Editorial – digitalisation and internationalisation: rethinking the global management agenda in the digital era

Alireza Nazarian*

University of Westminster,
London W1B 2HW, UK
Email: a.nazarian@westminster.ac.uk
*Corresponding author

Massimiliano Matteo Pellegrini

University of Rome "Tor Vergata",
Via Cracovia, 50, 00133 Rome, Italy
Email: massimiliano.pellegrini@uniroma2.it

Pantea Foroudi

Middlesex University,
The Burroughs, London NW4 4BT, UK
Email: P.Foroudi@mdx.ac.uk

Asieh Hosseini Tabaghdehi

Brunel University,
Kingston Lane, Uxbridge UB8 3PH, UK
Email: Asieh.HosseiniTabaghdehi@brunel.ac.uk

Biographical notes: Alireza Nazarian is a Reader in Management at the University of Westminster, London, and an experienced academic consultant specialising in Leadership, Human Resource Management, and Organisational Culture. He is the founder of Management & Business Academy, the Conference Chair of MBAcademy, and the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Organisational Studies and Innovation* (JOSI). He has published extensively in high-ranking journals, including the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *Journal of Environmental Management*, *Current Issues in Tourism*, and the *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*. With a strong background in research coaching and academic publishing, he has guided numerous researchers and PhD students to successfully publish in top-tier (Q1/Q2) journals. His work focuses on bridging theory and practice, empowering individuals and organisations to achieve excellence.

Massimiliano Matteo Pellegrini is a full Professor of Organisational Studies and Entrepreneurial Behaviour at the University of Rome "Tor Vergata". He currently coordinates two tracks at the European Academy of Management (EURAM), where he chaired the Strategic Interest Group on Entrepreneurship

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(E-ship SIG) until 2018. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Globalisation and Small Business* (ABS 1*), an editor for the *Entrepreneurial Behaviour* book series (Emerald Publishing), and an Associate Editor for the *Journal of Management and Organization, Strategic Change, Journal of Enterprising Communities*, Heliyon – Business Management Section, and the *International Journal of Transition and Innovation Systems*. His interests include decision-making processes and behaviours, especially in relation to digital transformation. He has published in highly ranked journals such as *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management, International Small Business Journal*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Journal of Business Research*, and *Journal of Small Business Management*, *Small Business Economics, and Technovation.*

Pantea Foroudi (PhD, SFHEA, MSc (Hons), MA, BA (Hons)) is the Business Manager and Solution Architect at Foroudi Consultancy and the Director of the Sustainable Digital Economy Area of Excellence. She also serves as the Head of the Research Group in Marketing and Corporate Brand Management, a Member of the School Management Board (SMB), and a Reader in Marketing and Corporate Brand Management. Since 1996, she has built extensive experience in design, branding, and marketing, establishing herself as a creative innovator and practical problem-solver in visual identity, graphic design, and branding across various sectors. Her primary research interests focus on consumer behaviour, using a multidisciplinary approach across two key areas: (i) corporate brand design and identity, and (ii) sustainable development goals (SDGs). Her research has been widely published in leading international academic journals, including the *British Journal of Management*, *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *Regional Studies*, *Journal of Business Research*, *European Journal of Marketing*, and the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.

Seyedeh Asieh Hosseini Tabaghdehi is a Senior Lecturer in Strategy and Business Economy with research interests in responsible innovation, AI ethics, digital transformation, and inclusive leadership. She was a Co-Investigator on a UKRI/ESRC-funded project investigating the ethical implications of SMEs' digital footprint data. She is actively involved in knowledge exchange initiatives and thought leadership forums, championing ethical, human-centred approaches to responsible AI and technology adoption. Her work is particularly committed to advancing inclusive, transparent frameworks for the ethical use of AI in business and organisational contexts. She is a recognised expert in AI and ethical digital transformation. She is a member of the TechUK Digital Ethics Working Group, an associate member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on AI (APPG AI), and serves as the Impact Lead and a strategic board member of Brunel's interdisciplinary Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence. Her research has been published in leading academic journals, including the *Journal of Business Research* and the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, among others.

The rapid acceleration of digital technologies is fundamentally reshaping the field of international business and management. In the contemporary global landscape, firms are no longer expanding across borders through traditional means alone. Rather, they are increasingly relying on digital capabilities, data-driven strategies, and agile platforms to penetrate and compete in international markets. This special issue of the *European Journal of International Management* responds to the pressing need to better understand

how digital transformation redefining internationalisation strategies is, stakeholder relationships, innovation pathways, and managerial practices.

At the heart of this collection lies a unifying premise: that the processes of digitalisation and internationalisation are now deeply intertwined, and that firms must embrace new capabilities, network structures, and institutional understandings to remain competitive. Collectively, the articles included in this issue provide valuable theoretical, empirical, and practical insights into how organisations – particularly in emerging and transitioning economies – navigate the challenges and opportunities of digital internationalisation. They also raise important questions about how managers and policymakers can promote sustainability, innovation, and social impact in the face of technological change.

Fang-Yi Lo and Phuong-Quynh Nguyen explore how digitalisation reshapes the network structures and strategic dependencies of digital multinational enterprises (DMNEs). Drawing on data from Taiwanese MNEs operating in high-tech sectors, their study investigates how one-way and mutual dependence within global networks affect subsidiary performance. Interestingly, their findings show a curvilinear relationship between one-way dependence and performance, while mutual dependence positively influences outcomes. The study is further enriched by examining the moderating roles of subsidiary autonomy and capabilities. By situating their work within resource dependence theory, the authors provide an important contribution to our understanding of how digital internationalisation alters power dynamics and performance within global networks. Future research could explore how these dependencies evolve over time in more volatile environments or in relation to new forms of digital intermediation.

In another timely contribution, Cizhi Wang, Zhongjuan Sun, Jialin Feng and Hejun Fan investigate the digital transformation of Chinese manufacturing firms and its influence on their internationalisation efforts. The authors employ strategic flexibility theory to uncover a threshold effect in the relationship between digital capability development and international expansion. Their empirical results demonstrate that unabsorbed slack resources enhance this relationship when a firm's strategic flexibility surpasses a critical level, whereas absorbed slack resources inhibit progress. This nuanced insight provides important implications for managers facing resource constraints during international digital transformation. The paper invites further exploration of how organisational learning, absorptive capacity, and institutional support mechanisms interact with digital thresholds in shaping a firm's international trajectory.

María J. Quero, Jose L. Ruiz-Alba, Cristina Mele, Bård Tronvoll and Rafael Ventura focus on the evolving dynamics of innovation ecosystems through the lens of crowdfunding platforms. By identifying three types of linkages – transactional, relational, and institutional – they explain how connectivity and actor engagement enable innovation and impact ecosystem viability. The study highlights how internationalisation is no longer solely a function of market entry strategies, but also of a firm's ability to participate meaningfully in co-creative digital ecosystems. This work extends service-dominant logic and contributes to our understanding of how innovation and value co-creation practices influence international outcomes. Future studies could examine how these linkages vary across national contexts and regulatory regimes, and what role cultural or linguistic proximity plays in shaping international engagement on open platforms.

The article by Pengfei Fu, Weimu You and David Sarpong explores the rise of innovation incubators in China as intermediaries of digital entrepreneurship and internationalisation. Drawing on ethnographic interviews with key stakeholders in Chinese innovation hubs, the authors illustrate how these incubators function as relational platforms, linking traditional industries to digital technologies and global opportunities. Their findings suggest that innovation incubators not only support domestic transformation but also act as strategic gateways to international markets, particularly for firms that may lack direct access to global networks. This study advances our understanding of institutional infrastructures in internationalisation and calls for further inquiry into the comparative effectiveness of incubators and accelerators across different economies.

Shahzeb Hussain, Constantinos Vasilios Priporas and Suyash Khaneja provide a cross-cultural analysis of customer engagement in the digital era by comparing consumer responses in the UK and Pakistan. Their study confirms that social media marketing activities significantly impact engagement, and that these effects differ by national culture. Using commitment–trust theory, the authors demonstrate that collectivist cultures, such as Pakistan, exhibit stronger engagement effects than individualist cultures, such as the UK. This finding is especially pertinent for international marketing strategists and managers who operate across culturally diverse markets. Future research could expand this work by examining how different digital touchpoints (e.g., AI chatbots, live streaming) mediate these cultural effects on engagement and brand outcomes.

Rainer Hensel, Ronald Visser and Ellen Sjoer contribute to the conversation from a human capital development perspective by investigating how entrepreneurial teams cultivate effectuation skills in digital environments. Using a self- and multi-source assessment methodology, they identify innovative competencies and team climate as critical enablers of strategic decision-making. Their findings underscore the importance of feedback-rich environments and shared mental models in enhancing digital entrepreneurial performance. The study has direct implications for international entrepreneurship education and opens pathways for future exploration into digital learning platforms, gamified assessments, and culturally sensitive pedagogy for global entrepreneurial training.

Taken together, the articles in this special issue showcase how digitalisation is not merely a technical upgrade, but a transformative lens through which internationalisation must now be viewed. Firms are increasingly moving beyond transactional, export-driven models to embrace platform ecosystems, digital capabilities, and relational network structures. This evolution necessitates new frameworks, methodologies, and interdisciplinary approaches that account for the socio-political, cultural, and institutional dimensions of global digital business.

Future research directions

Despite the breadth and depth of the contributions in this issue, several pressing questions remain open for future inquiry. First, there is a need for conceptual frameworks that integrate digital strategy with social responsibility in international contexts. How can digital internationalisation promote inclusive growth and address global inequalities? Second, future research should explore longitudinal and cross-industry comparisons to better understand the dynamics of capability development in different digital ecosystems. Third, while several studies address Asia-based firms, more work is needed in under-

researched contexts such as Africa, Latin America, and smaller European economies. Fourth, the ethical implications of algorithmic decision-making, data governance, and AI adoption in international business remain largely uncharted. Finally, we call for greater methodological diversity, including mixed-methods approaches, experimental designs, and digital ethnography, to capture the complex realities of digital internationalisation. Collaborations between academics, industry, and policymakers will be essential to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

As guest editors, we are proud to present this special issue as a significant step toward reframing international management through the lens of digital transformation. We hope it encourages scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to engage in deeper dialogue and co-create actionable knowledge that supports a more inclusive, resilient, and innovative global business environment.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the authors for their insightful contributions, the reviewers for their rigorous feedback, and the editorial team of the *European Journal of International Management* for their support in bringing this timely collection to life.