Actions, actors, strategies and growth trajectories in international entrepreneurship

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Introductions

This article reviews the evolutionary trends of a few concepts with significant theoretical and operational impacts on entrepreneurial enterprises and their internationalization experience over time. It will draw and builds on the discussion of issues that have appeared in the journal already. Recent research findings, however, necessitate revisiting some of them for developing a deeper understanding and stimulate further discussion when necessary.

Although the scholarly discussion of international entrepreneurship (IE) as a field of scholarly inquiry emerged in the 1980s (Morrow 1988) and has been evolving over the past three decades, the historical records show that prominent European family firms were involved in international trade before Christianity. Furthermore, the description of actual entrepreneurs travelling from China to Central Europe, and vice versa, dates back to more than 3000 years ago (Etemad 2004a, 2013). One would, therefore, expect perfect clarity in all aspects and concept in the field by now, but some basic concepts still remain unclear, which in turn call for further discussion to gain higher clarity and stronger consensus in the field. This article will, therefore, attempt to highlight a selected list of such issues, briefly examine their evolutionary paths, place them in the context of the recent developments and empirical findings and present suggestions for their further developments toward higher conceptual and consensual clarity.

Based on published reports (e.g. Cantillon 1755 and Say 2008), there is a perception that the practice of IE (or entrepreneurial internationalization) started from a clean slate in the latter parts of the eighteenth or early nineteenth century in Europe. Even within Europe, however, the prominent European family firms had engaged in trading and entrepreneurship within the European continent more than two millennia ago. Beyond Europe, trading caravans, the ancient counterparts of the modern trading missions, spanned vast territories. Caravans were composed of individual and organized entrepreneurs who travelled back and forth on the trading routes (e.g. the famed “Silk

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Road”) between the present China to Central Europe, which can be traced back to some three millennia ago (Etemad 2004a, b, 2013). Such travelling practices originated in the ancient Persian Empire along the routes of the Imperial Postal Services and gradually extended in the easterly direction to the Central and the Far-eastern Asia and on the westerly direction reached beyond Asia Minor in to Central Europe. Generally, a trading caravan started from the “Middle Kingdom (the present China) and travelled westward through northern China, Russian Steppes and Northern Persian Empire (present Central Asia) and through Asia Minor (parts of the present Turkey) or the Northern Middle East, on their way to Central Europe. They stopped in major cities on their way to sell what they had brought with them, to buy local supplies for next destinations and to exchange what was locally demanded and supplied at each stop-over location. Most of trading transactions took place in the central commercial locations (e.g. Central commercial district or in the proximity of the Grand Bazaars).

The members of these international travelling caravans should be viewed as the true predecessors of the modern international entrepreneurs. They took the *high risks of exposure to personal hazards and organized highway robberies* in a nearly year-long travel and the uncertainty of buying and carrying tradable commodities for potential (but not definitive) sales in different stop-overs, which involved their network of local intermediaries and other local agents, with some of whom they had established longer term relations (Etemad and Dana 2000). Retrospectively, these entrepreneurs of the past eras were more entrepreneurially oriented¹ than their modern counterparts and had established stronger ties with local traders than what the modern network links suggest. In the absence of detailed historical information,² they must have been highly optimistic, proactive, competitive, committed and forward-looking bearing immeasurable risks. These traits are among the dominant attributes of modern entrepreneurial orientation now.

On their return, these travelling entrepreneurs capitalized on their past experience and the acquired information during the previous leg of their travel to maximize the opportunities by loading up on local specialities demanded elsewhere. They acquired information about local demand, learned at each location and accumulated experience over time, mostly at the individual levels.

The noteworthy point of the above brief historical portrayal is the antecedents of the concept of international entrepreneurship (EI), entailing complex and time-consuming human, socio-economic and political contexts, involved long-term planning, preparations and complicated processes. They also required rudimentary knowledge of international economics, international relations with various foreign buyer (mainly traders), their inter-related decisions and composition of local supplies and demands, informed by precious little information that they had somehow acquired then, which *were all embedded in their own* prevailing contexts and time in the past. Furthermore, not everyone participated in such arduous and difficult processes. Only a special class of

¹ For detailed description and developments in modern entrepreneurial orientation, see Etemad 2015a, b, c.

² There are documented historical information in religious studies about the travelling caravans and the fort-like out-post called “Caravan-Saras” (Home for Caravans in Persian) with multiple purposes. They provided accommodation for occasional travellers and mainly for the religious missionaries, who recorded various occurrences in their travel summaries and reported on their missions at their destinations. For the international trading caravans, Caravan-Saras provided safe stop-overs, warehousing and travel provisions, including replacements for horses and mules as well as basic supplies and repairs.

people “undertook” to get involved. Richard Cantillon, an Irish-French economist, called them the “entrepreneurs” (The under-takers in French) in the late seventeenth century and laid the ground work for the emergence of modern international trade and economics (Cantillon 1755).³ It is only logical to suggest that the embedding context(s) have been always present, although operating, at times implicitly, in the background, and that one needs to account for their potential effects.

The advents of information explosion, increased mobility of individuals and enterprises and advances in innovation, production and technology, including the global e-commerce, among a host of many other recent developments, have expanded our information horizons and over-crowded our consideration sets. Such progress, modernization and especially information explosion have helped to simplify many decisions; but they may have further complicated others at the same time, as the *deep knowledge of their antecedents and prior context do not seem necessary any longer*. Consequently, some international entrepreneurs do not do the necessary due diligence by informing themselves thoroughly *to reduce, or possibly avoid, risks and uncertainties*. Consider for example that international trade in precious materials, silk, carpets and house-hold chemicals, among others in the past eras, took years of planning, accumulating and warehousing of tradable supplies along with preparations for long travels before international traders could join a travelling caravan to conduct international trade and commerce. Such *task-environment, or the context, governed the conduct of international entrepreneurs and international entrepreneurship then*. It is logical to suggest that *modernity may have changed some, but not all, aspect of past*. The counterparts of the past context are still operating implicitly in the background and their *intangible effects should not scape us*; which in turn necessitate some semblance of contextual effect to enter our considerations; although they may remain intangible or implicit for the most parts.

The aims and objectives of this article Following the above discussion, the main aim of article is to portray prior developments, or antecedents, in order to help contextualize numerous issues discussed in this issue before turning to highlighting the next four articles that relate to them. The ultimate objective is offer pathways toward more clarity and consensus.

The structure of this article This article consists of five basic parts. Following the above introduction, part II presents a discussion of selected basic aspects of international entrepreneurship, including the role of time and timing and the dynamics of various local life cycles in different international markets. The highlight of the other four article in this issue will appear in part III. In part IV, a brief integrative discussion

³ The study of entrepreneurship reaches back to the work in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries of Irish-French economist Richard Cantillon, which was foundational to classical economics. Cantillon defined the term first in his *Essai sur la Nature du Commerce en Général*, or *Essay on the Nature of Trade in General*; it referred to a person who would pay a certain price for a product to resells it at an uncertain price, “making decisions about obtaining and using the resources while consequently admitting the risk of enterprise” (Cantillon 1755). Cantillon emphasized the willingness of the entrepreneur to assume the risk and to deal with uncertainty. Reportedly, Jean-Baptiste Say (1998) has also identified entrepreneurs as the driver for economic development, emphasizing their role in collecting input factors for production by diverting resources from less to more productive activities and fields.

will relate different topics discussed in part II with research finding presented in this issue. The “[Conclusion and implications](#)” section will draw lessons for scholarly research and the management of entrepreneurially internationalized and family firms. Implication for management and public policy will be presented at the end.

Basic aspects of international entrepreneurship in perspective

This section addresses selective aspects of international entrepreneurship within their respective contexts in order to discuss the effect of context on the substance (or impact) of the concept at hand. At times, the context is implicit, but it has an impact on the concept and its meaning or operational effects. A brief discussion of three thematic topics will be presented below.

Time and timing in international entrepreneurship A few aspects of time have distinguished the behaviour of IE enterprises from the traditional international business firms. For example, Born Globals (Rennie 1993 and Knight and Cavusgil 1996), INVs (McDougall et al. 1994; Oviatt and McDougall 1994) and Rapidly Internationalizing and High Growth Enterprises—RIEs and HGEs (Etemad and Wu 2013; Etemad 2007; Keen and Etemad 2011, 2012)—have been generally younger enterprises that started their internationalization process much earlier than their counterparts conducting traditional international business have.

Three questions arise: (i) what accounts for the young enterprises starting-up earlier or proceeding faster; (ii) how earlier do, or should, they start their internationalization; and (iii) what account for such relative hurried perspective? One perspective (Etemad 2007) suggests that knowledge and technological intensities could be among the significant influential factors in accelerating pertinent processes. The underlying argument is that the probability of competitors entering the market with similar knowledge and technologies increases with elapsed time. At the same time, the overall *useful life* of such advanced knowledge and cutting-edge technologies decreases with time, as if their corresponding novelty and value decays with time. The entrepreneurial perception of such decaying processes, real or otherwise, necessitate rushing their commercialization (and internationalization) at the earliest possible time in order to minimize the adverse impact of anticipated decays.

Similar concerns operate in high investments in early stages (e.g. early stages of commercialization), when investors (e.g. venture capitalists) opt to empower a young enterprise with a *highly potent patrimonial heritage with carry-over power* in order to enable the young start-up to propel and accelerate its growth rate in the market. When expensive early investments for creating high capital and intellectual intensities prior to their focal start-up and commercialization process (or high early patrimonial heritage with carry-over effects) (Etemad 2018a) is required, investors expect earlier and higher returns, which necessitate higher growth rates for higher return as if the time units for attaining growth is forced to shrink substantially. From the perspective of the younger and smaller enterprises, the carrying costs of such high early patrimonial heritage forces them to commercialize and grow as fast as possible, including much earlier internationalization, than otherwise to reduce their debt burden. Furthermore, the highly experienced, or resourceful, founder-entrepreneur-managers’ *expedited sense of internal*

time and timing (Etemad and Wu 2013) may not only accelerate commercialization and internationalization but also increase the speed and scope of internationalization as compared to others.

This brief discussion points to the critical and influential role of the time and timing context on start-ups that are destined to become BGs, INVs, RIEs or HGEs in particular and early internationalizing firms (EIFs) in general. The related theoretical question is whether the theory underlying the young field of international entrepreneurship has accounted for the above ex-ante accelerated time and timing as an integral part of the contextual environment facing IE agents? Briefly, the answer is in the negative. Naturally, there is a need for revisiting this topic.

Firm life cycles and internationalization Following a recent discussion of a typical firm's life cycle (FLC) (see Etemad 2018a, 2017c), authors have used various terminologies to refer to the starting point of IE firm's activities, including the process of *conception*, the time of formal *inception*, *establishment* or *foundation*. *After some elapsed time from that point in time*, an IE firm is expected to embark on commercial activities in a market and then begin internationalization sometimes later. Logically, differing length of elapsed time will relate to different points on the firm's life cycle with different characteristics. It is not clear which starting point(s) should be used for measuring, for example, the speed and the scope (or breadth) of internationalization, which in turn, affect the firm's growth rate toward maturity and possible decline to follow. In the absence of an enacted strategy for revival and renewal at an earlier point in time before the on-setting of declines, the first and other progressive internationalizations would mitigate and, possibly reverse, further declines. In light of the firm's life cycle characterizing firm's growth trajectory (see Fig. 1 for schematic representation of a typical FLC, firm's overall growth trajectory), this brief portrayal raises a series of unclear concepts, including but not limited to the following questions:

1. Which activities represented by the various terms should be used as a starting point and why?
2. Which sequence of market entries in different markets could yield higher (optimal or desired) growth, longer life, higher profitability or a combination thereof?
3. How would intense competition or competitive efforts in one market affect other firms?
4. How would the life cycle trajectory in one, or a few, markets impacts the longer term, or overall, FLC of the firm as a whole?

Again, the underlying theory has yet to provide clear answers or guidance. Naturally, there is a need to revisit this topic.

International markets and growth trajectories The challenge of generating revenues in foreign markets relatively quickly distinguishes international entrepreneurship firms from others. Attaining growth in different foreign local markets may entail tailor made strategic efforts in each market and result in different growth trajectories. Naturally, the firm's overall growth is the sum total of the various growths (in absolute or relative terms) in all local markets and is reflective of success, or lack thereof, in markets, where

Fig. 1 Progressive entries into international markets and the firm's overall growth trajectory

the firm is active. Therefore, the timing and the magnitude of growth rates in any of the local foreign markets affects the firm's overall growth and growth rate (see Fig. 1). Facing and fighting intense competition in one market, or a few markets, may not only adversely affect the principal firm's overall growth but also affect growth in other related country markets. This brief discussion points to the obvious interdependencies among the deployed strategies in different country-market environments, including their respective point and mode of entries, each of which could have its own enhancing (e.g. learning, scale and scope economies, etc.) or constraining (e.g. stiff competition or regulations, absence of collaborative network, etc.) indirectly affecting growth of others. Furthermore, the composition and nature of different portfolio of goods, services, the mode(s) and timing(s) of entry and growth in each of the local market and consequently influence the firm's speed of internationalization, its overall growth and life cycle trajectories.

Consider, for example, the potential impact of the inherent characteristic of a single factor, such as knowledge or intellectual property, on the firm's internationalization. Intellectual property or knowledge could be either *explicit and codified* or *implicit and embedded in its context*. Generally, the internationalization of a firm's products, services or intellectual property can be comparatively easier and faster, when the knowledge underlying them is explicit, regardless of the firm size. Simpler strategies can be used (e.g. exporting), when the underlying knowledge is already codified and *not context-bound*. In contrast, when the knowledge is implicit (e.g. processes are embedded in, and inseparable from, their context), internationalization may also entail transferring the context to international markets as well, which is logically more

difficult, more time-consuming, more expensive and beyond the reach of smaller firms and in early stages of their lives. Furthermore, transferring the context to international market is more complex and simple strategies, such as exporting, cannot be used; which in turn require larger and higher capacities to conduct the transfer to international markets. The above discussion also raises a family of corresponding questions, including but not limited to the following:

1. How strongly should the principal firm compete in any given country (or regional) market to achieve its overall a-priori objectives and, conversely, which markets should it enter to realize a desired portion of its revenues in the specified time period (which relate to definitions of Born Globals, INVs and others)?
2. What portfolio of products and services should be internationalized by smaller and younger firms earlier on and which ones later on?
3. Under what conditions should a firm *refrain from certain international activities* (e.g. *services with implicit knowledge*), or even withdraw from, certain country markets?
4. When withdrawals become necessary, should it be from all, or selected, market(s) for concentrating at home or major markets?
5. How and under which set of conditions, should a firm *re-enter* selected international markets (e.g. a few lead-markets with new product lines or services?) in order to realize certain objectives, including higher growths or longer firm life?

Again, the underlying theory of internationalization has yet to provide clear answers or guidance to the above, and similar, questions. Naturally, there is a need for revisiting these topics.

The highlights of the articles in this issue

Recalling the earlier discussion in the introduction, a few issues in international entrepreneurship have yet to achieve clarity and consensus, including a well-agreed-upon definition of IE agent and actors, the characteristics of their firms and the trajectory of their firm's life cycle (FLC), especially those who embark on early entrepreneurial internationalization, among others. Such lack of clarity and strong consensus in an emerging and young field should not be worrisome as it is an indication of the field's expansion and growth dynamics. Conversely, the absence of dynamism and scholarly fluidity would be highly worrisome in a young field, as other well-established fields have experienced early fluidities in their early lives before achieving solidified foundations. Additionally, as a scholarly field, international entrepreneurship's strong contextual relationship with the ever-innovative and risk-bearing practices of entrepreneurs in ever-changing, competitive and dynamic international markets makes it a more dynamic field. Furthermore, the rising consumer expectations, changing trends and the socio-economics dynamism of emerging markets also add to that contextual dynamism, which give rise to a fluidity that defies the comfort of constancy and static conditions over time. The articles contained in this issue address some of the above challenges and dynamism. They also provide empirical evidence, either as support or as potential answers, to some of the questions raised earlier.

The second article in this issue, entitled as “The long-term trajectory of international new ventures: A longitudinal study of software developers”, takes up the challenge of exploring some of the above issues and tracing their dynamics over time. It is co-authored by Renato Cotta de Mello, Angela da Rocha and Jorge Ferreira da Silva and is a *longitudinal study of seven high-technology Brazilian enterprises*. Inherent in longitudinal study of dynamic agents is change, some of which were expected at the beginning and the study’s initial research design framework would be capable of handling and the others that pose challenges along the way.

Methodologically, the authors conducted 28 interviews with the managerial teams of the focal firms. However and as discussed above, the dynamics of entrepreneurial internationalization in a firm may expose researchers to unanticipated issues at the outset, which necessitate a back-tracking for the possible presence, or absence of, similar issues across all other firms in the study. Such occurrences, especially in a dynamic phenomenon such as entrepreneurial internationalization, require the complements of archival and secondary as well as the primary information that would need triangulation to resolve potential errors of commissions, omissions and discrepancies. Developing complete and comprehensive trajectories could be both challenging and rewarding. The over-time trajectories could be viewed as the consequential manifestation of causal forces of evolution and change over time—some of which are initiated by entrepreneurs and the firms and others in reaction to others’ competitive initiatives or changes in the contextual environments, which force more detailed studies. The authors experienced and reported such *backward, forward tracing and triangulations* in their 8-year-long study of seven enterprises.

The initial research questions was to what extent does the internationalization process of high-tech firms fit the patterns and predictions of the extant theoretical frameworks, including the Uppsala internationalization process, the network theory, and the international entrepreneurship perspectives? Nearly all of the extant theoretical perspectives offer certain explanations for some parts, but not all, or features of a firm’s evolutionary path. Similar to milestone along a route when travelling over time, firms start from pre-start-up preparations and travel over the road to maturity over the firm’s life cycle with features that can potentially characterize mile stone along their travel routes. Accordingly, the authors adopted an extensive number of firm features to enable discrimination among the paths expected by the three perspective, which are summarized in three tables. Table 3 of the paper present a summary of the firms’ demographics (i.e. the year of inception, the main product lines, number of employees and percentage of turn over in 2007 and 2015 and the length of time between *inception* and the *first international experience*). Table 4 lists the highlights of internationalization features and behaviours (i.e. the trigger point of, early attitude toward, and overall motivation behind, internationalization) and Table 5 documents the extent of market uncertainty, attitude toward risk, speed of internationalization and the ultimate outcome in 2015. *Three firms succeeded well with increasing internationalization over time with 24%, 38% and 40% international turnovers. One firm achieved a small but stable international sales (5%) and three firms de-internationalized after their successful initial international activities.*

Retrospectively, the authors’ selection of an extensive list of distinguishing features allowed for a clearer portrayal of each firm’s travel path through time and search for a better fit of each firm’s trajectory’s with one of the theoretical perspectives. Similarly, this more inclusive approach provided for a better understanding of the various

distinguishing, and possibly discriminating, features on the one hand, and the assessing of whether one, or a few, theoretical perspectives would correspond better, or offer a richer explanation, for the empirical findings on the other hand. The authors focused on the latter perspective at the end and reported that “no single theoretical perspectives seem to be able to explain the international trajectory of the INVs overtime”, while “all of them may contribute to explain parts of a firm’s long term international trajectory.”

The findings of the above article point to the need for exploring the explanatory power of the extant theoretical foundations in some nuanced details not only cross-sectionally but also longitudinally over a firm’s life cycle trajectory. They also raise a few troubling conceptual, operational and theoretical issues, some of which were briefly discussed in part II of this article and others that will be addressed in the next three articles and in the discussion part. However, they all require further examination. As the extensive literature review of the third article in this issue presents a rich background discussion of most of those issues, such examination is deferred in favour of a more informed elaboration. However, the need for a thorough examination remain ever-present.

The third article in this issue is entitled as “Early internationalizing firms: 2004–2018” and is co-authored by Rubina Romanello⁴ and Maria Chiarvesio.⁵ As suggested by the title of the article, the authors took an inclusive and objective scholarly position by operationalizing the term “early internationalizing firms” (EIFs), rather than using other terms; which allowed them to include article discussing “Born Globals (BGs)”, “International New Ventures (INVs)” and “Rapidly Internationalizing Enterprises (RIE)”, among other terms. Each of these terms refers to, and is based on, its corresponding developmental literature. Stated briefly and differently, this article presents an extensive, inclusive and systematic review of the published IE literature without an ex-ante assumption or preference for one terms and the corresponding theory, between early 2004 to late 2018 regardless of their orientations.

The authors stated three objectives in carrying out the review: (a) portraying the state of the art of the literature, (b) identifying the various research themes that have emerged and evolved in past two to three decade of IE development, and (c) highlighting the over-time trends that may point to the direction of further research in the field. This article’s thematic approach offers deeper taxonomical insights of the literature than other reviews by identifying seven themes for grouping the literature. Accordingly, it enables the reader to draw upon the state in each of the identified themes in general and this article in particular to further discuss a list of selected topics that relate to other articles in this issue and to the field as whole. In the followings, we will highlight some of fundamental issue discussed in the paper.

Definition of the field’s actors and their actions As discussed briefly in the Introduction, a few definition of early internationalizing firms (EIF) have emerged, two of which have been dominantly adopted: namely, the definitions of the international new ventures (INVs) and Born Globals (BGs). INVs initially referred to young firms adopting an overall international orientation *soon after their foundation* (Oviatt and McDougall 1994), while Born Globals referred initially to smaller and younger firms selling a growing share of their production abroad (Rennie 1993). Knight and

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Cavusgil's (1996) modified the Rennie's description to the effect that Born Globals would be "small technology-oriented companies, which started operating in international markets from the earliest days of their establishments". This generalized definition did not specify the nature of firm's technology (e.g. whether it would be explicit or implicit, as discussed earlier), the extent of its early support system for internationalization (e.g. extent of patrimonial heritage) or founder(s)' characteristics. Although definitions have evolved along with the growth of the field, the above early definitions did not specify, or set expectations for the behaviour of the principal actors of the field clearly and fully, including founding entrepreneurs and supporters. Such, and similar, early omissions may have served as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the general specifications of the dominant definitions allowed other scholar to introduce more nuanced elaborations based on their empirical finding, while other scholars found the lack of clarity, if not imprecision, uncalled for on the other hand. Recalling the earlier discussion in the "Introductions" section, a few aspects of the definition merit further attention, including but not limited to the following aspects:

1. *The starting point of international orientation and action—What should be, or is, the internationalization behaviour at inception, soon after foundations or a short period after establishment?* As stated earlier, the context within which the future EIFs would begin their lives and evolve to maturity could be highly influential in effecting the initiation of internationalization in terms adoption of an international orientation to begin the planning for entering international markets after some elapsed time after a starting point in time—should that starting points be at "*inception*", "*foundation*", or "*establishment*", among others? The early definitions did not provide for the necessary level of exactitude for discriminating between firms with a view to their evolution over time. Consider for example, that knowledge-intensive and science-based new start-ups do not suffer from, and need not to adapt their products and services, as much for the socio-cultural and legal differences in different international markets. In contrast, non-science-based applications are not universal; and thus they cannot start their preparation for internationalization earlier, even when their entrepreneur-founder wish to do so earlier on, as opposed to later on; which point to a significant interaction between the elapsed time before internationalization and the entrepreneurial, firm characteristics and their market offerings. In short, there is a need for further clarity beyond the commonly used terminologies that have qualitatively different meaning, with the simultaneous presence of terms such as inception, foundations and establishments, which refer to different points in time along the firm's life cycle, as discussed earlier (see Fig. 1 for a schematic depiction of these points in time).
2. *The elapsed-period before internationalization.* As discussed earlier, the competitive advantage, or global competitiveness, of knowledge-intensive, science-based and high-technology resources may decay with time, thus applying pressure on already codified knowledge and technology to internationalize faster than others. Although most early support eco-systems desire a faster and larger commercialization, context-bound knowledge and technology (i.e. implicit knowledge or process technology, respectively) may require more investments, much more preparation time, involvement and resources to internationalize, thus calling for more clarity in reasoning behind a proposed elapsed time from the starting point to the first internationalization as shown in Fig. 1.

3. *The extent, scope and complexities of international involvements.* The extent of internationalization (e.g. in terms of number of markets) and degree of commitment to, and involvement in, different markets, require different internationalization strategies due to the inherent business processes or complexities (Etemad 2018b), ranging from indirect exporting to a full subsidiary operations, have served as proxy measures for the impact of other influential factors in the formulation of international business strategy for a long time. There is a consensus that, for example, exporting, is qualitatively different from FDI and international turn over as a percentage of the overall sales is incapable of expressing the true nature of internationalization involvements and efforts, regardless of the magnitude. There is, therefore a need for an expression of extent of involvements in the EIF's definition to provide an expectation as to how the early agents of IE would internationalize and where they should, or do, end up at maturity. Will they all remain exporters and traders, do they gradually become small and eventually fully fledged MNEs or do they retreat through de-internationalize? In summary, the challenge before IE scholars is to include both *the necessary and sufficient conditions* to a generalized definition of EIFs, in terms of the contextual details and nuances, in order to distinguish the acts and respective actors of this young field from all others.

The qualitative insight of the thematic approach The thorough and methodical analysis of the 280 articles included in this review provides the reader and the field with qualitative insights as to how the field has evolved in the past three decades and what is the current state of the art in the literature. For example, and among other things, we learn that

1. The majority of the research has not only been about the firms based in highly advanced countries (e.g. see the corresponding text and summary in Table 3), but also most of these firms' have internationalized by entering advanced and emerging countries (e.g. see the corresponding text and summary in Table 4).
2. There has been substantial number of conceptual articles (i.e. more than 22) that have contributed to the conceptual and theoretical developments in the field that fall into five different thematic topics (e.g. see the corresponding text and summary in Table 5).
3. Some 250 empirical articles have examined various characteristics of EIFs and their respective operational approaches and strategies in their respective entrepreneurial internationalization (e.g. see the extensive and detailed text and corresponding summaries in Tables 6, 7, 8 and 9).

In favour of time and space, no further highlights will be offered. Instead, the reader is encouraged to examine this article patiently to form a comprehensive portrayal of how the field has developed and evolved over time and where its current state of the art stands. In spite of the impressive documented developments in the field so far, a related and well-developed scholarly territory has remained figuratively uncharted, which IE scholars can further explore.

Collectively, IE scholars are aware of the complexity of their scholarly territory at the intersection of a few other fields of inquiry (for further elaboration, see Etemad 2017a, b and Etemad et al. 2011), but the pathways for further exploration of the features of the territorial landscape have remained somewhat obscure and beyond our

reach due to the absence of connecting linkages from, and to, the other older and well-developed scholarly fields. Abstracting from the cartography metaphor of a territory and their linking pathways, the next two articles in this issue introduce us to the related field of family firms' internationalization.

The fourth article is entitled as "Family ownership concentration and firm internationalization: integrating principal-principal and socioemotional wealth perspectives" provides one of the missing pathways to a particular entrepreneurial institution. It is co-authored by Rosalia Santulli, Mariateresa Torchia, Andrea Calabrò and Carmen Gallucci and it introduces us to family firms' ownership complexities affecting their respective internationalization, as the article's title indicates.

"The concept of family firms is as old as the concept of business itself. It has existed for a few millennia and has been the dominant way of conducting business nationally and internationally over many countries" (Etemad 2004a: 214 and 215). Historically, families such as *Colonnas* and *Orsinis* predated Christianity and went back to the Roman eras. Other prominent Italian families, including Medicis (operating for more than 150 years in the fourteenth century), *Dell Rovers* (operating for more than 250 years, starting in the early 1470s) and *Farneses* (operating successfully for more than 300 years from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries) reached the rest of the European continent and left impressive legacies behind. Similarly, British families, such as *Daltons*, *Chippendales* and *Anderson* played critical roles in Britain and reached to the rest of the world. Likewise, the *Rothschilds* family of Frankfort started from a humble beginning and dominated banking in the nineteenth century. Similarly, numerous American families, including but not limited to, *Carnegies*, *Fords*, *Hearts*, *Morgans*, *Rockefellers* and *Vanderbilts*, among many others, created and revolutionized numerous industries and left impressive foundations behind, some of which are still contributing to worthy causes nationally and internationally.

Abstracting from historical developments, current families have been a force in the modern businesses. They are conducting impressive national and international business. The noteworthy point about the majority of these families have been their entrepreneurial orientations and their respective businesses focus on their home region or country. Accordingly, they appear to be the logical candidates, or predecessors, of the modern international entrepreneurship with a few significant differences: (a) the patriarchs of those families were true entrepreneurs, (b) families controlled their respective businesses fortunes and wealth, and (c) they expanded beyond their first generation of founders' range of activities, nationally and internationally, from one generation to the next and over a long time. Logically, similar to publically held firms, family squabbles, especially the inter-generational disagreements, created challenges for their prevailing management at the time, but the public did not learn much about most of their contentious family-business interactions, except for the eruption of serious problems. However, the evolution of institutional frameworks leading to regulatory disclosures, increasing demand for information, among other socio-cultural and technical developments, are resulting in increasing transparency and availability of information, which are allowing publics to learn about the governance structure of family firms in general, and the influence of inner-dynamics of family members in particular. In turn, such availability of information, especially in more advanced and open country-environments, is enabling scholars to explore the impact of such inner-firm dynamic on internationalization.

Within that perspective, family ownership concentration and its impact on the firm's governance and decision-making have come under increasing scrutiny. Internationalization-related decisions differ from other routine decisions due to their well-documented complexities and the higher risks associated with foreignness (Hymer 1976), newness (Stinchcombe 1965) and outsidership (Johanson and Vahlne 2003), among a host of others, that pose new challenges to the firm decision makers and managers, as their reported international sales can retrospectively divulge deliberations underlying related decisions. However, the true nature of such relations have remained relatively unclear due to the inconsistency of reported empirical results, which this paper's methodological approach and rich sample of 455 German family firms help to overcome and clarify the issues involved. A clear depiction of such relations are shown in Figures 2 and 3 and are well supported by the narrative texts in the paper.

The fifth article in this issue complements the previous article's discussion of family members' *socio-emotional wealth (SEW)* in terms of shared identity and emotional attachments by relating *family capital* to another feature of family firms, their resilience in dealing with internal challenges and combating external turbulent environments. The article is entitled as "How does family capital influence the resilience of family firms?" and is co-authored by Imen Mzid, Nada Khachlouf and Richard Soparnot.

The context for research in this article is family firms based in the Tunisian turbulent environment during the period of 2011 to 2014. The Tunisian Revolution, when the country experienced severe socio-economic and political transition, had varying impacts on all businesses in that period. Some of such family firms were well-prepared, managed the environmental turbulence well and thrived, while others experienced difficulty and even suffered bankruptcies. The starting research objective was hypothesised in terms of a relationship between family capital and family firm's resilience for dealing successfully with external turbulence. The authors used a qualitative research approach and data was collected from the owner-managers of four Tunisian family firms between February and April 2013 in sectors affected by the transition in Tunisian economy. The detailed information about these firms are presented in Tables 2, 3 and 4 as well as in the corresponding narrative text of the paper. The findings of this research indicate that family firm managers mobilize *family capital, defined in terms of financial, human and social capitals*, in order to deal with adversities and it is the firm's main strategic resource contributing to family firm's resilience defined in terms of *adaptive, absorptive and appropriation capacities* that enhance firm's resilience and renewal.

Discussions

This part relates a selective list of questions raised in part II with the research finding of articles included in this issue and others. Part II discussed three major topics pertinent to the field. The first topic was concerned with aspect of time and timing and posed three questions about time and timing of EIFs' decisions and suggested that the extant theory did not offer a clear direction. The second article of this issue studied seven Brazilian high-technology firms over an 8-year period. These firms seemed to fit well into the definition of Born Globals and INVs at the early stages of the research. The research aimed to assess which of the three extant families of theories would offer a clearer perspective on such firms' over time developments than others. This longitudinal research came to

the conclusion that the *extant theory offered partial, but not clear and complete, explanation for the over-time behaviour of the focal firms*; as three firms de-internationalized, one achieved a small stable turn over and three firms experienced increasing growth in international markets after initial internationalization. A few possibilities may have affected their inconclusive findings, including but not limited, to inadequate selection of the seven studied firms due to the unclarity of definitions at the time, inadequate methodology and analysis of findings, and impotent underlying theory incapable of shedding clear light on the situation. While their prudence in methodology and analysis was not questioned, the unclear definitions of what type of firms should, or should not, have been included in the analysis may have contributed significantly to the findings. The topic of definition of who should be considered as the proper agents of IE and their consequent longer term behaviour reflects on the clarity of the underlying theory. The findings of this research raise doubts if the extant theories are as clear as they are expected to be regarding time and timing. Furthermore, the third article (i.e. the literature review of EIFs) provides confirmatory evidence by pointing to the existence of different definitions with different time and timing parameters. Therefore, the need for revisiting for clarifying the above topics still remains.

The second general topic discussed in part II of this article dealt with aspects of a firm's life cycle in relations to the nature, the starting points of entry in different international markets and their respective effects on the firm's internationalization results and growth over time. That discussion also came to raising a few questions about related but unclear concepts with direct or implied effect for a firm's consequent growth and presence in the international markets. In light of earlier discussion of early investments in the early stages of an internationalizing firm and their consequent effect on firm's life cycle and growth in this journal (e.g. see discussion of patrimonial heritage and their carry-over effect of firms in Etemad 2018a), it suffices to add that the findings of the second article in this issue are confirmatory. They implied, if no pointed to, the presence of different life cycles trajectories (i.e. at least three patterns) with differing characteristics, as three firms' de-internationalization truncated their international growth; while one appeared to have reached a plateau internationally and the remaining three firms progressed at different growth rates. Similarly, the research in family firms presented in the fourth and the fifth articles of this issue pointed to other influential factors. The fourth article reported on the moderating effect of the family firm's socio-economic wealth on internationalization trajectory, while the fifth article of this issue found that family firms' resilience in facing adversities was related to its financial, human and social capitals. In short, various internal decisions and external influential forces affect a firm's internationalization and growth trajectories, most of which are in need of revisiting for further clarification.

The third general topic discussed in part II of this article dealt with aspects of a firm's growth trajectory in relation to its decision regarding the choice, the timing and mode of entry into international markets. It also posed questions regarding a few related unclear topical aspects. Among other arguments, it briefly pointed to the interaction between a firm's nature of resources and capabilities and its internationalization strategies. As discussed earlier, a younger and smaller firm may export goods and services that are based on its already codified knowledge and technology (explicit knowledge and hopefully protected). However, for internationalization of good and mainly services (or processes) in which the underlying knowledge and technology are context-

dependent, the context needs to be also transferred for the most part, which adds to the complexity, timing and impact on internationalization, especially for smaller firms. Although knowledge and technology are implicitly present in most early internationalizing firms, the interactions between internationalization and the characteristics of knowledge and technology are yet to be explored and their details and nuances remain unclear. Therefore, there is substantial room and need for revisiting of the related topics for further clarification. In summary, the article has pointed out a need for further clarification of some basic and fundamental concept of the field.

Conclusion and implications

In the early parts, this article continued on with earlier discussions that started in a few of the previous issues of this journal and extended their arguments to relate to the articles included to this issue. This is an integral part of the journal's reflective aims that are driven primarily by the content of articles included in an issue. This reflective exercise resulted in raising a few questions about unclear aspects of the young field of international entrepreneurship in need of further scholarly attention. Accordingly, the journal invites IE scholars to take up the challenge of responding and resolving them conceptually, empirically and theoretically.

The primary managerial implications of this article relate to the various aspects of time and timing decisions affecting international growth beyond the early aspects of entry into and selection of international markets. To highlight one simple aspect, as an example, taking the time to build-up and strengthen the prerequisite asset, capabilities and resources for internationalization, before pushing into international markets and facing the risks and uncertainties of foreign environments and competition with home-grown firms there, can pay-back handsomely. This and previous issues of the journal developed and expanded on what was called as "patrimonial heritage with strong carry over effects" and potentials—i.e. what the earlier generations had built and would leave to sustain the later generations, on which to build-on and grow further. This concept referred to building up assets, capabilities and resources with strong carry-over effect over time at earlier stages of the firm's life cycle to help it deal with future adversities as they arise. Conversely, relatively unprepared or underprepared younger and smaller firms may be forced to retreat and de-internationalize, for the most parts, with slow-down in their growth and possible damage to their healthy international brand equity and reputation worldwide. This issue presents two article on family firms that reported on how these firms used their built-up capitals (e.g. financial, human, social capitals and socio-emotional health) to remain resilient and grow, even under difficult circumstances.

The public policy implication of topics presented and discussed in this issue are numerous. However, the dominant issue among them is the concept of providing umbrella protection for the younger, smaller and highly innovative firms that hold the promise of becoming successful born global firms on their way to become large multinationals. Metaphorically, such younger firms are like the gifted children in need of education and protection to realize their true potentials as they grow up, which require the involvement and investments of both the family and the society in order to immunize them from untoward predators and enable them to reach their deserving

heights. For example, a strong education and training for preparing the entrepreneur-founders of such firms could become a mandatory part of the early support eco-systems, especially in the early stages of their lives, when they are more vulnerable than later on. Furthermore, a nationally or regionally assisted support eco-system can invest in building their “patrimonial heritage” in terms of potent assets, knowledge and resources that, can carry them forward and propel them beyond the ordinary.

In the final analysis, the true burdens of challenges in resolving some of the above issues, including the numerous questions raised in part II of this article, fall on the shoulders of IE scholars and the *Journal of International Entrepreneurship* is prepared to assist efforts in those directions.

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