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Editorial on “Technological Innovation in B2B International Trade”

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The importance of international trade - an exchange of goods and services across international borders or territories, is undeniable. This special issue was commissioned to understand how technological innovations could advance international exchanges between business-to-business (B2B) firms. Specifically, the aim of this special issue was to collect empirical research that engages in a debate how international B2B firms can employ and use digital technologies to enhance their performance and cross-border exchanges, and by doing so advance theory and practice. When the issue was commissioned, steadily growing over the years, international trade was expected to pick up to 3.0% in 2020 (WTO, 2019). Current health crisis and likely economic crisis, presents significant threat to international trade growth (Evenett 2020), which makes this special issue even more important. This is because social distancing measures imposed by countries across the globe, make internationally trading B2B firms reliant on technology use to ensure growth, and in many cases survival. Moreover, technological innovation will play a critical role in recovering from the impact of Covid-19 pandemic (Chesbrough 2020). The collection of studies included in this special issue, therefore, is timely and relevant.

Five papers are featured in this issue, two of which recognise the importance of electronic commerce (e-commerce) in facilitating international exchanges of goods. This is not surprising since

cross-border e-commerce is becoming increasingly popular around the world. Specifically, Qi et al (2020) in their study explore e-commerce as an entry mode to international markets, focusing on the key role of technology provider, as a B2B partner, in facilitating firm's entry into the desired market. Drawing from the transaction cost theory, they examine the motives driving adoption of e-commerce as an entry mode. The findings derive the evidence to suggest that such an entry mode reduces uncertainties and opportunistic behaviors leading to a lower transaction cost. It also allows firms to take advantage of the involvement and the dependency of technology intermediaries. Importantly they alert on the crucial role of trust between the focal firm and the technology provider in the process of international markets entry. By increasing the level of trust and reducing risks, B2B firms are found to benefit from a lesser transaction cost.

B2B firms, which have already adopted e-commerce to facilitate international exchanges, should find the work by Wang et al (2020) useful. In their research, the focus is to put on a supply chain's service capacity for e-commerce. Specifically, they depict how cross-border e-commerce firms can generate supply chain service capabilities that yield improvements in supply chain relationship quality to e-tailors and other platform users. Underpinned by the service dominant logic, the investigation allows them to identify three supply chain resources related to information, logistics and finance, which are critical for the development of supply chain service capabilities as well as improvement in the quality of supply chain relationships. They conclude their research by discussing how cross-border e-commerce firms can effectively manage relationships and foster their quality.

Ho et al (2020) also highlights the key role of relationships in their research. They are however, concerned about the existence of malpractices (i.e. unethical data sharing) and its damaging impact on the relationships. They note that monitoring of misconduct in B2B context is a challenge, which technological innovation can help to overcome. Their work highlights the important interplay between technological innovation and ethical leadership needed for businesses to succeed. Specifically, their

study explores the link between technological innovation, ethical leadership and its impact on firm performance. Overall, the results show a significant relationship between the adoption of innovative technology and ethical leadership; technological innovation enhances a firm's performance and this relationship was stronger with the presence of an ethical leader.

The role of technology is to not only facilitate trade, but also to enhance communication between internationally trading partners. Zhang et al (2020) notes however, that while the communication technology can help promote international trade, factors including the intercultural miscommunication can weaken its effectiveness. Through the course of their research, they derive evidence confirming that the intercultural miscommunication indeed reduces the effect of communication technology on trade volume. At the same time, however, the development of communication technology helps dilute negative impacts of bureaucracy and uncertainty. They highlight the importance of skills of technology users to mitigate the impact of miscommunication and encourage firms to invest in human capital in order to enhance international trade.

Although the above studies provide valuable insights to theory and practice, further work is needed. Lacka and colleagues (2020) provide a bibliometric analysis of research published in the *Industrial Marketing Management* journal, and by doing so they reveal current state of knowledge concerning international trade, and related issues. They identify research gaps, and make direct recommendation how those can be addressed in the future. In their review, they note that although research attention focused on local and international B2B trade, 'there is a scarcity of empirical studies examining technological advancements and B2B international'. We echo their findings, and hope that this special issue will inspire researchers to develop further insights into B2B trade across borders, and how technology can facilitate it. In the aftermath of Covid-19, such research will be much needed.

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