**CALL FOR PAPERS**

***Special Issue of the Journal of International Business Studies***

**Rethinking firm international involvement in a changing world of complex realities**

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**Deadline for Submission:** January 31, 2024

**Motivation for the Special Issue**

Recent special issues (SI) at the *Journal of International Business Studies* (JIBS) have highlighted the important roles that digitalization (Meyer, Li, Brouthers, & Jean, 2023) and changing institutional norms and standards (Dau, Chacar, Lyles, & Li, 2022) have for international business (IB) theory and practice. While digitalization is creating new pathways for firms to become involved in foreign markets (Kano, Tsang, & Yeung, 2020; Li et al., 2019; Luo & Tung, 2018; Nambisan, Zahra, & Luo, 2019), impediments to these digitally-enabled pathways are emerging, such as privacy concerns, laws and regulations, perceptions of individuals and groups of MNEs from certain countries of origin. The changing informal institutions and rising geopolitical tensions are becoming the new barriers for multinational enterprises (MNEs) in their global expansion (Alvarez & Rangan, 2019; Buckley, 2020; Contractor, 2021; Liu & Li, 2020; Nambisan & Luo, 2021; White et al., 2022). These concurrent movements are reshaping firm *involvement* in international markets (Liesch, Buckley, Simonin & Knight, 2012) by simultaneously increasing opportunities and creating new barriers. Changing how established and new firms become involved in IB, these trends and the tensions they create challenge the established view of the theory of the MNE.

By international involvement, we refer to a broad spectrum of arrangements taking place within, across, and beyond firm boundaries to enable the firm's participation in foreign markets (Brouthers & Hennart, 2007; Liesch et al., 2012). International involvement is not limited to foreign investments and the traditional modes of entry and operation (e.g., exporting, joint ventures, wholly owned subsidiaries) but includes all means of cross-border value-creating activities, such as outsourcing, licensing, alliances, capital access, innovation outposts, user acquisition via digital channels, and managed ecosystems (Brouthers, Chen, Li & Shaheer, 2022). Traditionally, international involvement has been studied through the lens of international market entry and operation modes (Brouthers & Hennart, 2007; Kirca et al., 2011; Tihanyi, Griffith, & Russell, 2005; Zapkau, Schwens, & Brouthers, 2020), by which firms organize the way they access markets or resources in foreign countries (Erramilli & Rao, 1993). This has been a prominent research domain in IB, with numerous award-winning papers at *JIBS* (e.g., Agarwal & Ramaswami, 1992; Anderson & Gatignon, 1986; Brouthers, 2002; Kogut & Singh, 1988). International involvement is not only fundamental to the questions of why MNEs exist and how they evolve, but also shapes our collective wisdom on internationalization processes (e.g., establishment chain).

However, scholars contend that traditional entry mode research and theorization has seen little progress (Shaver, 2013), and our understanding of how and why firms increase/decrease involvement neglects the processes involved (Autio, Mudambi, & Yoo, 2021; Connelly, Ketchen, & Hult, 2013; Jacobides & Hitt, 2005; Welch, Nummela, & Liesch, 2016). While Hennart and Slangen (2015) advocate for research opportunities on entry mode choices, new pathways of international involvement in the era of digitalization and extremely disrupted (de)globalization are putting our literature at a juncture that may require novel theorization. Shaver’s (2013) question becomes more compelling than ever: Is the entry mode literature producing “more of the same” rather than revealing new trends and forms of international involvement, and theorizing their nature and behaviors?

Reflecting on recent advances in digitalization and institutional drivers of integration/decoupling, Brouthers et al. (2022) develop a theoretical framework based on the theories of Embeddedness, Exploration and Exploitation (EEE) to better recognize and conceptualize a broader range of non-traditional entry modes that MNEs, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and born-global ventures have utilized to involve themselves in foreign markets in today’s economy. However, this development is challenged by Hennart (2022), who argues that most ‘non-traditional entry modes’ constitute changes in kind rather than substance and that a more sophisticated version of transaction cost economics (TCE) can effectively explain the transfer of capabilities and knowledge in these modes. This debate has aroused a broad discussion through a variety of channels, including JIBS and AOM IM Division online research panels. There is compelling interest in rethinking international involvement as well as a widespread recognition of the need for developing, extending, and integrating traditional and emerging theoretical frameworks to explain these transitions.

This special issue intends to accelerate the conversation and investigate the question – Do we need new theories, extensions to existing theories, or combinations of new and old theories, to understand how international involvement is evolving in our changing world of complex realities, and if we do, what might these theories entail?

**Aims and Scope of the Special Issue**

We seek scholarly contributions that can help advance our understanding of international involvement in the new era of digitalization and globalization with extreme disruptions to the international environment (or ecosystem). We are interested in contributions that can connect debates about the theorization and modality of market entry and involvement to ongoing conversations and practices in the IB field. We welcome submissions using a diversity of research methods including quantitative and qualitative approaches and conceptual/theoretical contributions. Possible topics that would be suitable for this SI include (but are not limited to):

1. **New ways of international involvement**. Digitalization and conflicting institutional drivers are forcing both large MNEs and smaller born global and born digital ventures to reevaluate their international involvement (Jean, Kim, & Cavusgil, 2020; Kozlenkova et al., 2017; Watson et al., 2018). Technologies such as Blockchain, Metaverse, or 3D printing are continuously creating new ways through which firms can structure their involvement in foreign markets. Indeed, to this effect, UNCTAD has started tracking the top digital MNEs as they changed the nature of cross-border investment at a “breakneck” speed (Zhan, 2022). At the same time, geopolitical tensions, risks of cyberattacks, stakeholder concerns about privacy, liabilities of country-of-origin, and differences in digital regulations across countries are emerging as impediments that lead to a diversity of technology standards across countries and the emergence of ‘splinternet’ (Luo, 2022; White et al., 2022). Faced with these conflicting circumstances, what are the new international involvement possibilities (for example, user entrepreneurs, platform complementors and social media influencers) and how do they enable new enterprises to create and capture IB opportunities? How do digitalization and conflicting institutional drivers redefine globalization and deglobalization, and how do their effects vary across firms from different countries? Will the institutional drivers of decoupling require MNEs to be ambidextrously involved with the increasingly divided geopolitical systems? More fundamentally, what are the implications of these new forms of involvement for organizational theories? We look for theoretically grounded approaches to identify, explain, and integrate novel ways of international involvement to extend our knowledge of the theory of MNEs.
2. **A general theory of entry modes*.*** Debate among diverse theoretical perspectives such as TCE, resource-based view (RBV), knowledge-based view (KBV) and institutional theory, has cast different views on how firms should utilize entry and operation modes. Brouthers et al. (2022) incorporate the embeddedness dimension into the RBV to develop an EEE framework for non-traditional entry modes, while Hennart (2022) stresses the applicability of TCE in a broader range of entry modes and management practices. With this debate now ongoing, we invite attempts to develop a general theory to reconcile these (and other) theoretical views on entry modes, or to draw clearer and more practical boundaries for these theories. With this conceptualization not limited to TCE or EEE, we welcome other conceptual frameworks that explain mode choice or ways of international involvement.
3. **Reevaluating traditional entry mode research.** We have gained a profound understanding on traditional entry modes, but there may still exist topics worthy of novel research. Examples include the managerial decision-making process for choosing traditional entry modes, the impact of past investments modes, the role of expatriates in developing and/or managing entry modes and the consequences of entry mode choices. Echoing Shaver’s (2013) question, we would like to see novel research, utilizing more fine-grained data or new methods, to examine the efficacy of the existing theoretical lenses and to generate new insights into these familiar phenomena.
4. **Exploring non-traditional entry modes.** While Brouthers et al. (2022) have developed an EEE framework to categorize several important non-traditional entry modes, little empirical research has been conducted to test such a framework. Can the EEE framework effectively explain the antecedents and consequences of entry modes (non-traditional and traditional)? Or will TCE still demonstrate substantial predictive power for non-traditional modes? How can we better extend prior research from global strategy into this new context to investigate such topics as the role of culture (Tihanyi, Griffith, & Russell, 2005)? How could international marketing research help us better understand non-traditional entry from a demand-side perspective (Samiee, Katsikeas, & Hult, 2021), regarding, *inter alia*, consumers’ data privacy concerns (e.g. Madan, Savani, & Katsikeas, 2022) and discrimination against foreign products (e.g. Fischer, Zeugner-Roth, Katsikeas, & Pandelaere, 2022)?In addition, as most entry modes are conflated with location choices, will the requirement of embeddedness in a local context help shed new light on entry decisions?
5. **Integrating traditional and novel ways of international involvement.** We are interested in scholarly attempts to reconcile traditional and new ways of international involvement to offer a more comprehensive view of IB realities. In particular, MNEs are pursuing different configurations and constellations of traditional and non-traditional ways of international involvement (Stallkamp & Schotter, 2021; Shaheer & Li, 2020; Shaheer, Li, & Priem, 2020; Wormald, Agarwal, Braguinsky, & Shah, 2021). These combinations are increasingly important in today’s economy where MNEs are responding to conflicting international drivers by exiting from certain countries while reentering with other ways of involvement. These transitions require researchers to go beyond the traditional conceptualization of international involvement as a one-time choice of a single mode. Instead, researchers may explore more nuanced and complex patterns for configuring multiple ways of international involvement.
6. **Advancing international involvement research through process interpretations.**The context in which new ways of international involvement are evolving is dynamic, and it shifts with geo-political interferences. Firms must accommodate these shifts and dynamism by better understanding and recognizing differences in Western and non-Western perspectives that may have, at least in part, given rise to the heightened geo-political tensions (Tung & Stahl, 2018; Tung, 2021). Taking such multidimensional perspectives is critical for making sense of a complex and changing global context and for orchestrating international involvement activities. Research paradigms that explicitly take account of multiple perspectives and changing contexts are available, but assumptions must be challenged and new research questions asked (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013; Kriz & Welch, 2018). This SI provides opportunities to reflect on past mode research and to advance new research agendas that strengthen the IB field through advancing IB process theorizing on international involvement (Welch et al., 2016). Using process approaches to address how established and new firms are taking advantage of new ways of international involvement, while navigating the tensions caused by geo-political barriers, substantiates the IB field in the marketplace of ideas and applications.

**Deadline and Submission Instructions**

Authors should submit their manuscripts between January 15, 2024, and January 31, 2024, via the *Journal of International Business Studies* submission system at <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jibs>. All submissions will go through the standard double-blind review process.

The guest editors plan to host a paper development workshop at the AIB annual meeting for manuscripts that have advanced through the revision process in 2024. We also plan to have a symposium at one of the host universities of the editorial team for the final selected papers for publication, aiming to increase their visibility and impact.

Questions about the Special Issue may be directed to the guest editors or the JIBS Managing Editor (managing-editor@jibs.net).

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**About the Guest Editors**

**Noman Shaheer** is Lecturer in International Business Discipline at the University of Sydney. His recent research on digital internationalization appears in *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of Business Venturing*, *Journal of International Marketing,* and *Harvard Business Review*. He has received several prestigious awards including the Lazardis award for the *Journal of Business Venturing*’s Best Paper, AIB /Temple Best Paper Award, Buckley & Casson Dissertation Award, AOM International Management Division Best Dissertation Award and Alan M. Rugman Most Promising Scholar Award.

**Sali Li** is Professor and Distinguished Research Fellow at the Darla Moore School of Business, University of South Carolina. His current work explores how digital platforms iterate and internationalize, with a particular focus on digital start-ups from China. His research has been published in leading academic journals including *Academy of Management Review, Strategic Management Journal, Journal of Management, Journal of International Business Studies, Journal of Management Studies*, etc. He has received several prestigious research awards including the Lazardis award for the *Journal of Business Venturing*’s Best Paper of the Year, and AIB /Temple Best Paper Award. In addition, he serves as an Associate Editor at *Journal of Management* and *Journal of World Business*.

**Liang Chen** is Associate Professor of Strategy & Entrepreneurship at Singapore Management University. His recent research on platform ecosystems and digital strategy appears in *Strategic Management Journal*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, and *Harvard Business Review*. He has also shown lasting research interests in multinational firms, emerging markets, global strategy, corporate strategy, and the theory of the firm. Liang is a JIBS ERB member and Best Reviewer, a winner of the AOM IM Division Emerging Scholar Award, and a finalist of the Alan M. Rugman Most Promising Scholar Award. He is Senior Editor of *International Business Review* and of *Management and Organization Review*, and a consulting editor at *Journal of International Management*.

**Keith D. Brouthers** is Professor of Business Strategy at King’s Business School, King’s College London and a Fellow of the Academy of International Business. Keith specializes in international strategic management and is the recipient of the JIBS Decade Award (2012) as well as a JIBS Fiftieth anniversary research scholarship award (2019). His current research interests include entry and establishment mode choice, export channel selection, and the digital economy. Keith’s research has been published in leading academic journals including *Strategic Management Journal, Journal of Management, Journal of International Business Studies, Journal of Management Studies, Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal,* and *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*.

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**Dan Li** is the L. Leslie Waters Chair and Professor of International Business at the Kelley Business School, Indiana University. Her research and teaching focus on global strategy, particularly in the areas of international strategic alliances, and institutional influences on activities of both established multinational enterprises and international new ventures. Her work has been published in the *Journal of International Business Studies, Academy of Management Journal, Strategic Management Journal, Organization Science, Journal of Management, Journal of Business Venturing,* among others. She is an incoming Area Editor of *JIBS* and previously served as the Editor-in-Chief of *Business Horizons* and an Associate Editor and Special Issue Editor of *Global Strategy Journal.*