cases both new products are foreign and new, i.e. have not been sold in the target market earlier (Eng & Ozdemir, 2014; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009a; Mezas, 2002). Cosmetics and sauna products share a kind of triviality in the common life of local consumers; they are new, but without a radical innovation element (Lim et al., 2006). These are consumer products that can be considered as improving quality of life, but not essential for daily life or survival. Still, they need notable marketing to

educate the customers of the use⁵. The product from Finland to the American market belongs to wellness, to the sauna-concept, and the product from Israel to the post-Soviet Russian market belongs to cosmetics, on a more premium level. Both markets represent the hurdle of “novelty” as similar products had not been available previously. These processes serve well as an example of how diaspora engagement generates special agility for international marketing while employing and finetuning a hybrid standardization-adaptation strategy on sales and marketing, co-created by the right partners. They also explicate how such diaspora partnership may overcome the liabilities of newness, outsidership, and foreignness, and facilitate market entry process (Eng & Ozdemir, 2014; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009a; Mezias, 2002).

4.1. Case 1: Finnish company entering American markets

4.1.1. Pre-entry phase

The North American market has been and still is a difficult market to enter for foreign companies (Elo & Hieta, 2017; Koivu, Laine, Iivonen, & Gonzales, 2003). The institutions, such as the Food and Drugs Administration (FDA), as well as the legal system with class action lawsuits and interpretations of manufacturer-reseller responsibilities form thresholds for many firms in their efforts to enter the US market. Consequently, international marketing and exports to the US and NAFTA are often carried out using a network of local partners, importers, agents and other intermediaries. These Finnish origin partners serve as the entry bridge to the market, opening the doors in the US market. Finnish diaspora entrepreneurs in the US perceive an entrepreneurial business opportunity in the import and distribution of products from their country of origin and export of US products to Finland.

The exporter, a Finnish manufacturer-firm of sauna heaters was established after the World War II in Finland as an entrepreneur-driven small family business. It grew in the post-war era and started its

⁵ During the time of entry in this study, there was no internet

internationalization process with exports in the mid 1980's and 1990's but did not have presence in the US. In 1995 Finland joined the EU which eased the business in the intra-EU market notably. The US market for sauna products was practically non-existent till the late 1980's as there was no mainstream market to perceive. This meant that there was no a priori market standard or preference that would have offered clarity or required adaptation for US customers. The only market consisted mainly of the Nordic and Russian diaspora in the US. Despite the lack of market - or due to it -, several regulations and institutions control systems on consumer safety issues and health claims were making the business in the US highly complex if not impossible. This complexity was further increased by the federal system lacking unified responses on issues such as heat produced or responsibilities in case of fire. The situation created impermeable layers of complexity for small foreign manufacturers.

On the US-side, another Finnish entrepreneur who had migrated to the US and had settled down there, had also started an entrepreneurial venture in the sauna business importing Finnish sauna heater products and customizing sauna cabins and solutions to the American market. He started in the early 1960's with sauna cabin manufacturing and turn-key projects to serve the Finnish, Russian and Nordic diaspora markets and had learned how that business could work. He faced numerous problems in introducing this new type of product to the US, even to customers who were accustomed to it as the preferences and regulations did not necessarily meet. However, serving diaspora pull was a good strategy to start with.

The diaspora entrepreneur had to improvise and develop agile solutions while building his business, this included craftsmanship and creativity. The firm personnel was developed purposefully with diasporic origins that was able to act ambidextrously and span the sauna cultures. He acted proactively exploring market opportunities from the diaspora and beyond and developing those into further sales towards new user groups. He kept learning and constructed his understanding of the potential despite the noise of missing or fragmented market information by developing opportunities in an agile manner with his team,

e.g. addressing cultural preferences and user traditions. He had the role of pioneer, who had to co-shape the business framework regarding the insurance systems, product certifications, customs, and user instructions. His business had to make the concept work in the market through proactive education, information and experiencing, as sauna consists of a complicated set of elements and respective services that might need to be felt. The diaspora entrepreneur and the Finnish manufacturer-exporter were unconnected till the 1980's.

4.1.2. Entering the new market

The US-based diaspora entrepreneur was running a successful business with imports from another manufacturer, but that manufacturer was sold, and he needed a new supplier. In mid-1980's, he found this other manufacturing company while searching for new suppliers in Finland during one of his business travels and they started cooperating. Both sides sensed and shared the US-based window of opportunity (growing demand) and time (virgin market) and could agree on the international marketing strategy building on the diaspora entrepreneurs experience. The US market entry of these products started immediately without adaptation through the extant business and sales team of the diaspora entrepreneur. With his prior entrepreneurial experience and agile way of responding to challenges he could deliver solutions to both the complexity and noise that the exporter had faced earlier. Each new product needs permits and here his relationships with local senators and the Hornet countertrade deal became helpful. His local knowledge and relational networks, including layers and experts, and his complementary services and product lines boosted the entry. Thus, this manufacturer-exporter was able to avoid all entry difficulties as it entered a ready-made distribution and sales system created by the diaspora entrepreneur. This fast lane-system of entry and the diaspora pull-effect were highly beneficial to both partners. The exporter could focus on shipping the heaters as a supplier and the channel partner took care of all the rest. The collaboration during entry was fostered by the shared ethnic and entrepreneurial culture,

available business-specific capabilities, and immigrant effect on the sauna business (Chung, Rose, & Huang, 2012; Discua Cruz, Hamilton, & Jack, 2012; Rana & Elo, 2017). The diaspora entrepreneur's particular competences to tackle challenges quickly and efficiently, his entrepreneurial motivations to "live the sauna life", and entrepreneurial marketing agility responding to false claims (e.g. on cancer) and market needs in the right way provided market driving energy and needed agility to operate in the US market. The allocation of tasks allowed both actors to focus on what they did best and develop the business ambidextrously as they shared information on the market and technology.

The diaspora entrepreneur culturally refers to one market-driving feature in his operations: "*I can sell the product because I believe in the product*" (Interview owner-manager, 2014). He has an extraordinary commitment to the sauna business, beyond commercial interest. He takes a particular pride in distributing the "real thing" (contrary to cheap Chinese infra-red heaters) and underlines the importance of understanding these values, as he notes "*We import the true Finnish Sauna heaters and then make all of our precut and prefabricated Sauna rooms in Portland, Oregon*". This is a challenge due to low cost imports that act as followers strategically and push the market. The close customization building a solution around the original heaters is in line with the conceptual concerns that need particular agility in preserving and valuing the originality, as the US based Sauna Society points out : "*Not only sauna experiences vary, but (and we find this disturbing) often saunas are not built to given standards, thus prohibiting your opportunity to enjoy sauna to the fullest. Before you buy, do the research to find out what type of sauna would be best suited for you. Also, if you are having a sauna specially built for you, make sure a knowledgeable party draws the plans and the sauna is built accordingly - no exceptions*"⁶.

With the marketing focusing of the original type of sauna and sauna experience both the exporter and the diaspora entrepreneur's firm grew rapidly with the standard heater product. The diaspora entrepreneur-

⁶ <http://www.saunasociety.org/sauna-experience/> retrieved 26.6.2019.

partner could match the entry with the sauna cabin offerings that were locally adapted, on the site. He was able to diffuse the concept spanning diverse diaspora markets and to cross over to mainstream markets, such as fitness studios and spas. His team provided a unique set of capabilities and diasporic agility for shaping the marketing operations on the US side, even by emphasizing the Finnish accent for trusted originality, with the exporter staying in the supplier role branding the heaters.

4.1.3. Further marketing penetration and market-driving partnerships

The brand gained market share through the diasporic development of the US market, and its exports kept increasing to the US. The manufacturing company had acted ambidextrously by letting the local partner act independently and entrepreneurially on the marketing mix, basically outsourcing the business marketing. The partner visited the manufacture in Finland regularly. The exporter could focus in its own core operations and its competitiveness due to the IMA and engagement of the diaspora entrepreneur. The local partner became the market leader in the US among other nascent importers of sauna products. Many of the related products were not original saunas (“wet saunas”), which further emphasises the need for fast action in marketing operations safeguarding and communicating the brand value, “the real thing”. The US market grew geographically from the North-West to other states, in terms of new products and services, and by new user categories that were developed by the diaspora entrepreneur and his firm. The market needs were covered with a broad range of solutions i.e. services and processes were adapted to local needs. They had created test saunas to let mainstream customers understand the differences experientially as such decision making without prior experience is difficult and large customer such as the US army require very agile and flexible service. Furthermore, they produced rapid responses to malpractices by competition, new customer demands, regulative changes and new permits.

By outsourcing marketing, distribution, sales and service to the diaspora entrepreneur, the manufacturer could invest in advancing its global products, innovation, technology and manufacturing processes i.e.

standardizing products and their development through innovation and sustainable manufacturing. With this strategy the exporter had become the world's leading manufacturer by the 2000. Moreover, through distributors and partners it had gained exports worldwide, covering several continents and markets (e.g. Europe, USA, Russia, Far East, etc.). By using such strategic partnerships, the manufacturer-exporter was able to build on the agility of the partners in keeping up with the markets and the local level needs while working on several geographic fronts at the same time. The CEO commented: "The leap in the efficiency in the entire supply chain in a rather traditional manufacturing industry is a strong indication of excellent know-how and agility" (Annual Report 2020). Similar type of cooperative marketing and co-created agility with diasporas was employed also in other markets. Naturally, the availability of diasporas is a prerequisite for diasporic IMA. For example, Germany with a large Finnish diaspora could also contribute to their market development. In fact, the family-owned manufacturing firm had kept the strategy going over the years, in the US for over several decades. The exporter continues to cooperate tightly with the diaspora entrepreneur using the corporate brand in the US-partnership and leaving the strategic lead of marketing operations to the diasporic channel partner who can see through the noise and complexity and can act as "their" speedboat. The activities of the partner cover all operations after the shipment of the heaters, including the sensing of market signals that the US partner then translates to the exporter. This is important for their decision making on technologies, solutions and ways of doing business.

The lengthy diaspora entrepreneur partnership does not support classic internationalization theories, it is contrary to the usual establishment of own sales and marketing subsidiaries that take over the business of the previous partner. The management explained that "*We develop our products to suit our customers and we don't compromise on quality. We offer everything that you need for the authentic sauna experience, from full sales support and marketing right up to the products themselves*" (Interview 2015).

However, on the local level the diaspora partner is their face to the market. The exporter suggests that their company addresses “*the role of promoter of sauna culture seriously and places great emphasis on customer service and marketing*” (Interview 2012), which can be highlighted as being identical to the corporate marketing strategy of the US channel partner.

These agile marketing operations and corrective-guiding knowledge sharing continue to work, e.g. on which technology should be adopted, which models will sell, etc. The manufacturer considered listing in the Finnish stock exchange as a viable solution for the reasons of generation change and succession-related taxes, but also due to strong and continuous international growth making it a realistic option. The CEO estimated that in few years the firm would develop into a notable stock exchange company (Yle news, 2018). The new CEO underlined the continuous agility in screening new markets, i.e. “*which markets would allow faster growth*” (Kauppalehti, 2018), and this growth had been strongly embedded in the concept’s diffusion by Finnish diaspora abroad. In 2018, the company became listed as planned and in 2021 its share value is already tenfold. After entering the stock exchange, the exporter changed its strategy and created its own direct online business in the US that is now one of its main markets with “*excellent performance*” and in 2021 it is establishing its first production plant in the US (Annual report, 2020).

4.2. Case 2: Israeli company entering former USSR markets

4.2.1. Pre-entry phase

An entrepreneur established a cosmetics company in Israel following a new trend in cosmetics in the late 1980’s. The Israeli cosmetics manufacturer was soon operating internationally and producing high quality and rather premium-priced cosmetics for diverse purposes and markets. Its strategy included exports. In the early 1990’s, globalization had not yet opened the doors for smaller manufacturers to compete openly and directly; thus, finding suitable foreign markets was complicated (Ghauri et al., 2003;

Leonidou, 2004). Furthermore, trade with the Soviet Union (until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991) was based on bilateral trade agreements, and the products that were exchanged were centrally planned in advance. Therefore, the situation regarding Soviet markets was almost impossible considering the exporter's view⁷ (Adler-Karlsson, 1966; Adler, 1993). Hygiene, safety and consumer regulations in the Soviet Union, before and after the collapse, posed considerable challenges for international business as permits were difficult to obtain. In addition, diaspora and other pull strategies like those described in the former sauna case were impossible due to the lack of private entrepreneurship (Elo, 2016a). Typically, all markets had trade-, customs- and various other rules and regulations that were often impeding formal market entry and distressing international marketing operations by adding local requirements or process delays, especially in the era before 1991. As a result, an adaptation strategy was often the only realistic option in their international marketing. Adaptation started from the way the market entry and the regulation were approached and it led to amending product details and obtaining hygiene certificates.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a threshold for global change on multiple levels (Aron, 2011). During this era of transformation, international trade and business faced fundamental, very rapid and connected changes, and caused implications to global markets (Dicken, 1992; Spoor, 1993). The rupture from a planned economy to a set of high uncertainty transition economies massively influenced numerous product markets, firms and entrepreneurs (Elo, 2016a; Spoor, 1993). Suddenly, the entrepreneurship-inhibiting plan was no longer valid, but on the other hand, there was no clarity about the future, not even regarding state institutions (Aron, 2011; North, 1991). A huge challenge of transition started in the former USSR countries and businesses were puzzled about how to cope with the situation.

⁷ Soviet era bilateral trade did not allow individual SMEs to target Soviet markets as trade agreements were done on the nation state level, not on private enterprise level.

This change was also an opportunity for many firms to enter the new, previously closed markets, as was the case for the Israeli cosmetics manufacturer. The former USSR markets were unexploited and underdeveloped. The USSR market did not have supply of cosmetics and skin care products like Western economic systems had. The diaspora entrepreneur stated that *“during the Soviet era there was almost no good cosmetics available in the area, but after the collapse of the USSR, cosmetics totally disappeared, therefore, it was exactly the right moment for this business to start in this area”* (Interview 2013).

4.2.2. Entering the new market

The Israeli manufacturer aimed to expand in the new post-Soviet markets as Russia and its neighbouring countries were seen as an Eldorado for opportunities, especially for various consumer products that were not previously available. This manufacturer employed people of diverse origin, also from USSR. Thus, it possessed an advanced level of ambidexterity in coping with both sides of this change, thanks to the employees from these areas. One of the managers had migrated to Israel from Central Asia but had family in Russia and other former USSR countries. The manager’s sister had migrated to Russia and was thinking of starting some kind of business with cosmetics or beauty products as she had noticed that the market was in short supply, practically empty: there was no supply of almost any cosmetics. She understood the latent demand and the transitional character of the market and sensed the opportunity: *“Moreover, since 1991 in Russia and Central Asia, finally the private entrepreneurship started to emerge - legally- and thus one can say that I planned it all on the right time”* (Interview 2013). She considered cosmetics to be an essential aspect of female life and an important product category with vast latent potential. She believed that the era was right for a change towards high quality Western products. *“ My sister offered to me to sell cosmetics from Israel to Russia and to Uzbekistan, as at a time she was working successfully for an important firm in cosmetics production. So it took off”* (Interview 2013). Therefore, once the Israeli-based sister suggested that she start an import business, they started contemplating

building on these latent needs. This way, she became a transnational and circular diaspora entrepreneur (Riddle et al., 2010). In the beginning, the first steps were careful; standard products from Israel were exported in small quantities to test the market and to avoid excessively high risks. The market entry took place via Moscow. It targeted the network of the sister there with a special arrangement for the payments to take place later and a first shipment paid for by the sister in Israel. As the importer-entrepreneur said, *“They [women in the former USSR area] want to look good and always buy cosmetics. And then they learned about these high-quality, but somewhat more expensive cosmetics from Israel”*. *“I liked the business immediately, because of that I could travel a lot and market my products with great speed. At the time, I had almost no competitors”* (Interview 2013). The market was in short supply, there were no functioning sales and distribution networks and the institutional problems were deterring entry for many others. She was agile to capture the opportunity and set up the entrepreneurial venture formally in 1998.

In Central Asia, Uzbekistan played an important corridor role in connecting the new areas, as it has the largest population and Tashkent is a large city. The Uzbek context became an epicentre: *“All this [population and size] makes Uzbekistan a strategically important place, not only in regard to its strategic importance in Central Asia, but also in the economy. We can start with the fact, that the country has a very low criminal rate, and despite the circulating myths the guardians of the law make no problems here. On the contrary, the Uzbek government does everything that the foreign businesspeople feel well here* (Interview 2009).

4.2.3. Further marketing penetration and market-driving partnerships

The first point of entry was chosen to be Moscow as it was a central place to start the business and formed a good setting for headquartering further expansion. The owner-manager comments: *“...and in a large city like Moscow, there one could sell cosmetics well, as Moscow is famous as a centre of fashion and beauty since ages”* (Interview 2014). After the successful and rapid entry phase, further expansion took

place quickly, with the establishment of a network of businesses in other Central Asian countries: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kirgizstan, driving the development of Western cosmetics market in these transition economies. The entrepreneur comments on a special aspect of motivation: *“I think this business is the dream of every women, as one always has good cosmetics in the vicinity”* (Interview 2013). The importance of appearance is valued across the multi-ethnic nations of former USSR and the beauty salon business grew rapidly after the collapse, but there are *“various preferences in style”* (Interview 2012). The agile approach of this case has numerous sources as she points out: *“...and in addition, my relatives helped me. I have always been a social person, I could always discuss and convince people [in business]. And I think that in the future, the [religious-ethnic population] will increasingly invest in Central Asian countries, because our historical roots are there. Our culture is intertwined with the culture of Uzbeks, Tajiks, and other populations living here”* (Interview 2013). Another expert also highlighted the growth perspectives: *“Uzbekistan [as a market] has huge development potential”* (Interview 2009). The diaspora-family ties facilitated the exploitation of the potential ambidextrously knowing the “system” and offering her support if needed.

Both firms in Israel and Russia benefitted from the collaboration that made them grow. The Israeli partner company has remained over the years as the key supplier partner and still covers over 70% of the imported goods. The agility of the Russian side of this partnership to rapidly address any local concerns with local sales and beauty consultants and the speed of expansion across former Soviet republics were central in capturing the market potential despite the complexity. The diaspora entrepreneur explains how market and marketing information is obtained by personal engagement in the businesses on multi-transnational level: *“I and my husband travel alternating in the three Central Asian countries due to our businesses, but the head office location- where we also [formally] live is Moscow”* (Interview 2013). The capabilities in the linguistic plurality of the region played an important role in addressing the market

successfully, as one export manager puts it “*It helps that I can move easily from one language to another*”. This reduces complexity and noise, making collaboration easier and faster. These capabilities and knowledge are combined with the central (exporter) marketing data on consumer and market insights, i.e. understanding consumers, their preferences and lives, for marketing strategy and development. The research manager of the exporter firm travels and interviews consumers around the world to increase the global agility in responding to trends ahead of time. She suggests that there are “*surprisingly universal*” views across the globe, which allows for standardisation on the core product level (Interview 2016).

This deep engagement with the market preferences by the transnational diaspora families and sales networks provided a unique type of agility for marketing operations and strategy. Interestingly, the Israeli strategy could continue on standardisation despite the plurality of the markets entered and penetrated: the cosmetics did not require product adaptations thanks to the local expertise and approach to serve the customers that the Russian-based partner could provide. As a result, the business partners see that “*we already have loyal regular customers [b2b] in Russia and Uzbekistan, who are to a certain extent dependent on our products and business*” (Interview 2013). As a reference, only in Uzbekistan, one of their target markets there were about 2000 beauty specialist retailer outlets in 2017 (Euromonitor, 2018). Although the cosmetics exporter has been acquired by a foreign firm in the 2010’s, the collaboration continues.

5. FINDINGS

These cases narrate how both “blanco” market entry and penetration processes were co-created and pulled by transnational diaspora actors, by diaspora entrepreneurs, with the support of the exporters. The US case was initiated and pulled by the diaspora as passive internationalization and the former USSR case was co-created in the beginning with the diasporic families and then increasingly independent, both diaspora entrepreneurs were instrumental in understanding potential and exploring and exploiting

opportunities. Interestingly, both cases illustrate external (to exporter-firm) actors operating ambidextrously with the exporter while generating IMA (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2008). Both cases created a marriage of agility between the organizations to enable fast market responses and to reduce complexity and noise (Kozinets, 1999).

Contrary to classic internationalization, these entry and marketing processes were largely outsourced to these intermediaries and their networks (cf. Welch & Luostarinen, 1993); they were dominated by the diaspora entrepreneur in the target context, acting as the local strategic channel partner over the total period of time. Only after going public the sauna heater company changed its strategy to equity-based modi with local manufacturing and direct online business after supplying the market for decades. Both diaspora entrepreneurs marketed the products independently as *entrepreneurs* which allowed them to be very agile and responsive (Freiling & Kollmann, 2008). They orchestrated, enabled, and carried out the market entry and new product introduction. Interestingly, they also carried the business risk in this process instead of the exporter. Additionally, they also took care of the market expansion first in their context of residence, then locally and across the regions, later even including neighbouring countries. This underlines the power of their relational and diaspora networks in the entry process and offers another novelty for understanding internationalization processes that are externalized. Both cases are surprisingly similar in terms of entry and marketing strategy process despite their extremely different politico-economic contexts, institutional environments and target markets, which suggests that such transnational diaspora entrepreneur activities in marketing share universally applicable agility characteristics, i.e. diasporic agility.

Diasporic partners, their families and employees, as well as their networks of customers, resellers and other stakeholders were particularly significant in the early phase in providing the knowledge and the dynamic capabilities needed to shape and carry out the marketing operations and also to optimize the

suitable strategy for each market and region (Teece, 2010). However, on product level both exporters worked with little adaptation, only if truly needed (e.g. regulation). The heaters had several models that covered the needs as standard versions, due to strict regulation any modification on the heater itself needed a new permit process. Regarding adaptation, the partners were interpreting the optimal choices to keep the business competitive and avoid unnecessary changes. Both diaspora entrepreneurs were highly capable and agile in addressing institutional impediments and challenges, for example, by employing their connections with senators, local leaders and influencers (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009b). At the same time, the collaborative ambidexterity through the inherent trust, commitment and sharing of the responsibilities provided the exporter-manufacturers the possibility to concentrate on production and product-related processes for advanced competitiveness and cost-efficiency, while the partners were focusing on developing the business locally in the export markets (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2008). This marketing activity strategy that co-created IMA externally to this dependent extent was not expected but worked for both exporters that became multimillion businesses in couple of decades.

Theoretically, externalizing with such entrepreneurs is interesting. The dynamic capabilities concerning the target market, e.g. sensing and seizing opportunities and threats and reconfiguring and mobilizing resources to face them (Degbey et al, 2021), were largely taking place in the externalized modus by the diaspora entrepreneur, not within the exporter organization (Teece, 2010, 2018). This is counterintuitive regarding the idea of internationalization and agility but supports the idea of entrepreneurial agency. The findings underline the role of diaspora actors, both diasporas per se and transnational diaspora entrepreneurs in the process. These indirect and direct ties and this “externalised” marketing agility located outside of organizational boundaries (of the exporter) but still shared important market knowledge with the exporters.

The findings highlight the impact of diasporic dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2010; Rana & Elo, 2017) that enabled the diaspora partners to a) sense proactively both relevant opportunities and threats through their immigrant effect and assess them (Chung, Rose & Huang, 2012), b) seize these by organizing needed resources in an entrepreneurial and creative manner, also building on their global diaspora networks (Elo & Minto-Coy, 2018), and c) reconfigure the resources to meet the challenges while developing business models that are fit for competition, which is fostered by their diaspora transformations (Vemuri, 2016). In short, transnational diaspora entrepreneurs showed vital expertise as orchestrators (Teece, 2018) in creating, executing, and planning marketing strategy flexibly and inexpensively for the manufacturer that acted mainly as a supplier for those markets (cf. Figure 1). This expertise, a dynamic capability, had a very independent nature from the exporting firm, in fact it turned around the idea that it is the manufacturer that upgrades its ordinary capabilities directing them towards high-payoff endeavours (Teece, 2018). The sauna heater upgraded first after 30 years of supplying and learning the US market. In this study, the diasporic partners were central driving the whole process of entry (cf. diaspora pull) and market penetration (cf. crossover). The strategies (cf. Teece, 2010, 2018) building on these partnerships seemed to enable agility, ambidexterity and maintain entrepreneurial agency and drive -with distinct focuses on both sides. In orchestrating resources, the Israeli exporters tried actively to interconnect some of their capability structures to support the local partners (Teece, 2018) but the sauna heater importer had to orchestrate resources alone from their networks to tackle institutional and regulative issues.

Notably, relying on international marketing agility of diaspora entrepreneurs allowed the manufacturers to focus on upgrading their other capabilities (e.g. manufacturing, technology), while remaining passive internationalization-wise letting the partners orchestrate the business in an agile and entrepreneurial manner. This inexpensive, low risk internationalization strategy allowed the manufacturers to invest and

gain competitive edge and avoid spending internal organizational resources for complicated market entry processes in which their resources were not as competitive as those of the diaspora partners’.

The IMA, or rather diasporic marketing agility, allowed a creative optimization of market responses in highly demanding and complex markets with the products that were novel. As a result, the respective international marketing strategies combined both standardisation (core products exported) with some customization-adaptation (ways of approaching and serving the markets). Both cases continued the cooperation over time, which also seems exceptional if compared to the usual changes within international channels and supply-marketing relationships, suggesting that there are long-term benefits in diasporic agility for exporters to leverage. In both cases, the diaspora entrepreneur in the host context represented the “speedboat” type of agility serving both sides as the interlocutor and connector.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1. Theoretical implications

Theoretically, the study brings a novel understanding of the multi-layered and multi-actor nature of international marketing strategy and its agility. It finds that external channel members-actors can (co-) create IMA ambidextrously and diaspora actors may explore, plan and execute strategies for the exporter in order to help new products enter and penetrate new markets. These diasporans are not employees or subcontractors, but independent channel partners who may possess highly valuable resources for market responses, both in exploring and exploiting international opportunities. IMA and capabilities by transnational diaspora entrepreneurs as channel partners represent diverse features from cultural interpretation, multilingual skills, intercultural communication to embedded relational structures within diasporas and beyond diasporas in local politics and business communities. This enables the right “how to” -responses. We expand theory by introducing the concept of diasporic IMA. These capabilities help in identifying appropriate long-term value creation processes, time-related windows, market-specific

information on the preferences and needs that might be culturally deep and difficult to capture without cultural interpretation, suitable entrepreneurial networks and partners in terms of sales, marketing and service, but also in logistics or technical issues (i.e. constructions, special circumstances), market-adapted marketing communication that may avoid communication failures, regulation and legal frameworks as well as trends and competition strategies (Teece, 2018).

We found that even smaller firms may benefit from diaspora partners and their ambidexterity, and be agile together in facing foreign market challenges, i.e. as a team of strategic partnerships tapping into the relevant resources of the partners. Thus, the concepts of ambidexterity and agility in international marketing strategy are not limited to a firm or its size but can be results of inter-organizational partnerships and networks (Filiou & Windrum, 2008; Fourné et al., 2014; Lubatkin et al., 2006; Junni et al., 2015). This links well with the concept of “marriage of convenience” (Welch & Luostarinen, 1993, 53), where smaller companies can relate with the global networks of more global actors and exploit their various inward-outward links in target markets. We propose the concept of “marriage of agility” that interconnects local diasporic business agility and export marketing transnationally (cf. Teece, 2018). We argue that IMA is more nuanced and needs to be re-conceptualized through the lenses of: a) the involved actors, b) the locus of action (intra-firm, inter-organizational, network), c) the type of knowledge accessible, and d) the lens of time and process.

Moreover, we propose that transnational diaspora entrepreneurs as strategic partner in target markets can diminish - or even eliminate - the psychic distance and adaptation problems for the exporter so that they may perform well even in distant and different markets (Riddle et al., 2010; Sousa & Bradley, 2005, 2008; Sousa & Lengler, 2009; Silva, Bradley, & Sousa, 2012; Elo et al., 2020; Silva & Elo, 2017). In fact, market-driving firms can also be partnerships or the local partners, instead of the actual manufacturer-exporter firm (Ghauri et al., 2016). Thus, the idea of a firm-specific strategy requires

revisiting in the context of new market entry process as the actual actors and their activities have, so far, remained in the shadow.

In addition, a closer analysis shows that there are different types of actors and objects in IMA (Chung, 2009; Chung et al., 2012) worth to study. The results indicate that in cases with very demanding contexts (cf. psychic distance, transition economy, and complex institutions), limited firm resources and novel offerings (cf. lack of extant market and market structures), the manufacturing firm may overcome such difficulties with a partnership strategy. This strategy allows the diaspora entrepreneur-partner to take over the local marketing and questions on strategy and operation level, in a context where they possess advanced market related capabilities, which increases efficiency and speed and diminishes complexity and noise for the exporter (e.g. Chung, 2009; Chung et al., 2012; Elo & Hieta, 2017; Elo, 2016b; Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Riddle et al., 2010). The findings support the idea of hybrid strategies (Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003) that evolve in the cooperation of the strategic partnerships and enable market specific adaptations while maintaining a feasible overall strategy (Silva & Elo, 2017).

Hence, for the conceptual development of IMA, we draw the following propositions based on the two cases:

- IMA is *co-created* between the exporter-manufacturer and the channel partner leveraging the transnational diasporic agility
- IMA is *not a firm internal resource*, but more a local capability to respond efficiently and effectively to the market needs applying a coordinated strategy
- Allocation of marketing responsibilities to a local diaspora entrepreneur- partner can be more profitable, as such channel partner may have *advanced dynamic capabilities* to address the nature of the market more efficiently and with lower costs
- Transnational diaspora entrepreneurs, particularly those with wide co-ethnic diasporas and mainstream networks in the target country, may provide *more advanced transnational market related capabilities and agility* for marketing strategy in new market entry than other channel partners. As a matter of fact they may:
 - Offer faster and easier entry and accelerated growth than other channel partners

- Offer better access to ethnic markets that are often culturally, linguistically and religiously complicated to address in marketing
- Efficiently work with transnational diaspora pull that other local channel partner candidate do not possess (cf. Rana & Elo, 2017)
- Share unique and intertwined motivations that may provide challenges in streamlining marketing strategy

6.2. Managerial implications

Managerially, the study provides stimuli for exporter-SMEs to address distant and different markets using locally based transnational diaspora entrepreneurs as partners for market entry, penetration and international marketing. Such local partners may employ additional capabilities and motivations that have ethnic, long-term and even altruistic characteristics, which are useful for SME internationalisation and commitment in sales (Elo et al., 2018; Riddle & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Minto-Coy, 2016, 2019). A good partner match with a common cultural understanding (Ferraris et al., 2021), a high level of trust, and a well-functioning inter-organizational cooperation can provide successful results for both exporters and channel partners and alleviate the inherent complexity (Silva, Bradley, et al., 2012; Sousa & Bradley, 2006; Theodosiou & Leonidou, 2003; Wu & Li, 2009). Diasporic agility nurtures the right respond to the market, from the diasporic market to the mainstream market, which is an additional feature inexistent in other channel partners and most useful for product diffusion (Teece, 2018; Elo et al., 2020). The locally based partner facilitates- with low cost and sharing the risk - the ambidextrous nature of the marketing as a system (e.g. knowledge sharing, cf. Hughes et al, 2020 & Degbey & Pelto, 2021) and its overall agility through dispersed transnational diaspora and their networks (cf. Rana & Elo, 2017).

Additionally, the institutional agility of the diaspora entrepreneurs can be highly beneficial for the exporter-entrants to overcome the liabilities of foreignness. It would be recommendable for policymaking, especially in SME exports, to engage with this category of intermediary actors more

carefully as such diasporans are a promising resource for international marketing and internationalisation. SMEs often start exporting with some sort of distributors or agents. Hence, the option of diaspora entrepreneurs could get more attention as these act as network partners, resellers and as mentors with particular agility. Their activities in the pre-entry and entry can be superior especially in those contexts where even multinational enterprises fail to perform.

6.3. Further research and limitations

The channel partner selection is a strategic choice for successful international marketing and operations, especially when both customer segments (diaspora and mainstream) are targeted or the exporter is resource-limited the option of partnering with a transnational diaspora entrepreneur deserves further attention. Future research is needed to address these actors (e.g. generation, degree of transnationalism, global/inward/outward connections) and their combinations (exporter vs diaspora), particular market-location related dynamics (size of diaspora), and methodological challenges in studying international marketing and sales networks and their decision-making mechanisms (e.g. locus, power, interdependencies). Future research on diasporic agility could also provide valuable tools for overcoming external shocks like COVID-19. Furthermore, in-depth descriptive and interpretative research is scarce but could present various insights to the mechanisms.

There are multiple limitations for the study. The time era-processes addressed are idiographic; as such, diaspora business developments are not necessarily transferrable to other settings. The transnationality of diaspora entrepreneurs may vary and influence their capabilities. Moreover, such a retrospective analysis may suffer from memory effects and partial and one-sided data. Despite the in-depth material, the cases are only two and offer limited power for contemporary comparisons or future predictions due to the context-specificity. Additionally, the two longitudinal cases have evolved already before internet. The study offers insights from the target market perspective, not fully covering the dyadic interplay which

leaves room for hidden rationales on the exporter side. There is also the danger that such diaspora entrepreneurs are misled and exploited, especially if there is a large power and resources discrepancy across the partners. Future research addressing the UN SDGs could focus on the inclusion, diversity, and fairness aspects of such business relationships.

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