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International Entrepreneurship: Thematic Mapping and Research Agenda Proposal

Ramón Andrés Ortiz-Rojo ^a

Adonai José Lacruz ^{a, b}

^a Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória, Brasil

^b Instituto Federal do Espírito Santo, Viana, Brasil

Abstract

This study aimed to carry out a bibliometric analysis of the production on International Entrepreneurship IE based on perspectives of the thematic structure of the field using thematic mapping techniques to model the knowledge produced in it. Data from the scientific production on the subject were collected from Scopus and Web of Science databases. Three thematic maps representing the periods of 1995-2004, 2005-2014 and 2015-2022 were yielded in the study. The discussion of results concludes that IE is a research area that has grown significantly since the second period, showing a considerable increase in publications from 127 in the first period to 1,042 in the second. This increase remained constant reaching 1,934 in the third and final period. The themes that stood out the most and were most representative in the field of IE were: performance of companies in IE, innovation, knowledge, entrepreneurial companies, entrepreneurial orientation, management, strategy, model and export behavior. A conceptual variation of the themes was also observed with the performance theme standing out, maintaining a high representativeness in the three periods analyzed with displacements between the basic themes – transversal – and the driving themes. Another highlight was the capabilities theme, which, over time, resulted in the dynamic capabilities theme. As emerging themes, performance, entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurship, impact and management appear. Based on the results and conclusions of this study, a research agenda is proposed.

Keywords: international entrepreneurship; bibliometrics; research agenda; thematic map.

Introduction

International Entrepreneurship, after the publication of the study by McDougall (1989), considered the first work published in the area, began its development attracting several authors and contributions that marked the evolution of the theme, among them those of Oviatt and McDougall (1994), McDougall and Oviatt (2000), Zahra and George (2002), Knight and Cavusgil (1996, 2004), and Oviatt and McDougall (2005). There is a consensus that the starting point for the increase in research in the field of IE was the seminal work by Oviatt and McDougall (1994) with the definition of International New Ventures (INV). On the other hand, according to McDougall and Oviatt (2000) and Zahra and George (2002), IE originated in the confluence of two areas: international business and entrepreneurship.

There is also agreement among authors that advances in technology, communications and transport are among the triggers for the emergence of the IE phenomenon (Autio, 2005; Knight & Liesch, 2016; McDougall & Oviatt, 2000; Zahra, 2021). These factors enabled the internationalization of INV (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994), as well as companies called Born Global (BG) (Knight & Cavusgil, 1996, 2004), even reaching new markets from their conception or very close to that.

According to the bibliometric study by Baier-Fuentes, Merigó, Amorós and Gaviria-Marín (2018), publications on IE showed a considerable increase in recent years – 85.6% between 2006 and 2015. The authors report that publications, regionally speaking, are mostly concentrated in some European countries and that the United States appears as the most important country in terms of publications in the area. In relation to Latin America, only four countries are cited: Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica. Nave and Ferreira (2022), in their systematic review, considered the last 27 years of publications in the field of IE. The authors state that the production on IE shows an increase in publications and citations, mainly from 2014 onwards. In addition, the authors report four main clusters that encompass the production on IE, namely: international business networks and opportunities, institutional environments, characteristics and motivations of the entrepreneur and stimuli and processes of internationalization.

It is observed that, in recent years, along with the increase in publications on IE, there has also been an increased interest in systematic reviews that contribute to the state of the art in the area. However, and according to Baier-Fuentes et al. (2018), there is still a shortage of works that use bibliometric techniques in the field of IE since most studies do not go beyond the use of descriptive statistics to present results.

By applying bibliometric procedures, it is possible to study and measure texts and information in large volumes and mainly two dimensions: performance analysis and mapping (Cobo, López-Herrera, Herrera-Viedma, & Herrera, 2011). According to the aforementioned authors, the objective of performance analysis is to evaluate groups such as countries, universities and researchers and the impact of their activities. Mapping, on the other hand, seeks to demonstrate the dynamic and structural aspects of research, that is, mapping is used to represent the cognitive structure of a given area of research. In the case of the motivation of this study, we consider the notable increase in publications in the field of IE and the lack, according to Baier-Fuentes et al. (2018), of studies that contribute to bibliometric analyses in the case of IE. We sought to provide a basis for the construction of future theoretical and empirical studies, by showing and analyzing the

evolution of the theme considering the entire publication since 1989 and taking McDougall's (1989) seminal article as a landmark.

Having outlined this panorama, the objective of this work is to carry out a bibliometric analysis of the production on IE, going deeper, specifically, in the thematic mapping. As such, this study advances the state of the art on IE presenting thematic maps for different periods. A contribution like this is considered relevant due to the fact that the IE theme has shown a significant increase in publications, as already mentioned, as well as the modifications and adaptations that IE has shown over time, for example, in terms of ways of undertaking and speed, moving from more traditional IE to BG, more linked to new technologies, as pointed out by Knight and Cavusgil (2004). Based on results of this study an agenda is proposed so as to inform future research in the area that may consider the new trends and aspects found and highlighted by the thematic maps of this study. To this end, the guidelines of Fisch and Block (2018) were followed focusing on these questions: What are the central themes of production in the IE area? What are the emerging issues within the IE?

Methodological procedures

This empirical study examines the “knowledge production” of international entrepreneurship studies from the perspective of the thematic structures in the field using techniques of thematic mapping and systematic literature review to model the knowledge produced in the field of IE studies.

Fisch and Block's (2018) guidelines were followed for the systematic review of the literature in the business area presenting the motivation for the theme and formulating research questions that guided the studies. Also, the relevant literature was systematically identified balancing breadth and depth of sources of analysis; focusing on concepts rather than on studies to obtain a relevant conclusion, outlining paths for future research.

With regard to thematic mapping, specifically, it will be used the approach proposed by Cobo et al. (2011) of a thematic map graphic scheme, from which, from two perpendiculars (vertical and horizontal) on a Cartesian axis with the Callon density (measure of the internal strength of the network) in the ordinate and the Callon centrality (measure of the degree of interaction of a network with other networks) in the abscissa, four quadrants follow (Figure 1).

As seen in Figure 1, the upper right quadrant indicates driving themes for the field – well-developed and important – as they have strong centrality and high density. In turn, the lower right quadrant presents basic and transversal themes, important for the field, but less developed, as it has a strong centrality and low density. The lower left quadrant shows emerging or disappearing themes with low density and weak centrality. Finally, the upper left quadrant indicates highly developed themes though with irrelevant external ties, that is, high density but weak centrality. As such, the upper left quadrant themes are of marginal importance to the field, being specialized and peripheral in nature.

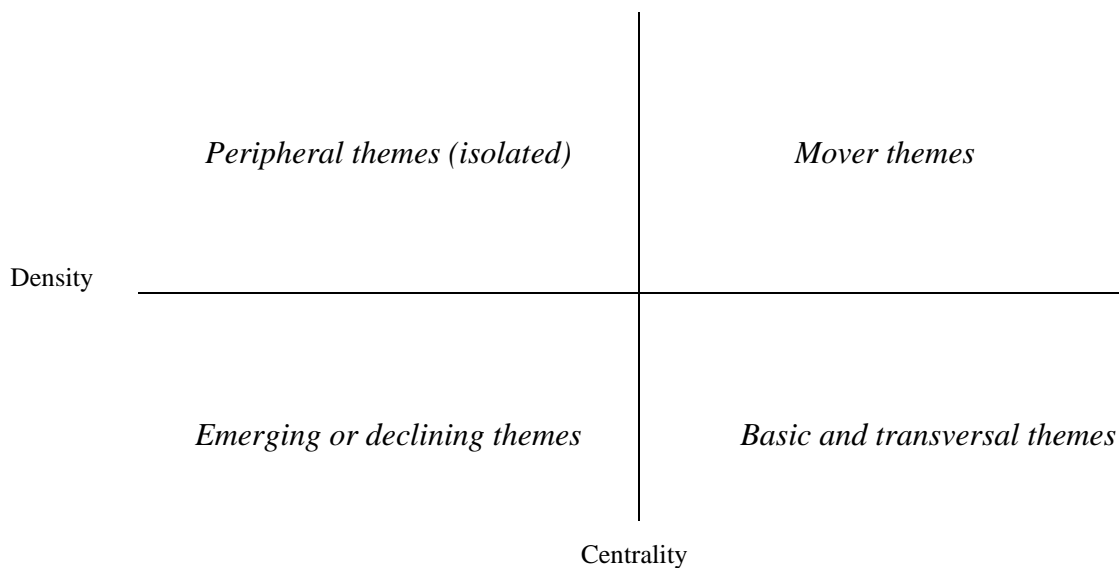


Figure 1. Thematic map

Source: from Cobo, López-Herrera, Herrera-Viedma and Herrera (2011, p. 151)

This analytical perspective examines how the literature has formed interconnections of research themes that can distinguish this field of research – a prerequisite for forming its disciplinary identity – while also helping to understand its evolution. It is important to bear in mind that thematic maps were prepared from the keywords plus the field identified in the documents.

When seeking to describe trends in the field, it was assumed that the data set should be as comprehensive as possible, including gray literature, in order to avoid selection bias (Mendes-da-Silva, 2019). By gray literature we mean that the data should be composed by books and chapters; published articles and articles approved for publication in scientific journals (early access); articles and abstracts published in proceedings of scientific events.

The query was made on June 13, 2022, in the bases of Scopus and the Web of Science - the largest databases of peer-reviewed publications in the field of applied social sciences. For the selection of documents, a search was carried out to verify the use of terms in the title, keywords or keywords plus or in the abstract of the documents, without delimiting time or language or type of document (e.g., article or book chapter) or source documents (e.g., journals and conferences). The queries used are shown below.

Web of Science:

ALL= ("International Entrepreneur*" OR "International New Venture" OR "Born global")

Scopus:

TITLE-ABS-KEY ("International Entrepreneur*" OR "International New Venture" OR "Born global")

At this stage, 4,145 documents were identified. It does not, however, rule out that the search for greater coverage can lead to a “deviation” of quality – for example, documents from journals with very different impact factors, taking the impact factor as a proxy for quality or dimension of the scientific production. For data processing, the bibliometrix package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) for the R software (R Core Team, 2022) was used.

Data retrieved from bibliographic databases may contain duplicate records or registration errors, which required pre-processing. In addition, the queries used could retain documents without adherence to the focus of the investigation. Thus, the titles were read. In cases where it was not possible to validate the adherence of the document to the scope of the study using this criterion, the abstracts of the documents were read.

In the end, the database had 3,116 documents (Table 1) from 745 sources (journals, books, conferences, etc.), with 4,594 unique authors and 5,631 keywords.

Table 1

Data description

Description	Nº Documents
Scopus	1.981
(+) Web of Science	2.164
(=) Subtotal [1]	4.145
(-) Duplicates	911
(=) Subtotal [2]	3.234
(-) Error ^a	0
(-) Scope ^b	118
(=) Total	3.116

^a error that implies the registration of duplicate documents

^b based on titles and/or abstracts of documents

Source: authors (research data).

Results

The number of annual publications on international entrepreneurship, from 1989 to 2021, is illustrated in Figure 2. It was decided to carry out this analysis by limiting the data set to 2021, in order to avoid misleading the reader into a sharp drop in 2022, since data were collected in June 2022.

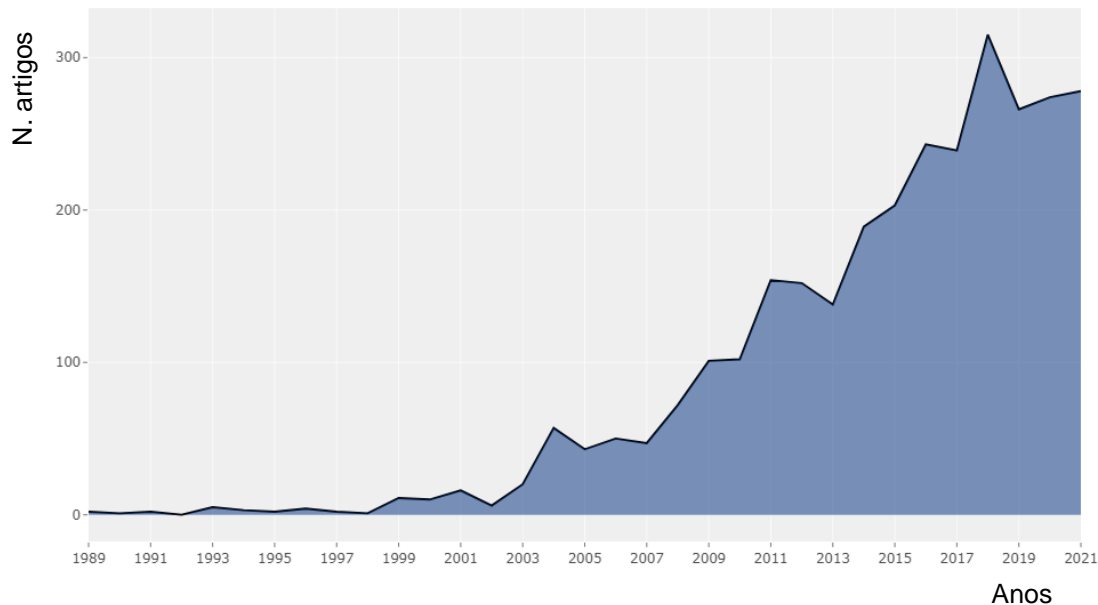


Figure 2. Scientific production (1989 – 2021)

Source: authors (research data)

Agreeing with Coviello and Jones (2004) and Servantie, Cabrol, Guieu and Boissin (2016), it was considered that the extensive amount of publications on IE (1989-2022) began with the article by McDougall (1989), although the result of the search in the databases yielded two works prior to McDougall's: that of Weaver (1987) and Borner (1984). The latter comprises a theoretical article published in German addressing characteristics of the market, whereas the former deals with local entrepreneurship (Ireland) rather than IE (the focus of this study). Thus, Weaver's and Borner's documents were not included in the database.

For the entire period considered (1989-2022), 745 sources were identified. According to Bradford's law, only four are core sources in the area whereas the area highlighted in gray is responsible for 1/3 of the scientific production (Figure 3).

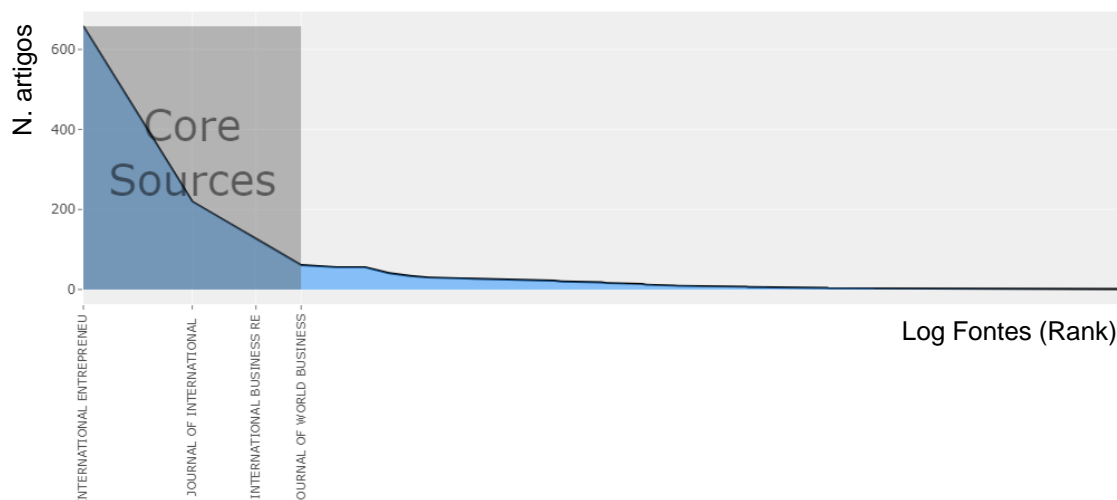


Figure 3. Bradford's law (1989 – 2022)

Source: authors (research data)

Bradford's Law proposes that authors tend to send their productions to the source (e.g. journal) where they see the document published. Thus, a nucleus of more productive sources in the area of knowledge is established. The journals identified are: International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal with 658 (20%) articles, Journal of International Entrepreneurship with 220 (7%) articles, International Business Review with 127 (4%) articles, and Journal of World Business with 61 (2%) articles. These journals thus formed the core of sources that proved to be productive for the circulation of studies of IE, especially the first two, which together accounted for more than 1/4 of the period's production.

In other words, Bradford's law assumes that after publishing some articles on a new topic in some journals, these same journals will polarize production on this new topic for a while and, in parallel, other journals will start publishing the first articles on the same topic. With the consolidation of the new theme, a gravitational core of journals that publish more on this new theme will then emerge. In this way, these four journals, more specifically the first two, function as sources through which other authors come into contact with certain publications, dialogue with them and where they tend to submit their own papers.

Resuming the discussion of Figure 2, after reading the initial work on IE by McDougall (1989), we arrived at the seminal article of Oviatt and McDougall (1994), considered a landmark in the research on IE (Baier-Fuentes et al., 2018; Nave & Ferreira, 2022). The authors defined International New Ventures (INV) as commercial organizations that seek to obtain competitive advantages through the use of resources and the sale of products in different countries from their very beginnings. With this, the starting point for the development of research in the area of IE was established.

Thus, the previously referenced period from 1989 to 1994 can be considered as the preamble to the analysis carried out in this study, in which, subsequently, three periods were analyzed and represented by the three thematic maps obtained from the bibliometric procedures applied in this

work. The first thematic map covers the period from 1995 to 2004; the second map goes from 2005 to 2014 and the third thematic map covers the period from 2015 to 2022.

The rationale for selection of these periods can be questioned. They were determined to be considered landmarks in IE research because of the following reasons. In the case of the first period, it begins after the publication of the work that inaugurated the development of research on the subject. The period comprising the time interval between the year after its publication and 2004 considers the influence of the study in question on the work of Oviatt and McDougall (1994).

Regarding the period for the second thematic map (2005-2014) which corresponds to nine years of publications, it presents a new milestone in the research of the IE theme with Oviatt and McDougall's (2005) update to the definition of INV (discussed in the map). Finally, the most recent period considers that from 2015 until the moment of production of this work, that is, 2022.

Thematic map: 1995 to 2004

Based on the definition given by Oviatt and McDougall (1994) for INV, it can be noted that research on IE began to be more directed towards the individual, in this case, the entrepreneur. Several aspects were considered by researchers among which is the formation of INV (McDougall, Shane, & Oviatt, 1994), regarding these questions:

1. 1st question: who are the founders of INV? To which the authors respond that these founders are individuals who see opportunities to establish ventures that operate beyond national borders. They are aware of the possibilities of combining resources from different markets because of the skills – networks, knowledge – they have developed from their previous activities;

2. 2nd question: why do these entrepreneurs choose to compete internationally and not just in their countries? Because they recognize that they must create international business skills from the moment the venture is formed. Otherwise, the venture may become dependent on the domestic skills development path and the entrepreneur will find it difficult to change strategic direction when international expansion eventually becomes necessary;

3. 3rd question: what forms their international business activities? They prefer to use hybrid structures, that is, alliances and strategic networks for their international activities as a way to overcome the usual lack of resources in the beginning of their expansion (McDougall et al., 1994).

Other aspects addressed in the surveys were ways of entering new markets (Burgel & Murray, 2000; Zahra, Ireland, & Hitt, 2000), cultural aspects (Thomas & Mueller, 2000), knowledge and learning in internationalization (Autio, Sapienza, & Almeida, 2000), among others. Also, within this period, Knight and Cavusgil (1996) published their work on BG companies, small companies with the ability to develop technological products and expand internationally more quickly. The aforementioned authors published, in 2004 their recognized work on innovation, organizational capabilities, and the born-global firm, addressing important factors such as the innovative culture and capabilities observed in BG which help to explain why these companies manage to conquer foreign markets quickly (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004).

Coviello and Jones (2004) state that the large amount of research that emerged in the IE area was characterized by the inconsistent use of measures and definitions of key variables, such as size

and age of companies. It was McDougall and Oviatt (2000) themselves who called for clearer directions in methodological terms in relation to research on IE.

According to Keupp and Gassmann (2009), research has focused, with some exceptions, mainly on the following issues: the propensity of small and young companies to internationalize; how small new ventures penetrate markets and/or how to survive in the market; the demographic and cognitive characteristics of individuals or groups of entrepreneurs and their actions in the course of the company's internationalization.

When we look at Figure 4 with Thematic Map 1 covering 127 documents, we see that, on the lower right side of the axis, in which the basic and transversal research themes of the period in question are concentrated, “company performance” appears as a main theme, followed by aspects such as “behavior” and “resources”.

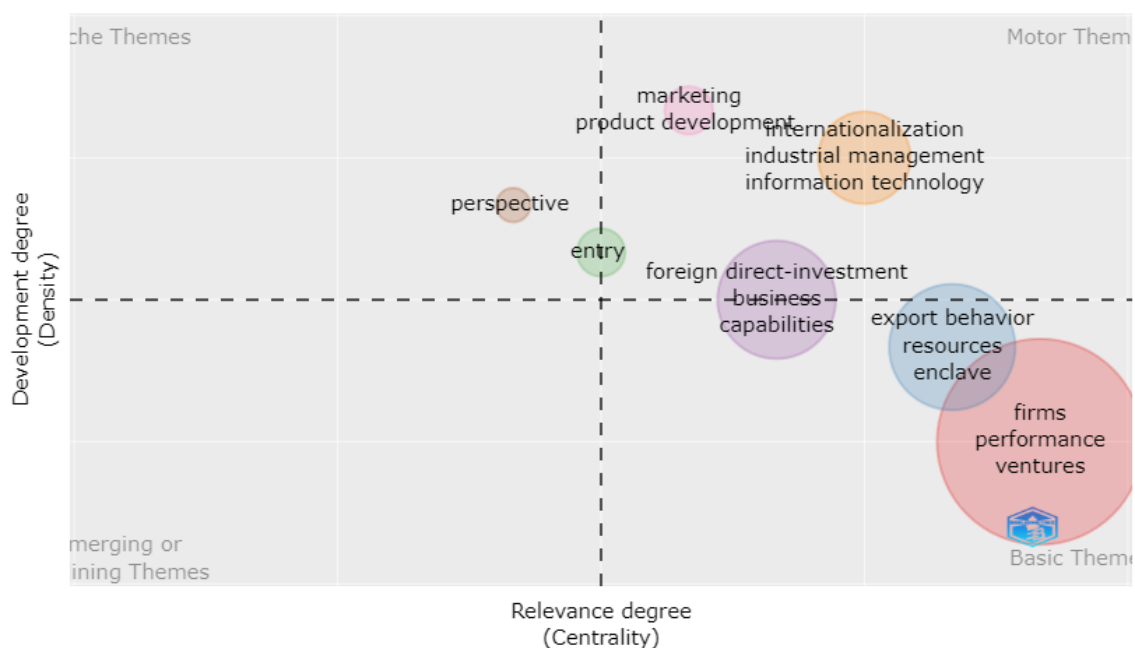


Figure 4. Thematic map 1. 1995-2004.

Source: authors (research data)

On the upper right side are the driving themes of the period with “internationalization”, “management” and “technology” as central themes. To a lesser extent, “marketing” and “product development” also appear on that side of the axis. Other aspects that also stand out on the upper right are those that are divided between the driving and basic framework – “foreign direct investments” and “capabilities” –, which suggest these themes are both considered basic in research on IE and convert into engine-themes.

On the upper left side of the axis we see that the peripheral theme is “perspectives” and, divided between peripheral theme and motor theme, “input form” appears, meaning that the latter theme is on the way to becoming a theme. IE search engine in the period of this thematic map.

On the lower left side, which corresponds to emerging or declining themes, research themes are not observed, which can be understood by the still initial period of the research, in which basic

themes and motors guided the works that, later, would give way to themes emerging and in decline according to the advancement of studies in the area.

Observing the results, we show the five most cited documents for the period (38% of the total citations) comprising Thematic Map 1 in Table 2 – for which we used the number of citations as a proxy for the relevance of the documents.

Table 2
Most cited studies in Map 1.

Document	Citations	Journal
Knight e Cavusgil (2004)	1.380	Journal of International Business Studies
Madsen e Servais (2017)	1.048	International Business Review
McDougall e Oviatt (2000)	832	Academy of Management Journal
Knight e Cavusgil (1996)	699	Advances in International Marketing
Sharma e Blomstermo (2003)	500	International Business Review

Source: authors (research data).

In the case of the work by McDougall and Oviatt (2000), given the greater participation of smaller companies in international business, the authors analyzed the intersection of two research areas that were linked to the study of IE: international business and entrepreneurship. This vision made it possible to approach and better understand smaller companies that ventured internationally, as well as their managers/entrepreneurs, drawing more attention from researchers and, also, making the course of research turn more towards these last two, and no longer exclusively for big companies, as it was before the INV irruption.

Smaller companies that decided to internationalize did so very quickly, even from their inception. This was the case with BG. Precisely the other four studies mentioned among the most cited in this map deal with these companies and how they achieved good results in terms of their internationalization, going against traditional models of internationalization in stages (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). The term born global was proposed by Rennie (1993) and brought up for discussion by Knight and Cavusgil (1996), right after the seminal work of Oviatt and McDougall (1994) on INV.

Subsequently, Madsen and Servais (2017) addressed BG by contrasting them with the traditional model of internationalization. Sharma and Blomstermo (2003) approached the subject from a network perspective to understand the good performance of these companies in the international market when using the knowledge obtained in their networks before the international venture. Knight and Cavusgil (2004), in their widely recognized work, address BG innovating by analyzing relevant aspects that contribute to the positive performance that these companies achieve when internationalizing, namely: an innovative culture, knowledge and capabilities.

Thematic Map 2 refers to the period from 2005 to 2014 and the themes that stood out in this period.

Thematic map: 2005 to 2014

Thematic Map 2 covers the period from 2005 to 2014 and has 1,042 documents, showing a notable increase in the production of works compared to Thematic Map 1 of Oviatt and McDougall (2005). The authors propose an updated definition for IE considering several forces that influenced the speed with which companies internationalized. According to them, international entrepreneurship is a combination of innovative and proactive behavior and risk-seeking that crosses national borders and is intended to create value in organizations. Also, according to these authors, international entrepreneurship has evolved from focusing on New Ventures to contemplating corporate entrepreneurship, starting to consider, in this definition, the behavior of individuals, groups and organizations.

Figure 5 with Thematic Map 2 presents changes compared to Thematic Map 1. We see that new themes have emerged and others have shifted as research on IE increases and evolves.

From the central axis, we see that the theme “performance” continues to dominate, but now focused on the performance of entrepreneurship and divided between basic themes and driving themes of this map. Also, in basic themes and with equal relative relevance, the themes “knowledge”, “innovation” and “model”, followed by “growth” and “business strategies” appear. Another theme that appears in this map is “dynamic capabilities”, considered as ‘capabilities’ only in Map 1. It should be noted that “dynamic capabilities” appears divided between a basic theme and an emerging theme, allowing us to deduce that, after its appearance in research on IE, this theme tended to become one of the strong themes of the area.

Finally, on the upper left side of the axis and with a certain similarity in the relevance of the map, as peripheral themes there are: “self-efficacy”, “gender”, “self-employed worker”, “research and development”, “experience”, “information”, “globalization”, “entrepreneur” and “international enterprise”.

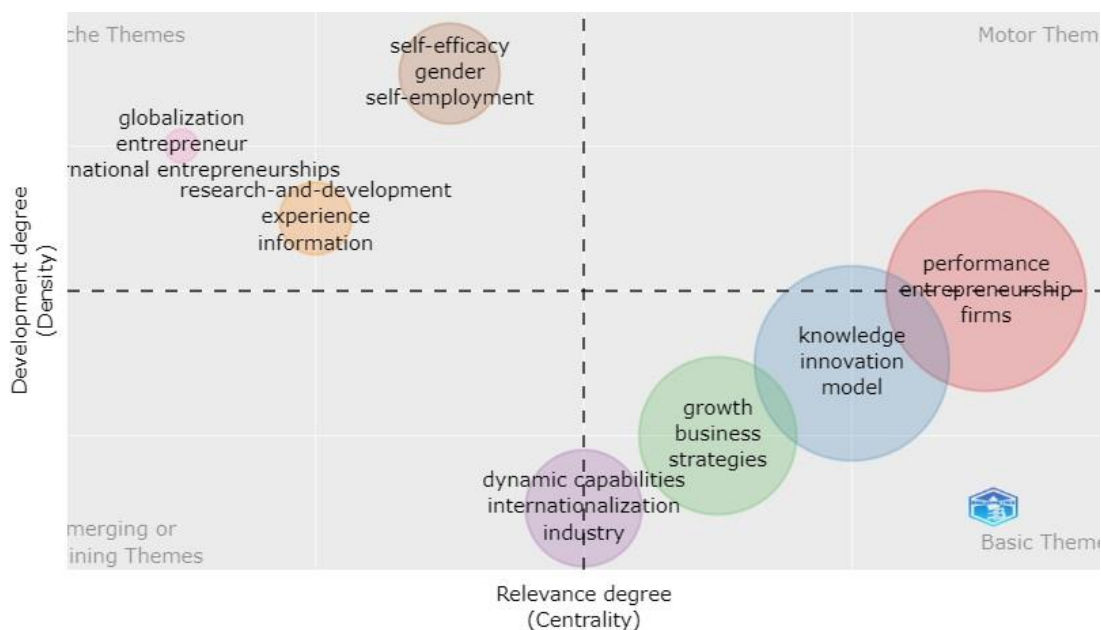


Figure 5. Thematic map 2. 2005-2014.

Source: authors (research data).

It should be noted that this map does not register emerging or declining themes or driving themes, except for those already informed and divided between two axis themes – basic and motor, in the case of “performance”, and emerging and basic, in the case of “dynamic capabilities”, “internationalization” and “industry”.

We present the most cited documents for the period comprising Thematic Map 2 in Table 3. As the number of individual citations of each document does not exceed 2%, we adopted as a criterion for this selection the documents with at least 1% of the total citations of the period, which total seven documents and 8% of the total number of citations.

Table 3
Most cited studies in Mapa 2.

Document	Citations	Journal
Oviatt e McDougall (2005)	930	Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice
Jones, Coviello e Tang (2011)	621	Journal of Business Venturing
Coviello (2006)	611	Journal of International Business Studies
Zhou, Wu e Luo (2007)	601	Journal of International Business Studies
Rialp A., Rialp J. e Knight (2005)	583	International Business Review
Zahra (2005)	580	Journal of International Business Studies
Jones e Coviello (2005)	487	Journal of international Business Studies

Source: authors (research data).

As in Thematic Map 1, when we observe the most cited works in the period that corresponds to this map, we see that, in the case of the study by Oviatt and McDougall (2005), in addition to being considered a milestone in research on IE, it is also the work that receives the most citations within this map. It is worth mentioning that Oviatt and McDougall brought an updated definition for the IE. Jones, Coviello and Tang (2011) reviewed the production on IE between 1989 and 2009 and stated that, ontologically, research on IE focuses on three themes: entrepreneurial internationalization, international comparisons of entrepreneurship, and comparisons of entrepreneurial internationalizations.

Coviello (2006) highlights the importance of networks in companies that seek to internationalize from the early stages. Zhou, Wu and Luo (2007) also highlight the importance of networks, in the case of the later in relation to small and medium-sized companies. These authors argue that a company's local social networks play a mediating role in internationalization and its performance. In addition, that this mediating mechanism is identified through three benefits: knowledge about international market opportunities, guidance and experiential learning, and trust and solidarity.

Rialp A., Rialp J. and Knight (2005), in a review of 38 papers covering the period from 1993 to 2003, offer suggestions for future research, one of them related to a better definition of companies with internationalization processes from their initial stages, understanding that the period addressed by these authors was initial when we consider IE as a research area, presenting

itself as more heterogeneous at that time. In fact, looking at Thematic Maps 1 and 2, we can see the diversity of themes and the changes between them from one period to another.

Zahra's (2005) work analyzes the proposal made by Oviatt and McDougall (1994) and the advances made in research on IE based on this seminal work. Zahra (2005) states, that much of the proposal of the work by Oviatt and McDougall (1994) remains as originally proposed while allowing new possibilities to expand research on IE to other topics and areas. One of these areas was cognitive psychology, which, according to Zahra (2005), researchers have used to better understand the behavior of founders of new international ventures in relation, for example, to how they recognize opportunities.

The work by Jones and Coviello (2005) proposes conceptual models for IE, in which the authors assert that, at the time, research on IE was an emerging area, and it was necessary to direct research in a unified manner. Thus, the authors, from the area of internationalization and entrepreneurship, obtained insights for the formulation of models, following a logic of entrepreneur behavior based on time.

There is work within this period that makes a new contribution to defining IE. Zahra, Newey and Li (2014) define IE as the recognition, training, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities beyond national borders to create new businesses, models and value solutions, which include financial, environmental, social and economic aspects.

A point worth mentioning in this definition is that it encompasses companies of all sizes, in addition to those that have internationalized since their inception, such as BG, and established companies that seek to expand by taking advantage of opportunities to undertake internationally. In this sense, there is an alignment with the definition of Oviatt and McDougall (2005) when they state that the focus of being in New Ventures started to contemplate corporate entrepreneurship, now considering in this definition the behavior of individuals, groups and organizations.

Thematic Map 3: 2015 to 2022

Thematic Map 3 presents the last period analyzed by this study, which runs from 2015 to 2022. This period contains 1,934 published documents, a considerable increase in relation to the two previous periods. Research on IE by now would have evolved and expanded enough to be considered a research area (Servantie et al., 2016; Zucchella, 2021). Figure 6 below shows Thematic Map 3.

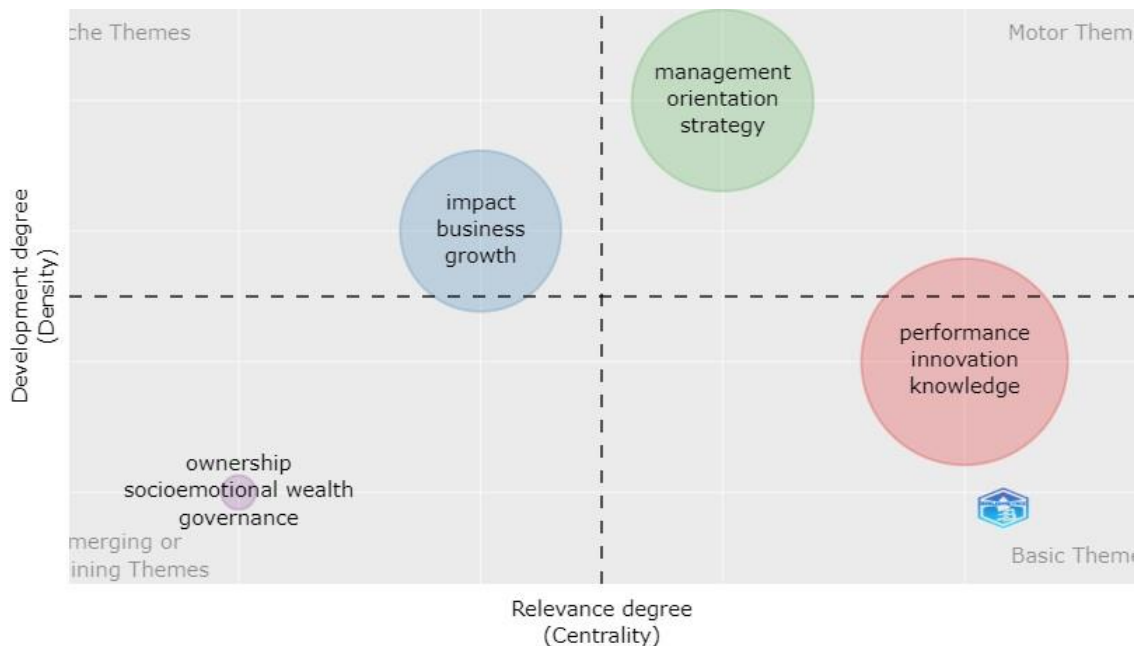


Figure 6. Thematic map 3. 2015-2022.

Source: authors (research data).

Figure 6 shows certain changes compared to the previous map. Advances in research and contributions in the area led to some themes being consolidated and others disappearing. As we look at the basic themes on the lower right side of the central axis of the figure, we see that, again, “performance” is the main theme. The difference is that in Map 3 performance is associated with innovation and knowledge while in Map 2 performance was associated with entrepreneurial companies and in Map 1 with companies still considered as ventures by the authors. The performance would later be absorbed by the updated vision of the IE (Oviatt & Mcdougall, 2005).

On the top right, under driving themes, are “management”, “entrepreneurial orientation” and “strategy”, three themes that are related if we think about the way companies face and develop in the international market. Dynamic capabilities, a theme present in the previous map, can influence the strategy and way of managing an organization, as well as provide a more effective way of seeking and exploring new opportunities, but not guaranteeing the success of the company (Zahra, Sapienza, & Davidsson, 2006). Continuing with the driving themes, we see that “impact”, “business” and “growth” appear. In the case of impact, this theme so far did not appear among the investigated themes.

The themes that appear on the lower left side of the axis, which correspond to emerging or declining themes, are: “ownership”, “socio-emotional wealth” and “governance”. In this case, we can understand that these themes are emerging, since they had not appeared on the maps until now.

The most cited documents for this six-year period are presented in Table 4, in which the same criteria applied to the selection of the period of Thematic Map 2 were used (i.e., documents with at least 1% of the total citations). Using these criteria, five documents were retained, totaling 7% of the total citations.

Table 4
Most cited studies in Map 3.

Document	Citations	Journal
Liñán e Fayolle (2015)	456	International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal
Cavusgil e Knight (2015)	378	Journal of International Business Studies
Davidsson (2015)	373	Journal of Business Venturing
Paul, Parthasarathy e Gupta (2017)	273	Journal of World Business
Terjesen, Hessels e Li (2013)	242	Journal of Management

Source: authors (research data).

The systematic review by Liñán and Fayolle (2015) focuses on the theme of entrepreneurial intentions, in which five main areas of research are identified: model for entrepreneurial intentions, personal level variables, entrepreneurial education, context and institutions, and entrepreneurial process. These authors claim that research on entrepreneurial intentions is increasing and evolving rapidly.

Cavusgil and Knight (2015) reflect on BG companies and their recognized and already mentioned 2004 work on innovation, organizational capabilities, and the born-global firm. The authors analyze exporting companies by integrating issues of marketing, entrepreneurship and capabilities. According to Cavusgil and Knight, currently, BG companies are abundant internationally; for this reason, the authors propose that topics still without answers be addressed, such as the future of BG, as they mature over time, as well as that companies that decide to remain active locally should be studied.

Davidsson's work (2015) addresses the topic of entrepreneurial opportunities. The author states that this topic has grown rapidly since 2000 and proposes a new contextualization for further research on the topic. Davidsson mentions three constructs for this new approach to opportunities: external enablers, company ideas and confidence in the opportunity. In the work of Paul, Parthasarathy and Gupta (2017), some of the barriers that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) face in their internationalization are presented. The authors separate these barriers into internal and external and propose some guidelines for future research in relation to the theoretical context and in methodological terms.

In the study by Terjesen, Hessels and Li (2013), another systematic review in this period, the authors carried out an analysis between countries addressing four levels: individual, company, industry and country. These authors highlight the heterogeneity in relation to IE observed in different countries and how the results are explained in relation to the performance of companies, countries, considering the economic growth and cultural aspects of these countries. In addition, the authors state that the literature comparing IE between countries is still fragmented with some substantial gaps related to content, theory and methodology. Among the suggestions by Terjesen et al. (2013) is the inclusion of the following aspects: institutions, culture, resource-based view, cost of economic transactions, economic growth and human capital.

It is worth highlighting in the Thematic Map 3, the appearance, now as a driving theme, of “dynamic capabilities”, which together with “management” and “strategy”, can be seen as related to the themes addressed by the most cited studies in this period. These themes are entrepreneurial intentions (Liñán & Fayolle, 2015) and opportunities (Davidsson, 2015). In fact, dynamic capabilities have contributed to the existence of a large number of BGs in several countries today (Cavusgil & Knight, 2015), understanding that these dynamic capabilities contribute in terms of entrepreneurial intention and identification of opportunities.

Discussion

This study considered the publication of McDougall (1989) as an initial work in the field of IE, and the study by Oviatt and McDougall (1994) as a seminal work that started the development and growth of research in this area. Based on this context, a bibliometric analysis was carried out that gave rise to the three thematic maps, namely: Thematic map 1, covering the period of publications 1995-2004; Thematic map 2, covering the period 2005-2014; Thematic map 3, covering the period 2015-2022. Each thematic map was determined based on: in the case of map 1, seminal work in the area of IE by Oviatt and McDougall (1994), of map 2, work by Oviatt and McDougall (2005), considered a milestone in research on IE with its theoretical contribution and redefinitions that were adopted from it, and finally, from map 3, which considers the period closest to the date of this research.

It is worth remembering that this analysis considered all publications identified in these periods, not discriminating by type of publication (e.g., only articles) and periods. The total number of works observed in the three periods was 3,103 publications, and divided as follows: 127 works published in the period of Thematic Map 1; 1,042 works published in the period of Thematic Map 2 and 1,934 works published for the period of Thematic Map 3.

Regarding the first map and initial period of research on IE, we see that, based on the challenge made by Oviatt and McDougall (1994) in relation to the divergent form of internationalization of INV, that is, faster when compared to the traditional internationalization in stages by Johanson and Vahlne (1977), other works were added. Several authors addressed the issue of speed and the way in which some companies entered international markets (Autio et al., 2000; Burgel & Murray, 2000; Zahra et al., 2000).

Another important approach that emerged during this period was that of BG companies, which also reached international markets very quickly and with the capacity to develop technological products (Knight & Cavusgil, 1996; Madsen & Servais, 2017; Oviatt & McDougall, 1999; Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003). According to Figure 4, the period of the Thematic Map 1 was marked by the dominance of studies addressing the performance and form of entry of companies in international markets, based on the definition given by Oviatt and McDougall (1994) for INV. Within the beginner production in relation to the quantity and theoretical and methodological definitions for the IE area, the work of Coviello and Jones (2004) appears, in which the authors state that the research that emerged in the IE area had as a characteristic the inconsistency in the use of measures and definitions of variables that these authors considered key, such as company size and age.

Later, and already within Thematic Map 2, Oviatt and McDougall (2005) proposed a more updated definition for IE. A change can be noted here in research in the area, in which IE begins by defining, perhaps leaving the concept of New Ventures behind. In fact, the authors stated that IE has gone from being an area focused on New Ventures companies to considering corporate entrepreneurship that encompasses individuals, groups and organizations.

In the period of Thematic Map 2, the themes concentrated mostly on those considered basic by the analysis. The performance theme continued to have greater representation, as in Thematic Map 1, along with entrepreneurial companies and knowledge. Furthermore, when thinking about the performance of companies, some authors highlighted the importance of networks (Coviello, 2006; Zhou et al., 2007). This importance can be reflected both when entering a new market, through the knowledge acquired before entering and facilitating this process, and through the knowledge that companies can acquire already operating in the international market.

This observation leads us to another, related to the themes that began to be identified in Thematic Map 1, as capabilities, and gained more relevance in the later map, starting to be considered as dynamic capabilities. It is precisely these dynamic capabilities that, in part, make companies like BG internationalize more quickly (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004).

Advancing to the next period of Thematic Map 3, there is a greater concentration of themes and always with greater participation of the performance theme. In this map, in addition to performance, the themes of innovation and knowledge continue to have a strong representation and, together with them, the themes that acquire greater relevance, positioning themselves as driving themes, are management, entrepreneurial orientation and strategy. In this sense, it is understood the importance of works that in previous periods addressed these aspects and that in the period of Thematic Map 3 are reflected.

This is the case of the authors who addressed the internationalization of BG companies and how these companies, despite the scarcity of resources, made use of the formerly called capabilities, now understood as dynamic capabilities, to obtain good performances when it comes to reaching international markets. (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004). In the period of this last map, we can understand that dynamic capabilities are reflected as a strong tool for companies to face the international market. When we talk about companies, we consider all company sizes and lifetimes, as proposed by Zahra et al. (2014), which even include social and environmental aspects to a new way of seeing IE. Along the same lines, Cavusgil and Knight (2015) state that BG companies are a trend, considering as BG companies of all sizes and with diverse bases of resources and knowledge.

Here it is worth making an observation regarding the type of companies considered in research on IE. We observed that in the period of Thematic Map 1, that is, at the beginning of the research, the IE was born from an antagonistic view of traditional internationalization models (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994). The discussion took place in relation to the speed with which INV reached the international market, even suffering from a lack of resources, which was not the case for large multinational companies, until that moment the focus of research on the internationalization of companies. The same context occurred for the BG companies (also of a smaller size), which, despite the lack of resources and short time of existence, had the ability to quickly internationalize using their capabilities, mainly to develop products with advanced technology (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004).

In the period of Thematic Map 3, we see that larger companies are considered when it comes to IE (Zahra et al., 2014; Cavusgil & Knight, 2015). This new scenario can be understood by the need for adaptation and competitiveness that companies face. In other words, if in the past we saw that internationalization was no longer an exclusive feature of large companies, currently it is these large companies that are apparently seen as those that try to take advantage of the opportunities that the market offers and are now embraced by research on IE. In this sense, dynamic capabilities, a culture of innovation and the ability to learn new knowledge that enable good performance by companies, whether small, medium or large, acquire greater relevance.

Thus, and before continuing to the final part of this work, we summarize the findings related to the questions that were formulated at the beginning of this study:

- What are the central themes of production in the IE area?

According to the results of the three thematic maps, it is observed that the theme that dominated the surveys in all periods was the performance of companies in the IE. This theme was accompanied with similar representativeness by the themes of innovation, knowledge, entrepreneurial companies, entrepreneurial orientation, management, strategy and model in Maps 2 and 3, and by exporting behavior in Map 1. The theme that also deserves to be highlighted is dynamic capabilities, which began being considered in Thematic Map 1 as capabilities to gain more relevance in the following map and starting to be considered dynamic capabilities. Currently, and based on Thematic Map 3, the most representative themes of research on IE are “performance”, “innovation”, “knowledge”, “management”, “entrepreneurial orientation” and “strategy”.

- What are the emerging issues within IE?

The emerging themes highlighted are performance, entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurship, impact and management.

Research on IE has already surpassed three decades and, despite already being considered a research area (Servantie et al., 2016), there are authors who claim that there are still important gaps in research on the subject (Terjesen et al., 2013), as well as those who ensure IS is still a heterogeneous area in its production (Etemad, Gurau, & Dana, 2021), or in need of more depth in certain aspects (Zucchella, 2021).

In this sense, we understand that the results and discussion of this work allow us to make an important contribution to the IE area. The first is the cognitive structure of the theme presented and which was allowed by the methodological approach of thematic mapping adopted here. This approach differs from some studies in the area cited here – e.g., Keupp and Gassmann (2009) and Servantie et al. (2016) –, with similar objectives and each with their contributions.

The delivery of this study can be understood as different from most bibliometric works in the field of IE, which, normally, as pointed out by Baier-Fuentes et al. (2018), present, in line with their objectives, descriptive statistics of publications in the field, and it was not possible for us to find other works with the methodological approach of thematic mapping in this study.

In addition, we chose to use the two largest databases in the area of applied social sciences (Scopus and Web of Science) to have greater breadth than if only one database was used – e.g., the Web of Science, as is the case of Nave and Ferreira (2022). Thus, the findings of this study add to those of the others, contributing to the state of the art of the IS.

As such we advance in foundation for the area for the construction of future theoretical and empirical studies, favoring critical analysis “on existing knowledge to study it, learn it, evaluate it or even modify it” (Patriotta, 2020, p. 1, our translation). The results of this study are presented in panels through each of the thematic maps revealing contributions to a better understanding of the development of research on IE in each of the periods covered. In the case of Thematic Map 1, one of the points that can be highlighted is that, from the seminal work of Oviatt and McDougall (1994), several research possibilities originated. This point was also highlighted by Zahra (2005), in which, in addition to this highlight, the author identified a connection between research on IE and the area of behavioral psychology to understand entrepreneur behavior in international ventures.

With Thematic Map 2, it was possible to verify the progress in research on IE, both in number of publications and in topics addressed from their development since Map 1. In this second period, and according to Oviatt and McDougall (2005), a study which was a milestone in the IE research, it is noteworthy that the IE shifted from having a focus on New Ventures to seeing corporate entrepreneurship, encompassing individuals, groups and organizations. Finally, in Thematic Map 3, the importance of themes such as dynamic capabilities was highlighted when dealing with entrepreneurs and companies when undertaking internationally, as well as with regard to their performance.

It can also be understood that the root of the high number of publications in the third map (research on IE) is heterogeneous, an observation also made by authors with publications within this period, including (Etemad et al., 2021). It is from these contributions, as well as those mentioned in each thematic map, that this study proposes a research agenda that can serve as a guide for new work in the area of IE.

Finally, it was possible to highlight the importance of themes such as dynamic capabilities, as well as the current scope of the IE concept in terms of types and sizes of companies. Topics that, as is the case of dynamic capabilities, are highly studied nowadays, but can be even more linked to IE. Thus, we believe in the necessary coverage that these and other topics presented in the proposed research agenda should have so as to advance the area of IE.

Figure 7 shows the tendency for new topics to be addressed by authors. We see that, in the case of the orientation theme, a displacement is produced to influence the orientation themes (continued), entrepreneurship and management. In this case, we understand that, based on an entrepreneurial orientation and its management, companies can develop new strategies, products, etc., have new business perspectives to definitively improve their performance (Teece, 2007).

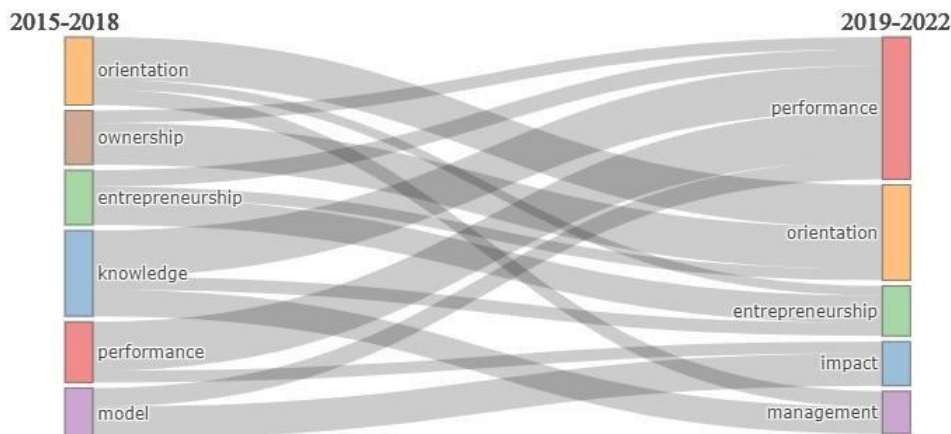


Figure 7. Emerging themes.

Source: authors (research data).

In the case of the ownership theme, this influences the performance and entrepreneurial orientation theme. Then there is the entrepreneurship theme which influences its own continuity, that of the entrepreneurial orientation theme and that of the most representative theme within the emerging ones: performance. Subsequently, we see the theme of knowledge, which contributes to the themes of performance, entrepreneurship and management.

Next comes the performance theme, which provokes its own continuity and the emergence of the impact theme. Finally, there is the model theme, which influences the continuity of the performance theme and the emergence of the impact theme. It is worth noting here an alignment of emerging themes and those that continue their development with the clusters mentioned by Nave and Ferreira (2022), mainly with the clusters networks and international business opportunities, characteristics and motivations of the entrepreneur and stimuli and processes of internationalization. The fourth cluster mentioned by the authors, institutional environments, is included in the research agenda that this article proposes for its deepening.

Therefore, it is observed that the themes emerging from the last thematic map analyzed in this study and in order of relevance are: performance (continued), orientation (understood as entrepreneurial), entrepreneurship (continued), impact and management. It is based on these themes and the results of this study that the following research agenda is proposed:

1. Approach the performance theme, unifying it with the impact theme. It is necessary to have more evidence regarding the impact on the company in terms of learning and knowledge, financial, networking, etc. In this sense, in relation to performance, Ferreras-Méndez, Fernández-Mesa and Alegre (2019) warn about the importance of knowledge and strategies in exporting companies and about how the absorption or learning capacity of these companies affects their performance in the international market. Regarding the impact, when undertaking internationally, and looking at the individual and organizational levels, when dealing with programs or actions that seek to improve the performance of international entrepreneurs, for example, typical methodological approaches to impact assessment can be used, such as difference in differences, discontinuous regression and synthetic control (Cunningham, 2021). That is, the impact theme also

gains contours that go beyond the theme and advance on the method. In addition, evidence is needed at the local level comparing companies from a given country, as well as international evidence comparing different countries and contexts, as suggested by Paul et al. (2017);

2. With regard to entrepreneurial orientation and entrepreneurship, we propose to deepen the investigation into what are the triggers for an entrepreneurial orientation and what are the actions at an institutional level (e.g., governments) to foster an international entrepreneurial orientation and culture. In this sense, Ortiz-Rojo (in press) presents two dimensions with variables that affect the internationalization of SMEs, in which one of these variables is precisely related to the promotion of the internationalization of companies through public policy, to better explore this aspect on how a culture of innovation and export could be established in companies;

3. With regard to management, more contribution is expected in relation to the application of new knowledge when it comes to creating strategies, products, networks, new approaches, etc. We suggest that studies deepening the analysis on dynamic capabilities can help in this sense;

4. Research on the development and application of dynamic capabilities can help in understanding the performance, learning and future of companies that undertake internationally.

In the case of these last two suggestions, it is highlighted that the approach of dynamic capabilities points to the importance of incorporating the dynamism of the environment to the determination of competitive advantage; being the way in which organizations react to the dynamism of the environment – whether through behaviors, processes or other capabilities – that allow the reconfiguration of the capabilities of organizations, leading them to reach new configurations to obtain a sustainable competitive advantage (Lacruz, Cunha, Moura, & Oliveira, 2019).

In this context, Pisano (2017) proposes a model for future research when it comes to dynamic capabilities and how to identify and select these capabilities for a company's competitive performance. According to the aforementioned author, future studies using the proposed model would help in understanding, for example, issues related to the challenges that companies face when it comes to developing new specific or general capabilities for the market.

5. Empirical contributions in relation to the decision to participate in the international market of established companies acting locally. It is expected to know what makes certain companies, after acting locally, decide to undertake internationally (adaptation, competitiveness, learning, etc.). Based on the study of Zahra et al. (2014), in which the authors in their updated definition for IE incorporate companies already established in the market and of all sizes, new possibilities arise to understand how and why companies decide to undertake internationally;

6. Contribute with more evidence in relation to companies that export non-technological products, that is, more traditional products. In the study by Cavusgil and Knight (2015), among the topics proposed for future research, are those related to the future of BG companies, as well as companies with slow internationalization processes. Those that sell more traditional or non-technological products normally fall into this second type of company (Ortiz-Rojo, in press). In this sense, new insights on companies that are not classified as BG, but decide to undertake internationally with non-technological products, will help the understanding of entry strategies, performance and the future of these companies.

Conclusions

In view of the volume of documents in the world production on IE, it was decided to carry out a bibliometric analysis, in particular using the thematic mapping technique. In terms of the performance of the IE area, it is observed that it is a research area that has evolved and grown a lot, and from the second period there was a considerable increase in publications, going from 127 in the first period to 1,042 in the second.

This increase remained constant, reaching 1,934 in the third and last period analyzed. In addition, it should be noted that, according to Bradford's Law, four journals concentrate 1/3 of the production on IE in the total period analyzed, namely: *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*, *Journal of International Entrepreneurship*, *International Business Review* and the *Journal of World Business*.

Regarding the mapping analysis, three thematic maps representing the periods 1995-2004, 2005-2014 and 2015-2022 were presented. The themes that stand out the most and are most representative in the research on IE are: performance of companies in IE, innovation, knowledge, enterprising companies, entrepreneurial orientation, management, strategy, model and export behavior.

Considering the results that show the thematic maps and the evolution in the IE research, the themes that are presented as emerging or with continuity are: performance, entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurship, impact and management.

This work makes a relevant contribution to research on the IE, bringing thematic maps of different periods that help to understand not only the state of the art of each time frame in the area in question, but also, and perhaps more representatively, about its contribution, the thematic evolution of the cognitive structure of the IE field. Along with this, the considerable effort of this study to contemplate all the production carried out on IE since the study considered as initial in the area allows us to offer, in addition to the descriptive statistics normally present in studies of systematic reviews of the literature (Baier-Fuentes et al., 2018), a research agenda based on themes that deserve attention from the results that emerged in the study. This research agenda is aligned with the efforts made by other authors in the field of IE and we understand that, theoretically speaking, they will be able to guide and subsidize new research on the subject.

This study has limitations common to systematic reviews of the literature, such as the heterogeneity of the analyzed studies, resulting from the strategy of avoiding non-coverage bias, including gray literature (e.g., articles published in proceedings), and the possible bias of publication, that is, the tendency in scientific publications of positive evidence to have a greater chance of being published than negative ones, making the comparative analysis biased.

We hope that the contributions made by this study can serve as a guide for the advancement and better understanding of a relevant and dynamic topic such as international entrepreneurship.

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Notes

1. According to Brookes (1969), Bradford's law establishes that ordering journals in a decreasing order of productivity of articles on a given subject makes it possible to establish divided clusters, so that the number of journals (n) in each cluster (core and subsequent zones) is proportional to 1: n:

n2.

Authorship

Ramón Andrés Ortiz-Rojo

PhD student and master's in business administration from the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES).

E-mail: ramonandres.31@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9258-3415>

Adonai José Lacruz

PhD in business administration from the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES), with a postdoctoral degree in business administration and accounting from Fucape Business School. Professor at the Federal Institute of Espírito Santo (IFES) – Viana campus and at the Graduate Program in Business Administration at UFES.

E-mail: adonai.lacruz@ifes.edu.br

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1575-3788>

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The authors inform that there is no conflict of interest.

Inclusive language

The authors use inclusive language that acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities.

Authors' contribution

First author: conception (equal), data curation (leader), formal analysis (equal), methodology (support), validation (equal), writing – original draft (leader), writing – review and editing (equal).

Second author: design (equal), data curation (support), formal analysis (equal), methodology (leader), validation (equal), writing – original draft (support), writing – review and editing (equal).

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