
Categorising the internationalisation of SMEs with social network analysis

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Abstract: This paper analyses the internationalisation of SMEs highlighting the importance of social network analysis (SNA) to display the main categories involved in SME internationalisation research. Methodologically, the paper uses a systematic review of the literature as a departure point to select the main papers on the internationalisation of SMEs and uses SNA to illustrate the main categories that have been used by researchers to identify how sectoral studies (manufacturing vs. service firms and single vs. multiple industry) have evolved and to identify the geographical origins of the papers carried out on SME internationalisation. This study is useful for researchers and academic community alike as it embeds the three main categories found (internationalisation theories, international strategy and performance) using SNA methodology.

Keywords: SME; internationalisation; literature review; social network analysis; SNA.

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1 Introduction

SMEs are of great importance in the world business structure. Its development is crucial for economic growth, employment and poverty alleviation (Jasra et al., 2011; Word Bank Group, 2015).

With the increasing globalisation process, international operations among SMEs are a necessity. In fact, internationalisation is a determinant of business competitiveness and a survival condition for many SMEs (Alon et al., 2009; Dutot et al., 2014), which requires from SMEs a greater efficiency, effectiveness and competitiveness (Raymond et al., 2005).

The study of SMEs and their internationalisation has been also of increasing in interest and grow significance (e.g. Etemad, 2004a, 2004b; Amal and Filho, 2010; Dimitratos et al., 2010; Kuivalainen et al., 2012; Kalinic and Forza, 2012; Child and Hsieh, 2014; Toulouva et al., 2015) as a result of the interconnectedness of SMEs competitiveness, increased productivity, flexibility, and active presence in the global market. In this context, firms (especially SMEs) that do not consider developing their activities at an international level, not only limit their potential, but also their economic survival. Indeed, SMEs cannot avoid the impact of both the globalisation of markets and the growth of emergent markets.

Although SME internationalisation has been receiving special attention, it is not yet a mature area. Traditionally, research has extensively focussed on large manufacturing firms (Dutot et al., 2014; Toulouva et al., 2015), especially on the activities of multinational enterprises (MNEs), using mainly the transaction cost model, the eclectic

paradigm and monopolistic advantage theory (Dana et al., 1999; Dana, 2001; Etemad et al., 2001; Wright and Dana, 2003; Ribau et al., 2015). However, despite the variety of firms competing in international markets, SMEs have created new opportunities, and shown profitable growth (Lin and Chaney, 2007) while playing an important role in the modern global marketplace (Ayyagari et al., 2007; Javalgi et al., 2011; Hessels and Parker, 2013).

When analysing previous reviews on SME internationalisation one can witness that the field is still fragmented. Fillis (2001) covers a period from 1975 until 2000 analysing SMEs as well as large firms. Etemad (2004a) and Kuivalainen et al. (2012) presented an overview of conceptual frameworks and concepts pertaining to SME internationalisation patterns. Keupp and Gassman (2009) analysed international entrepreneurship but did not restrict their analysis to SMEs. Peiris et al. (2012) analysed SME internationalisation including in their sample only those articles that deal with entrepreneurship forms. Kiss et al. (2012) analyse international entrepreneurship in emerging economies. Coviello and Jones (2004) and Rialp et al. (2005) analyse internationalising firms.

As one can conclude there are several theoretical groundings and contextual positions that make it difficult to analyse how SMEs perform/behaviour in international markets. For example several groundings may emerge such as international new ventures, international entrepreneurship and born global that are very much focussed on entrepreneurship theoretical underpinnings but do not separate SMEs from large firms. One can also realise that several reviews analyse family businesses, without a specific focus on SME internationalisation. There is little systematic research on SME internationalisation (Ayyagari et al., 2007) despite the acknowledgment of the importance of SMEs and their internationalisation. In order to achieve this goal, a systematic literature review is going to be carried out following Tranfield et al. (2003) procedures including only SME, the definition of main categories and topics of the literature, and how geographically dispersed is this SME internationalisation. One particular specificity is going to be applied that makes this study unique to the best of our knowledge: social network analysis (SNA) software is going to be used to display our findings.

As supported by Pinho and Pinheiro (2015), SNA is an important powerful tool that offers a different methodological approach to synthesise past research and to provide illustrative examples of internationalisation.

Based on these arguments, the central objectives of this article are:

- 1 to identify the key categories that researchers on SME internationalisation have been involved with in their research
- 2 to identify how pervasively those categories have been used by researchers
- 3 to identify what are the main topics analysed and how important they are for the main three categories analysed
- 4 to identify how manufacturing and service studies have been addressed in SME internationalisation
- 5 to identify the geographical origin of the studies carried out on SME internationalisation.

To explore these issues, we carried out an extensive review of the literature, seeking to provide an overview of the published work focusing on SME internationalisation. We reviewed and evaluated 382 articles published in international journals that, as a whole, can be considered representative of our present knowledge about SME internationalisation. With data extracted from the articles we created categories and topics and then applied SNA software with the aim of visualising sociograms relating the main structural patterns of the categories and topics. Although we know that the SNA has been mostly used to analyse publications, citations and co-citations networks (Otte and Rousseau, 2002; Knoke and Yang, 2008), it can also be used based on the assumption of the importance of relationships among interacting units or nodes (Scott, 2013) which is the focal analysis of this study.

This in-depth look at SME internationalisation identifies patterns and provides a better understanding of the field. This article categorises the studies and synthesises SME internationalisation over the 1995–2014 timeframe. The article is divided in five sections. After this introduction, Section 2 addresses the importance of SME internationalisation. Section 3 presents the methodology. Section 4 addresses the main findings. Finally, Section 5 presents the conclusions and limitations.

2 The importance of SMEs internationalisation

SMEs are the dominant business form across the world and potentially are large firms (Day, 2000) playing a critical role in development of the several countries (Zou and Stan, 1998; Lages and Montgomery, 2004; Jasra et al., 2011). SMEs are highly dynamic, not only for their contribution for employment generation, but also for being more innovative, more flexible in the decision-making process, and more responsive to the demands of consumers than large firms (Parker, 2000; Toulova et al., 2015). Their flexible and decentralised structure allows them to quickly adapt to fast changing consumption habits (Leicht and Stockman, 1993; Lages and Montgomery, 2004) and having more motivated employees (Marlow, 1997; Parker, 2000).

The European economy is dominated by SMEs as they represent 99% of all businesses, and are a key driver of economic growth, innovation, employment and social integration (European Commission, 2015). SMEs account 90% of businesses and more than 50% of employment worldwide (IFC, 2012) and they are the key drivers of competition, economic growth and job creation, particularly in developing countries (Kushnir et al., 2010; Jasra et al., 2011; IFC, 2012; European Commission, 2015). SMEs stand out as key strategic vehicles especially in emerging markets as a key way to advance development and reduce poverty (IFC, 2012).

SMEs have been progressively improving their flexibility, their customer expectations of satisfaction capacity and performing in accordance with the internationally accepted quality standards, as a priority competitive requirement, because internationalisation has been seen by SMEs as a way for their survival, growth and sustainability (Lages and Montgomery, 2004; Alon et al., 2009; Dutot et al., 2014).

The progressive involvement of SMEs on the international marketplace provides an emerging field in the SME internationalisation literature (e.g. Etemad, 2004a, 2004b; Torrès and Julien, 2005; Amal and Filho, 2010; Dimitratos et al., 2010; Kuivalainen et al., 2012; Kalinic and Forza, 2012; Child and Hsieh, 2014; Toulova et al., 2015), as internationalisation of SMEs is different from MNEs. The process of internationalisation

and growth of SMEs not follow linearly the process defined in the extant theories of MNEs (Etemad, 2004b). Since large firms and SMEs have different characteristics (such as management; ownership; resources; scale of operations; decision-making processes; organisational structures), several criticisms have been made of the use of MNE based internationalisation theories to explain the internationalisation process of SMEs. In particular, SMEs have several aspects to consider when considering their internationalisation and discrete financial, human and intangible resources to carry it out (limitations on resources and capabilities; financial restrictions; general management limitations; limited language skills, inter-cultural knowledge and international strategies awareness). When compared with MNEs, SMEs have relatively fewer assets, especially tangible resources (technology, equipment, financial) (Julien et al., 2004). However, SMEs have intangible resources that allow them to compete, survive and grow (Mejri and Umemoto, 2010; Love and Roper, 2015). With less resources (essentially financial) and international experience it is pertinent to ask how SMEs are able to succeed in global marketplaces (Karlsen and Nordhus, 2011).

3 Methodology

Recognising the importance of SME for the business world, particularly for economic blocs such as Europe, and its contribution to the international expansion of the firms, we made a systematic review based on Tranfield et al. (2003) by delimitating the subject area, identifying the key search terms and carrying out a thematic analysis. We tried to identify and analyse the multiple perspectives taken by research published on the internationalisation of SMEs. The systematic electronic search was performed using electronic databases such as EBSCO, Emerald, Web of Science and ScienceDirect, representing some of the main databases covering management, economics, social sciences and multidisciplinary areas, where we formed a combination of the keywords search.

The methodological approach is based in a certain criteria as shown in Table 1. We only considered journal articles, excluding books, book chapters, reports and conference papers, since journal publications are considered as having the highest impact in the management field and considered as validated knowledge (Tahai and Meyer, 1999; Podsakoff et al., 2005).

382 articles covering the period 1995 to 2014 complied with the criterion. Our main focus was to identify the several topics of the SME internationalisation research which represent the fundamental concepts and subjects of each article. To do that we used an inductive thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke (2006) in an attempt to organise the literature into patterns of topics. We deployed a data matrix that grouped and aligned the references by year of publication, arranged by topics. Each article was analysed using an interpretative synthesising approach (Noblit and Hare, 1988; Jones et al., 2011), where key topics were inductively identified, based on the articles' focus, core ideas and arguments. Based on the topics generated, we aggregated them on higher order classes that we call categories. We used a combination of thematic and content analysis (Weed, 2008) in order to capture the quantitative (frequency) as well as qualitative (explanatory value) aspects of the articles selected.

Table 1 Selection criteria

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Description</i>
Electronic database	EBSCO; Emerald; Web of Science; ScienceDirect
Source type	Full articles
Topic research	SME and internationaliz(s)ation; SME and internationa*; small firm and internationa*; small firm and internationaliz(s)ation
Article topic research	Title, abstract, keywords
General research areas	Management; marketing; economic; business; social sciences
Year	All – without restriction (to December 2014)
Journals	Scientific core
Exceptions	Articles that made literature review on this area

Source: Own preparation

We prepared a summary table where each article was categorised systematically based on the topic identified. The topics were based on the content of each article, its abstract, title and keywords. We found 88 topics on SME internationalisation. These topics were grouped in eight categories:

- 1 performance
- 2 international marketing
- 3 financing
- 4 international strategy
- 5 firms' characteristics
- 6 internationalisation theories
- 7 innovation
- 8 supply chain view.

Since the SNA can be used to analyse relationships between actors, it allows a better understanding of the interactional dynamics among the several actors and the influence of the structural dynamics on actors' behaviour (Scott, 2013; Knoke and Yang, 2008; Otte and Rousseau, 2002; Wasserman and Faust, 1994). As such, based on the sample of 382 articles, we analysed the relationship between topics and categories and researchers and managed to complement a qualitative stage – the identification of the categories and topics – with a quantitative stage – the identification of different interactions among categories/topics.

Network structures are formed by nodes (actors), which are represented as points (categories/topics and researchers within the network) and a set of ties or edges (links), which are represented as lines that connected the nodes through a relationship or interaction with a more or less strong bonding between them (Scott, 2013; Knoke and Yang, 2008; Otte and Rousseau, 2002; Wasserman and Faust, 1994). The unit of analysis of this study is the interaction between network pairs (researchers, topics or categories), reflecting the categories/topics shared between pairs (researchers). As such, we made an actor-by-actor (category/topic-by-researcher) matrix of values, where each cell represents the connection value for each pair, i.e. the relationship between each article (researchers)

and category/topic. Therefore, we used the SNA to identify all direct relations between actors in the network as local centrality, which only considers direct ties measured in terms of number of nodes to which a node is connected. The representation of the relational data will be performed through a graphic form, based on a matrix previously prepared which contains data collected on ties from a set of nodes.

There are several computer software that facilitates the SNA, some more user-friendly and easily available than others, in which Ucinet and Pajek are the most commonly used (Scott, 2013; Knoke and Yang, 2008). We applied Ucinet 6 for Windows (Borgatti, 2002) to analyse the ties between categories and topics and Gephi (0.8.2) to identify the weighted ties from the relationships between categories/topics, i.e. when the same researcher(s) concentrate their research on two categories or on two topics within the same category.

4 Findings

Over the course of the 20-year period 382 papers pertaining to SME internationalisation were identified, which were classified in eight categories. The most relevant category is *internationalisation theories* covering with 63% (239/382) of the papers, followed by *international strategy* with 49%, *performance* with 25%, *international marketing* with 12%, *innovation* with 10%, firms' characteristics with 7%, *financing* with 4% and finally the *supply chain view* with 4% (14/382).

After analysing the 382 papers, it was possible to conclude that they cover different categories and topics. The number of topics covered by the papers are shown in Table 2, in which one can conclude that in the 2006–2014 period the number of topics covered by the papers increases relatively to the 1995–2005 period. This means that the research on SME internationalisation is increasing not only throughout time, but also in complexity.

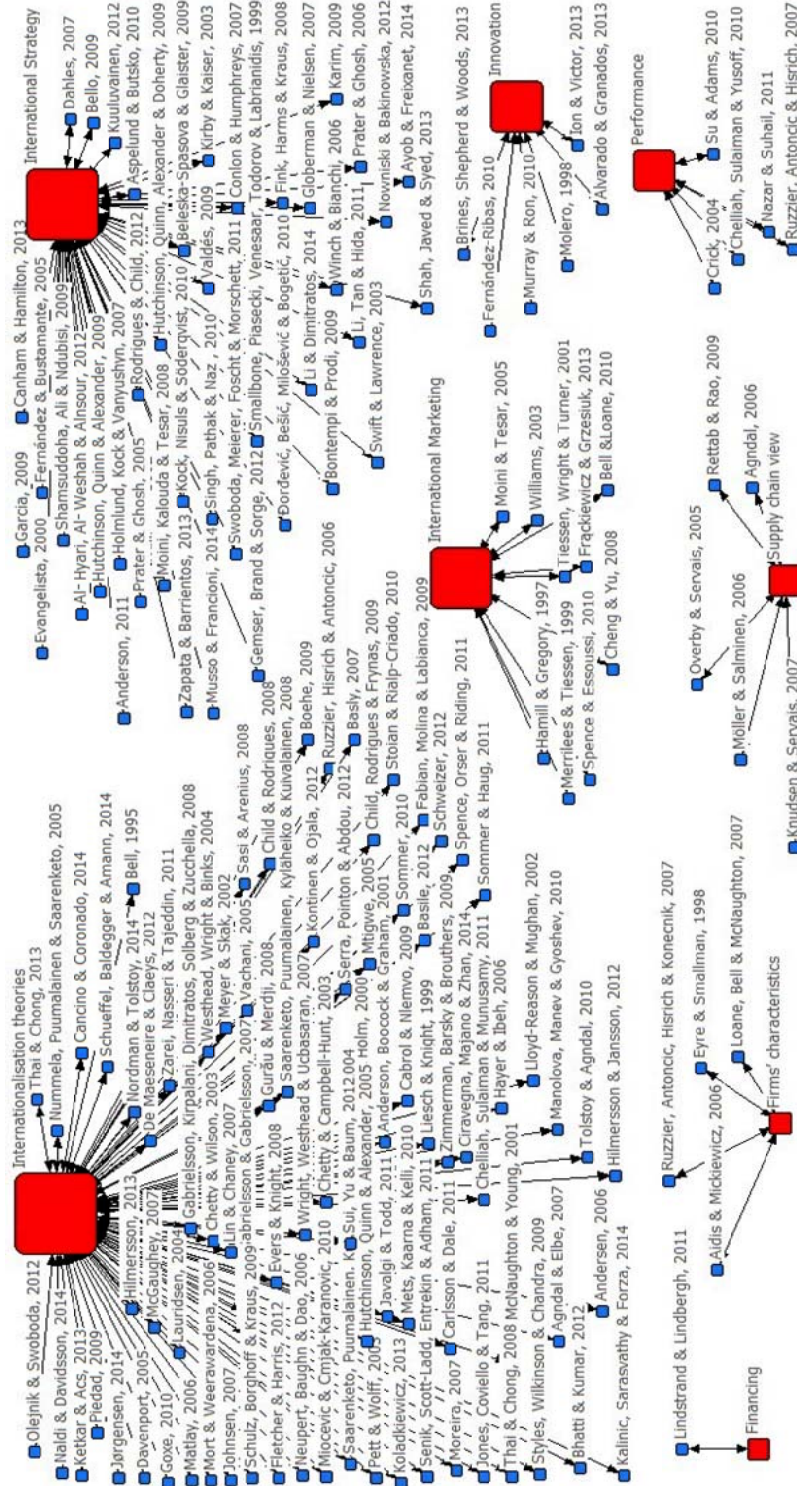
Table 2 Number of topics by timeframe

<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Papers (%)</i>	<i>1 topic</i>	<i>2 topics</i>	<i>3 topics</i>	<i>4 topics</i>	<i>5 topics</i>	<i>6 topics</i>
1995–2005	73 (19.11)	19 (26.03)	36 (49.32)	12 (16.44)	4 (5.48)	2 (2.74)	0 (0.00)
2006–2014	309 (80.89)	69 (22.33)	121 (39.16)	85 (27.51)	26 (8.41)	6 (1.94)	2 (0.65)
Total	382 (100)	88 (23.04)	157 (41.10)	97 (25.39)	30 (7.85)	8 (2.09)	2 (0.52)

Source: Own preparation

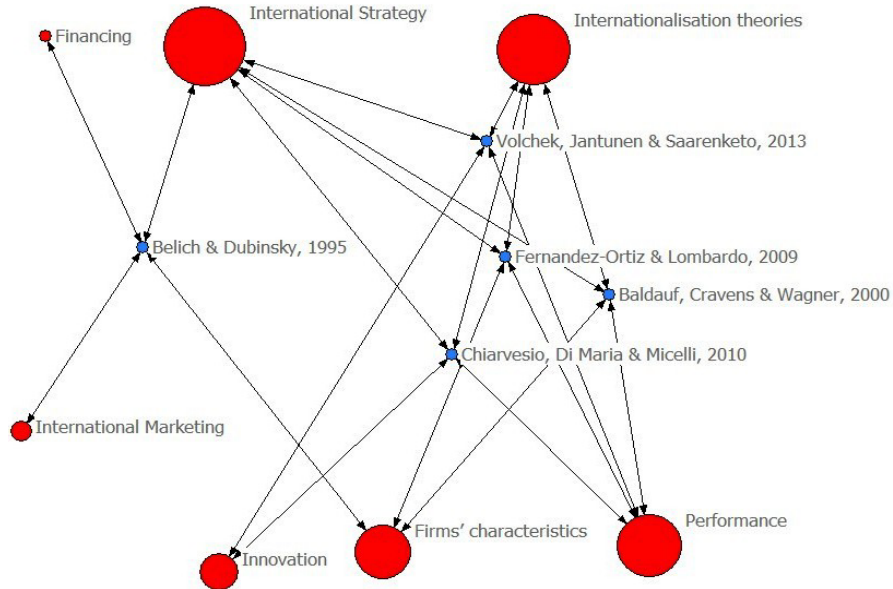
After analysing the 382 papers, we also found that 41% (158) of them deal with only one category; 168 (44%) cover two categories; 13% (50) cover three categories, and, finally, five papers (1%) cover four categories. More importantly, the potential power of SNA is witnessed in Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 in which it is possible to follow how prevalent the categories are as well as the growing importance of the international strategies category when the authors increase the complexity of their research.

Figure 1 Researchers dealing with one category (1995–2014) (see online version for colours)



Source: Own preparation; produced using NetDraw software package (Borgatti et al., 2002)

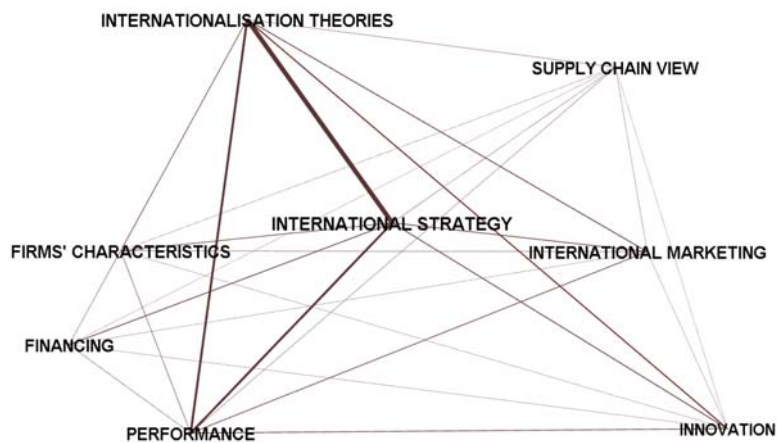
Figure 4 Researchers dealing with four categories (1995–2014) (see online version for colours)



Source: Own preparation; produced using NetDraw software package (Borgatti et al., 2002)

As shown in Figure 5, it is possible to conclude that, when analysing the whole 1995–2014 period, there are strong ties among internationalisation theories, international strategy and performance. This picture changes when one analyses the different timeframes separately.

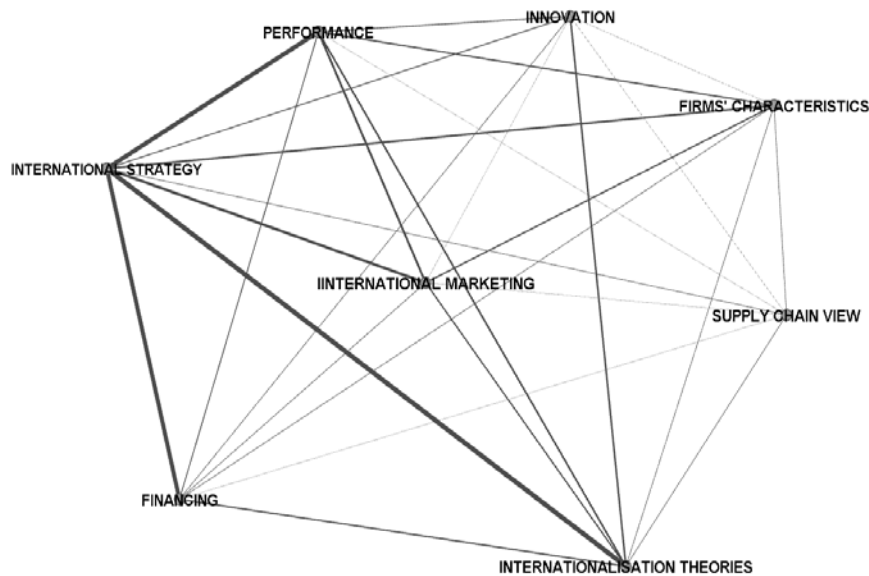
Figure 5 Relationships among categories (1995–2014) (see online version for colours)



Source: Own preparation; graph produced using Gephi 0.8.2 software package

During the first period (1995–2005), as shown in Figure 6, the category international strategy has strong ties with international theories, performance and financing. On the other hand, one can claim that innovation and supply chain categories have the weakest ties with the other categories. Between 1996 and 2014 (Figure 7) there are some slight changes as international theories and international strategy have strong ties with performance. However, one can witness the increasing importance for example of innovation as a category, when compared with the previous period.

Figure 6 Relationships among categories (1995–2005)

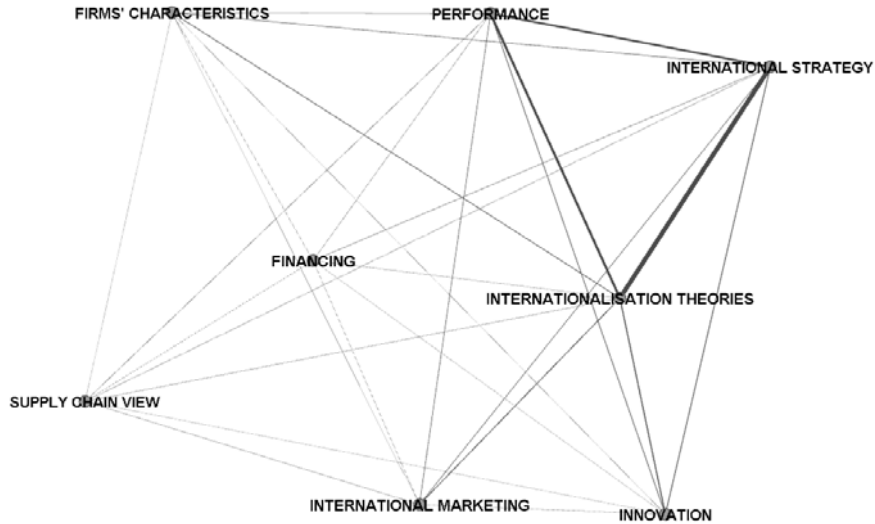


Source: Own preparation; produced using Gephi 0.8.2 software package

One can conclude that research on SME internationalisation has been evolving mainly on three categories: internationalisation theories, international strategy and performance; however the interconnection with other categories has been evolving over time.

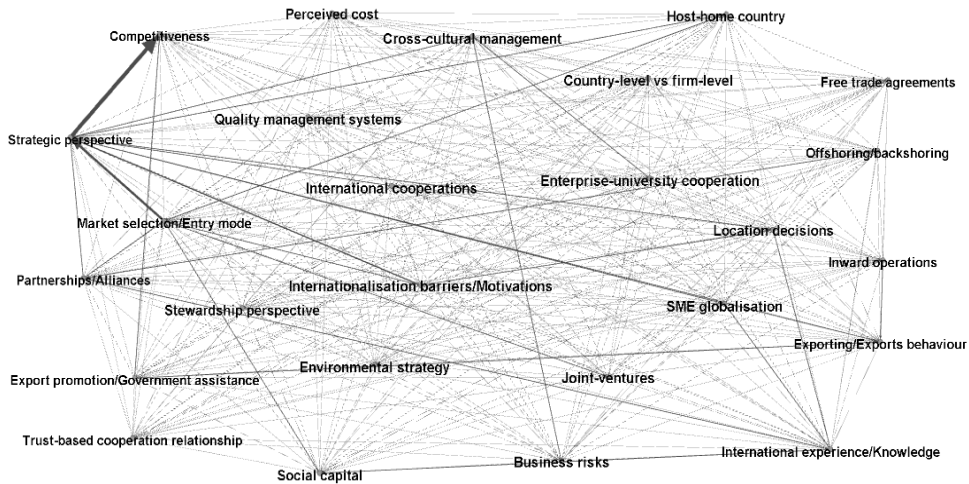
When analysing the importance of topics within the categories one can conclude that outcome/performance covers 21% of the articles (81 out of 382), the topic internationalisation process covers 17% (64 out of 382) of the articles; the network view 16%, the entrepreneurship approach includes 59 articles (15%) and the strategic perspective represents 14% (54 out of 382) of the articles. One can conclude that SME internationalisation research is fragmented, being characterised by a concentration-fragmentation dichotomy, i.e. despite a total of 88 different topics were found on the literature in this field almost 83% of the research cover five particular topics and 50% of the research is covered by the main three categories identified. Clearly, researchers tend to explore new topics which are anchored in the three core categories referred to above.

Figure 7 Relationships among categories (2006–2014)



Source: Own preparation; produced using Gephi 0.8.2 software package

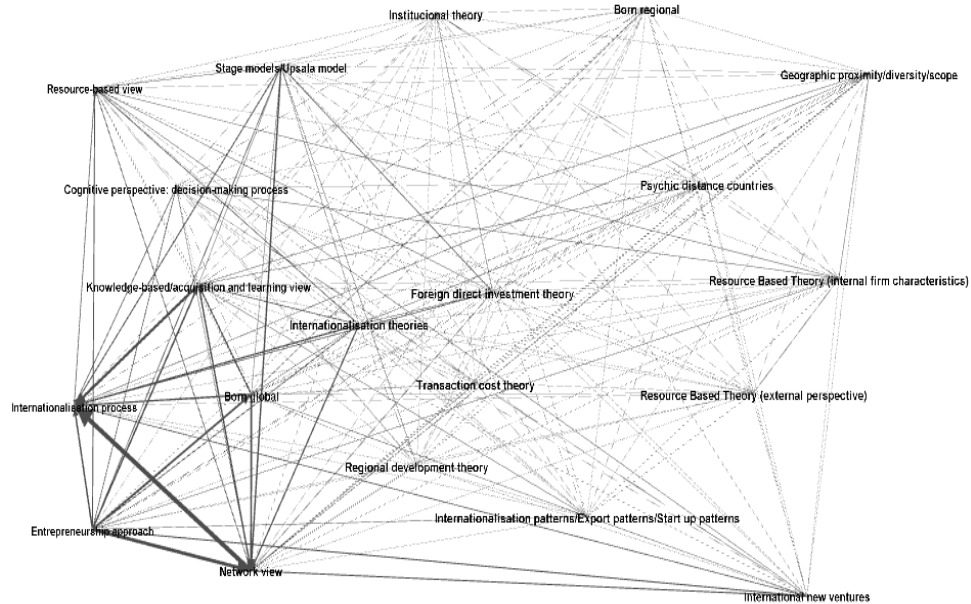
Figure 8 Relationships among topics within international strategy



Source: Own preparation; produced using Gephi 0.8.2 software package

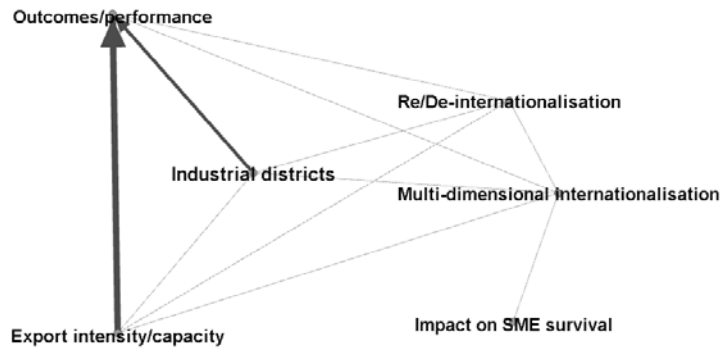
Figures 8, 9 and 10 show the most important categories and the relational ties among the topics included in the categories. From Figure 8, one can conclude that competitiveness, strategic perspective and market selection/entry mode/market entry are the most important within international strategy category. From Figure 9, it is possible to note that the relational ties within the category of internationalisation theories are important mainly across the following topics: internationalisation process, network view, knowledge-based/acquisition and learning view, born globals, entrepreneurship approach, stage model and resource-based view.

Figure 9 Relationships among topics within internationalisation theories



Source: Own preparation; graph produced using Gephi 0.8.2 software package

Figure 10 Relationships among topics within performance



Source: Own preparation; produced using Gephi 0.8.2 software package

The social network structure of the performance category is displayed in Figure 10, in which the strong ties between export intensity/capacity, industrial districts and performance stand out.

When comparing the figures relating the categories and the topics one realise that the network density is differs in the number of topics (within each category), as the number of articles that compose the topics and categories differ as well. However, the comparison

across networks (dense or sparse according to the number of networks nodes and ties in the network) cannot be used due to the significant variation in the network size (Scott, 2013).

As can be seen in Table 3, there is a clear prevalence of studies covering industry as opposed to services (44% vs. 11%). Using the SNA software, shown in Figure 11, one can also conclude that there are no overlaps on those studies. It is also notable that multi-sector studies (26%) are more prevalent than single-sector (18%) studies as shown in Table 3 and Figure 12.

It is possible to conclude that there several multi-industry papers: there are five papers involving the analysis of at least five industries; seven articles analysing four different industries and nine papers analysing three different industries. Moreover, there is one paper that covers the following industries: wood/furniture, computers, footwear, mechanical tools/machinery, textiles, clothing/fashion and food. By examining a greater variety of industries, the academic community can enhance the understanding of the links among industry sectors and internationalisation patterns generalising its knowledge to greater range of sectors.

As shown in Figure 13, 93.77% of the papers on SME internationalisation take a single continent approach. From the 353 empirical studies, five papers SMEs located in three continents (Mikhailitchenko and Lundstrom, 2006; Rodriguez, 2007; Gurău and Merdji, 2008; Hong and Roh, 2009; Bell and Loane, 2010). There are 17 papers addressing two SMEs in two continents. However, one can find that studies carried out in Africa are very few and quite isolated.

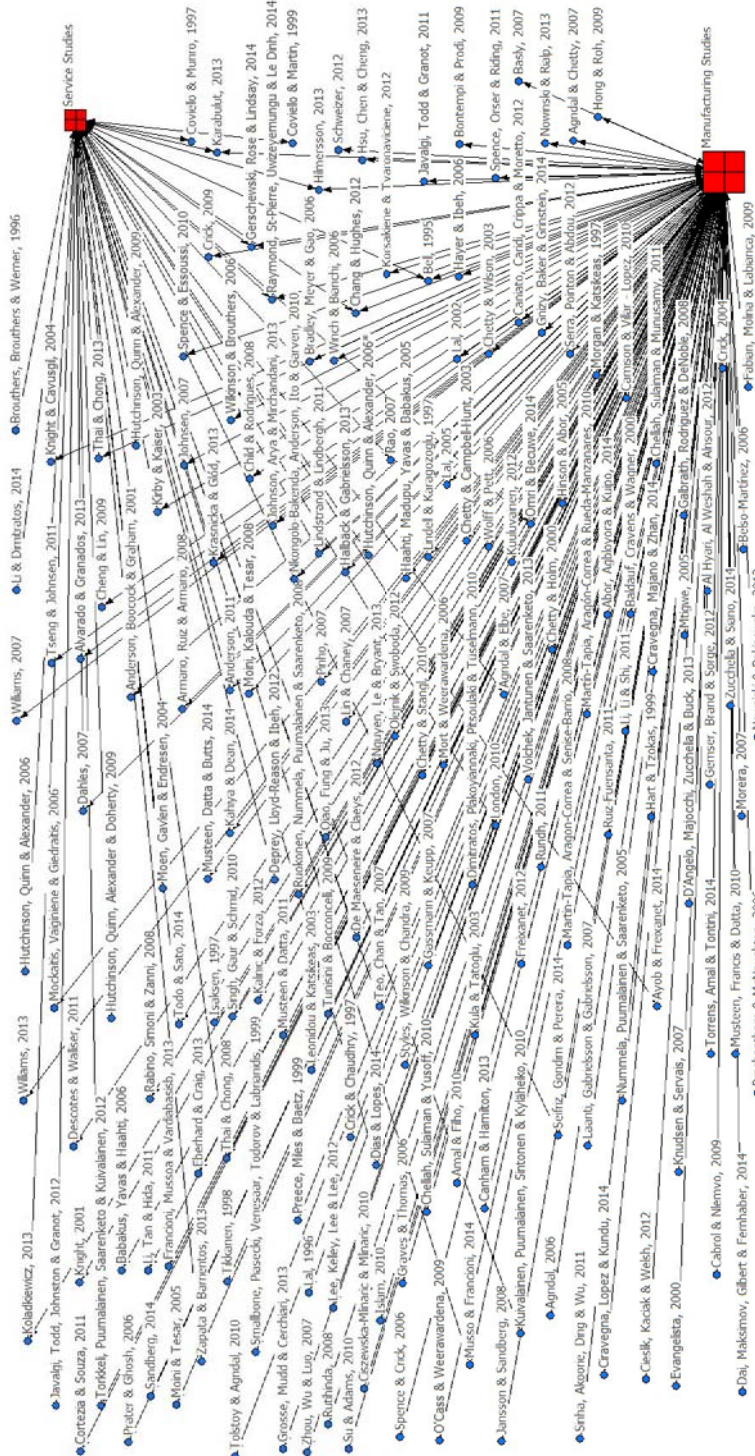
Europe represents 55.81% of the empirical studies (197 of 353), followed by the American continent with 20.11% (71 of 353), Asia with 15.58%, Oceania with 8.78% and finally the African continent with only 2.83%. In the American continent, 59.15% of the studies are from the USA and Canada. The representation of SME internationalisation across countries is shown in Figure 14.

Table 3 SME branch and sectoral nature

<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Papers (%)</i>	<i>Service studies</i>	<i>Manufacturing studies</i>	<i>Multi-sector studies</i>	<i>Single-sector studies</i>
1995–2005	66 (18.7)	6 (15.4)	29 4	16 1	15 2
2006–2014	287 (81.3)	33 (84.6)	127 3	77 1	48 3
Total	353 100	39 11.05	156 44.19	93 26.35	63 17.85

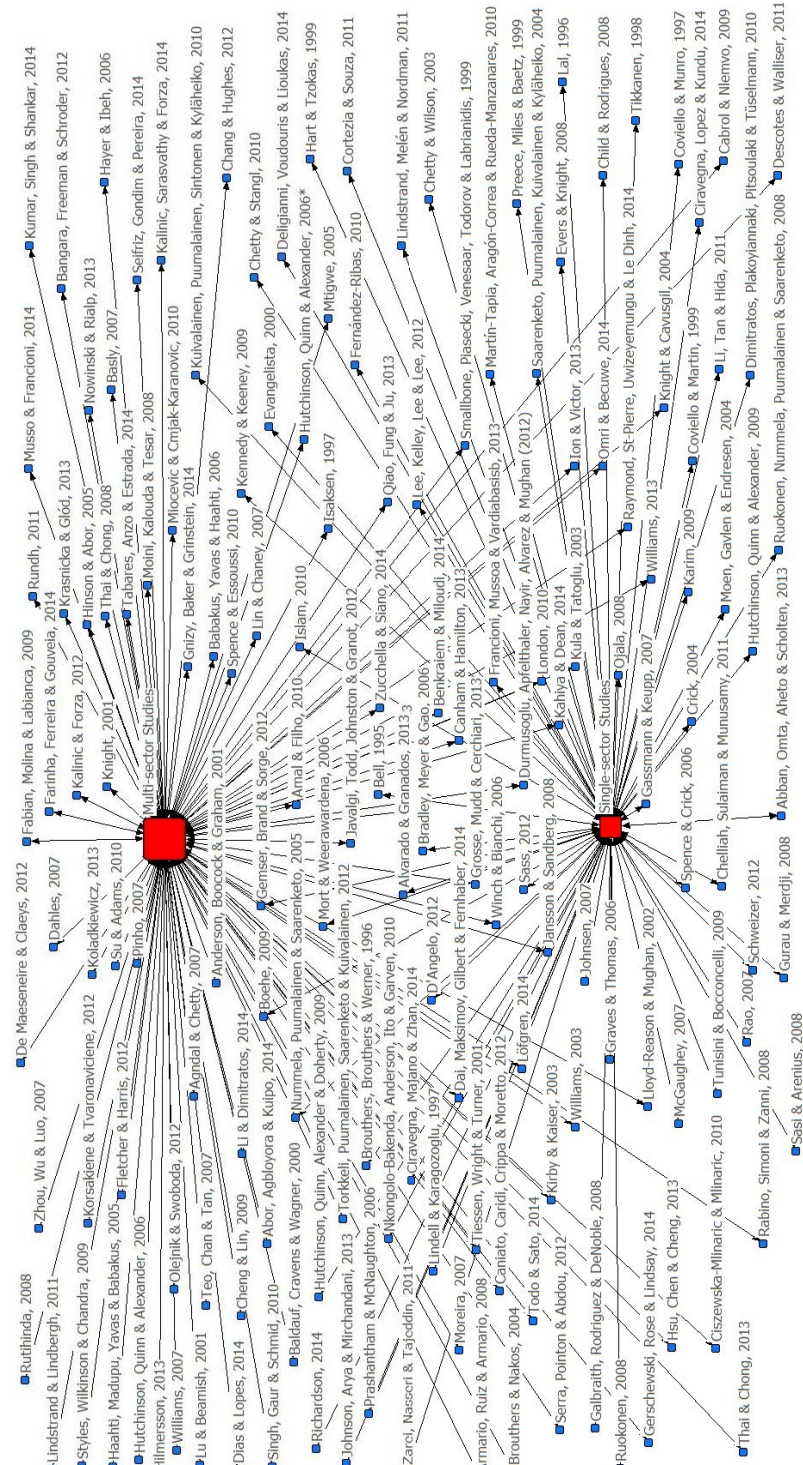
Source: Own preparation

Figure 11 Service vs. manufacturing studies (1995–2014) (see online version for colours)



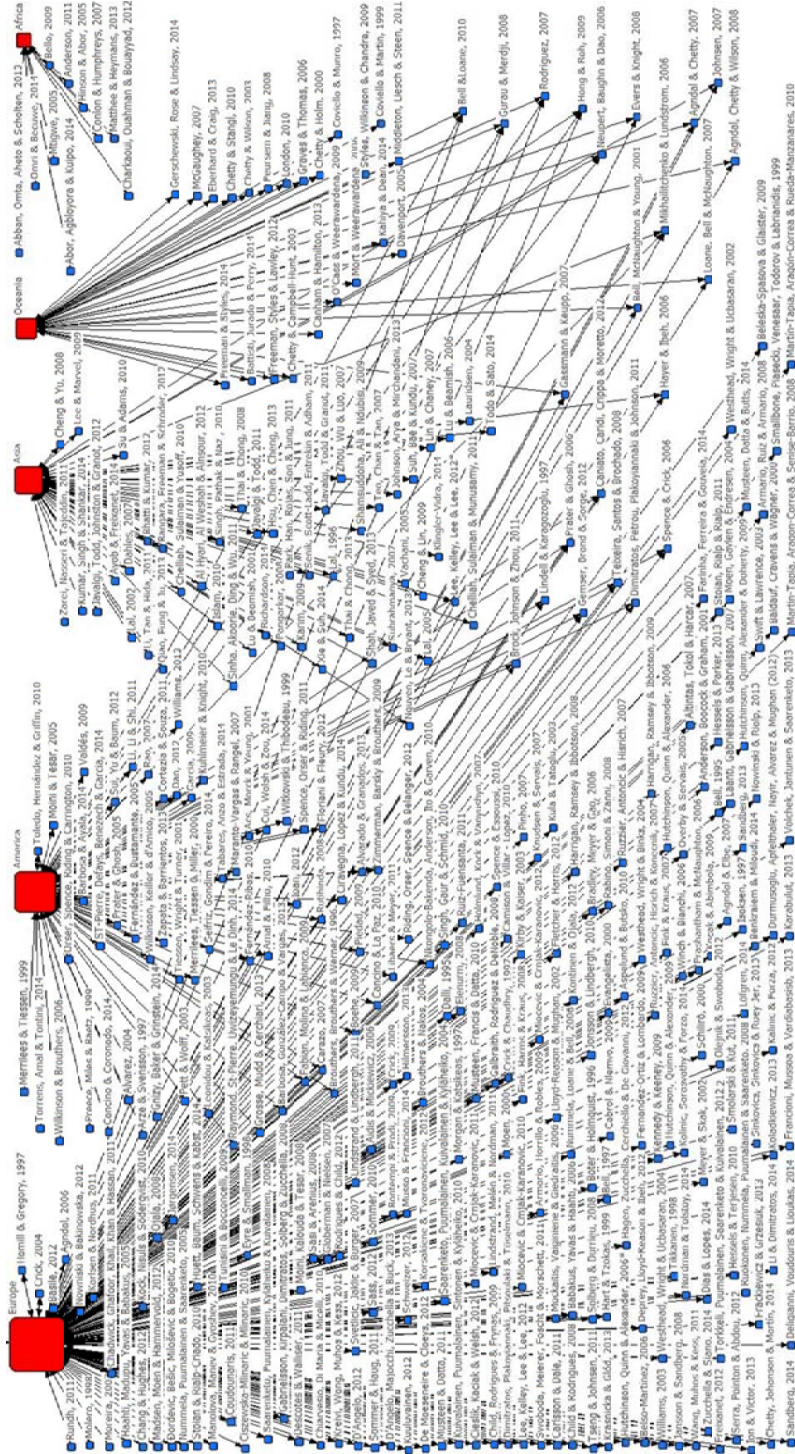
Source: Own preparation; produced using NetDraw software package (Borgatti et al., 2002)

Figure 12 Single vs. multi-sector studies (1995–2014) (see online version for colours)



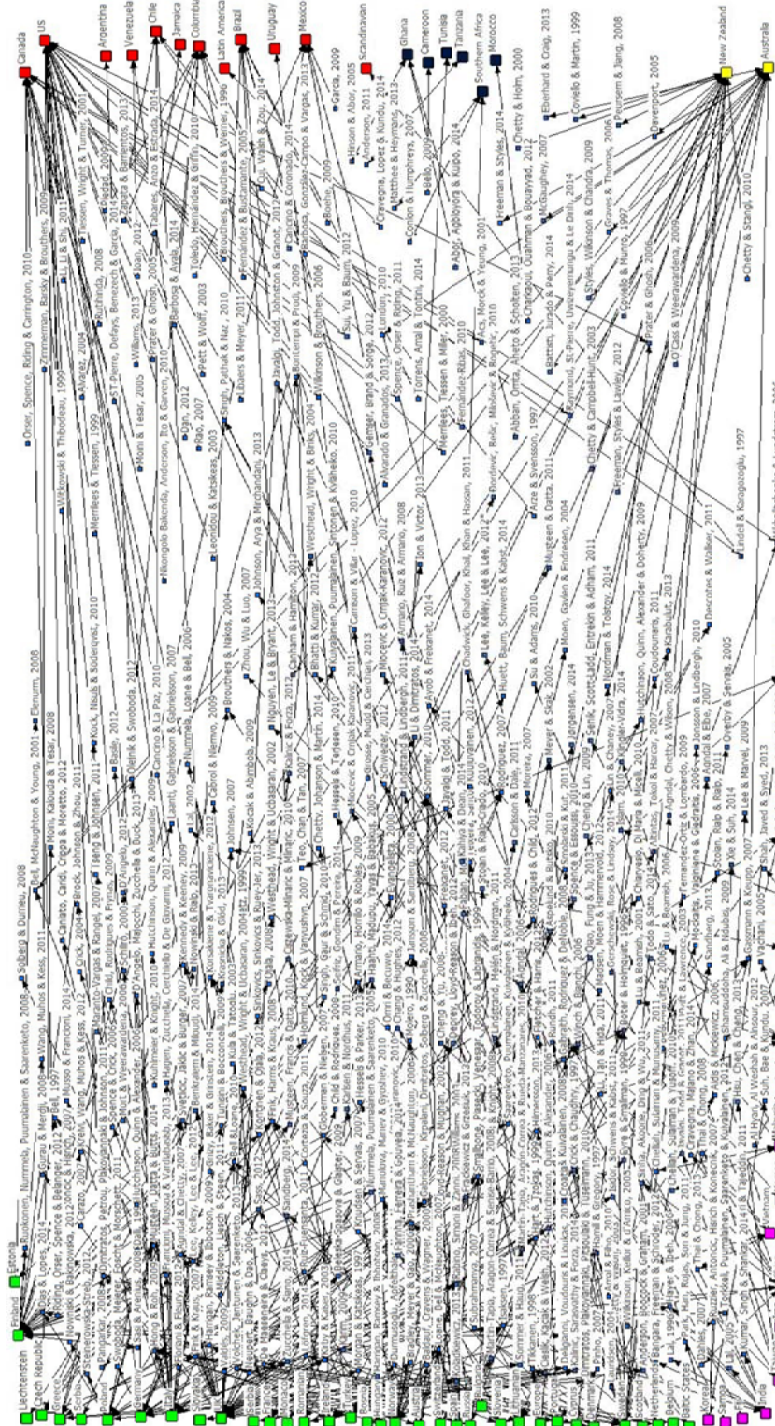
Source: Own preparation; produced using NetDraw software package (Borgatti et al., 2002)

Figure 13 Geographic localisation of SME internationalisation by continents (1995–2014) (see online version for colours)



Source: Own preparation; produced using NetDraw software package (Borgatti et al., 2002)

Figure 14 Geographic localisation of SME by countries (1995–2014) (see online version for colours)



Source: Own preparation; produced using NetDraw software package (Bongatti et al., 2002)

5 Discussion and limitations

This study contributes to the understanding of the multifaceted perspectives of SME internationalisation, which covers 88 different topics and eight different categories. Moreover, it identifies not only that performance is one of the most commonly addressed topic (81 articles), but also that internationalisation theories category cover 20 different topics (239 articles) and the international strategy category covers 26 different topics involving 187 articles.

One of the main conclusions is that SME internationalisation is a multifaceted area involving different perspectives. There are three main categories: internationalisation theories, international strategy and performance, which follow a typical historical perspective based on traditional theories – namely, the Uppsala model and the resource-based view of the firm. However, one can also claim that the entrepreneurial perspective – based on new international ventures, born globals, and early internationalisation – has paved the way in SME internationalisation studies. The internationalisation theories category stands out as most of the papers within this category are backed up by different backgrounds such as resource-based view, networked approach, knowledge-based view, internationalisation process.

The internationalisation strategy category is supported mainly by the following topics: the strategic perspective, internationalisation competencies, market selection/entry mode, internationalisation barriers/motivations and cooperative strategies. The importance of the three categories and their interconnectedness is shown in Figure 3 using SNA. The ties among them have captured the attention of researchers, entrepreneurs and policymakers alike.

Although manufacturing industry studies are prevalent, especially in the area of food and textile industries, followed by electronics and machinery industries, multi-sector studies are gaining importance with 26% of the studies. Clearly, there is a huge opportunity not only to diversify the study of manufacturing sectors, but also in the service industry that is clearly underrepresented. This would help to identify how a service based perspective would complement the theory that has been built-up by studying manufacturing industry. Moreover, the particular characteristics of the services mean that brand new windows of opportunity may unfold in areas such as modes of entry, international service provision, product/process innovation, and entrepreneurial perspective, among other things. Although there are several studies involving multiple sectors, there is a lack of comparative research within and across sectors.

International marketing, supply chain, innovation, financing and firms' characteristics are the categories that received the least attention by researchers. On the other hand, they are also very recent. However, if SMEs are so pervasive and so important to the creation of new businesses and employment, it is imperative that research on those new categories can be targeted by the research community and public policy.

As referred in the introduction, this article had five objectives that were meant to be dealt with SNA. Regarding the first three objectives we can conclude that researchers have been using mainly three categories, which have been extensively relying on a battery of 88 topics. The strong interconnection between the three main categories and the main topics is the result of an evolutionary path involving the search for better performance based on a several theories (resource-based view, entrepreneurship, network-based view and the internationalisation process) in which the international strategy (strategic perspective of the firm, market solution and entry models, export

barriers/motivations and international competencies) play a crucial role. It is also important to refer that there has been an evolutionary perspective in what concerns the number of topics as recent studies cover not only new breathe of topics but also intertwines them with more topics and categories, which is an important trend among researchers and academics.

Although research on service internationalisation has relied extensively on traditional industry-based theories, another important conclusion is that research on manufacturing and service internationalisation has been following independent paths. As such it would be important for academics to address internationalisation of service and industrial firms in order to complement the knowledge each strand has in an integrative way.

Regarding the geographical origin of the studies, it would be important to address how different studies from Europe and the USA are from studies carried out in Latin America, Asia or Africa, as the resource endowment of those geographical areas are totally uneven. Moreover, it would be of added value to compare the content of African-based studies regarding the barriers, motivation and challenges African small firms face as it would unleash how this multifaceted, polycentric world of SMEs evolves.

Practitioners, policymakers and academics need to be aware of the important new topics that have been evolving on SME internationalisation. In this case SNA might be a useful tool to analyse for example how important topics or categories are important for different countries or continents, how topics might differ for manufacturing and service firms as well as how family firms, new international returns and born globals differ in their use of the different topics and theories. It might be useful as well in analysing how SMEs and large firms really differ.

Every research has its limitation. In this case one of the limitations is related with the pre-defined keywords-research criterion used in the search for articles.

If for example one wants to use a more (or less) restrictive keyword-search, the number of articles would have been totally different. Another limitation is related to the topic searched: SMEs. Had we chosen family firms, or born global, or new international ventures the result would have been different. Another limitation is that we excluded book chapters, books, monographs and dissertations, as well as non-English literature. As such future studies might address literature in Spanish and Portuguese, which might be useful in addressing Latin American SMEs, and French, which might be advantageous for addressing African SMEs.

Due to the multi-disciplinary and multi-theoretical nature of SME internationalisation, measuring this complex phenomenon would be important for the development and consolidation of this research area. As such, in order to deepen the analysis in future reviews one might assess SME internationalisation using another search terms or using the SNA using attributes to categorise the network or analysing the actors positions in the network, or using centrality measures and connectivity. SNA might be an important contribution for the process of debate, testing and theorising.

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