



Dual-internationalization marketing strategies of emerging market e-tailers - Evidence from the Alibaba Group

Jin Shi¹ · Huifeng Bai²

Received: 26 September 2023 / Accepted: 16 September 2026
© The Author(s) 2026

Abstract

From the perspective of international retail, this exploratory study aims to shed light on the marketing strategies to implement dual-internationalization (DI) of emerging market multinational enterprises (EM-MNEs) in e-commerce. The qualitative primary data was collected from sixteen semi-structured executive interviews from the Alibaba Group. It is revealed that emerging market (EM) e-tailers employ two kinds of strongly interrelated and mutually beneficial marketing strategies to accomplish their DI. Specifically, they adopt an adapted *Multinational* strategy in developed markets, and their expansion has a strong asset-seeking orientation. Meanwhile they tend to carry out a standardized *Global* strategy in other emerging markets, through which their expansion has a strong asset-exploitation orientation. The paper develops the model of EM e-tailers' interrelated marketing and expansion strategies during their DI in both developed and emerging markets simultaneously. It contributes to the literature in retailer internationalization and international marketing strategies of EM-MNEs.

Keywords International retail · Dual-internationalization · International marketing strategies · E-tailer · EM-MNEs

✉ Huifeng Bai
H.Bai@ljmu.ac.uk

Jin Shi
Shijin@mail.saitama.ac.jp

¹ Faculty of Economics, Saitama University, 255 Shimo-Okubo, Sakura-Ku, Saitama 338-8570, Japan

² Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University, RB313, Redmonds Building, Brownlow Hill, Liverpool L3 5UG, UK

Introduction

International retail has become an important research subject enlightened by Hollander's seminal work in 1970 (Bai et al. 2024). Besides the six-question theoretical framework (*what, who, why, where, how* and *when* of retailer internationalization), research has shifted to more specific issues. Such as internationalization of small specialist retailers (Hutchinson and Quinn 2011), retailer internationalization to emerging markets (Burt et al. 2021), retailer international divestment (Burt et al. 2019), dynamic capabilities (Bezes 2024), parenting advantages (Bai et al. 2018, 2022a), multiple channel retailing (Verhoef 2021), and retailer international marketing strategies (Bai et al. 2022b). Despite great contribution, prior studies focused on traditional brick-and-mortar retailers originating from developed markets (DMs) rather than emerging markets (EMs), especially EM e-tailers (Alexander and Doherty 2010).

Emerging market multinational enterprises (EM-MNEs) have recently become globally powerful players across various sectors, especially service providers (He et al. 2019), high technology firms (Kotabe and Kothari 2016), and artificial intelligence (AI) applications (Zhang and Peng 2025). For example, after China symbolically overtook the U.S. to become the country with the largest number of ranking companies in 2019, Chinese enterprises steadily increased overseas investment with rising confidence in 2025 (PWC 2025). More recently, according to Casanova and Miroux (2025), the MSCI Emerging Markets Index raised sharply by 33%, and over 3000 listed EM-MNEs account one fifth of global market capitalization.

Meanwhile, EM-MNEs emerged as a significant research field due to their rapid, aggressive and risk-taking internationalization strategies and their ultimate purpose of international expansion, which pose challenges to traditional international business theories that restrict their scope to firms originating in DMs (Luo and Tung 2018). This could explain why there are limited studies that have focused on retailers originating from EMs (Sainam and Bahadir 2024). Bai et al. (2021) identify that EM-MNEs in retailing are keen to implement dual-internationalization (DI) which indicates expansion and business development in both EMs and DMs simultaneously. Nevertheless, marketing strategies adopted by EM retailers' DI remain underdeveloped (Gupta and Ramachandran 2021).

Therefore, this exploratory research aims to examine marketing strategies to implement DI of EM e-tailers. The following two research questions will be addressed: *What is the appropriate marketing strategy for EM e-tailers in other EMs during their DI?* and *What is the appropriate marketing strategy for EM e-tailers in DMs during their DI?*

The next section reviews the relevant literature. After justification of research methodology and study design, the results will be presented and discussed, especially in terms of theoretical and managerial implications. The paper concludes by identifying the limitations of the study and suggesting paths for future research.

Literature review

Emerging market (EM) e-tailers

From a marketing perspective, emerging markets (EMs) are described as developing countries which are undergoing substantial economic growth, transforming business sectors towards industrialization and servitization, and integrating into global markets by high potential of foreign investment (Sheth 2011). Typical examples are BRICS which comprise ten EMs especially Brazil, Russia, India and China. Extant studies such as Nielsen et al. (2018) and Le et al. (2025) demonstrate several core differences between EMs and DMs: economic growth rate (rapid vs. moderate or low), income level (low or intermediate vs. high), market competition and saturation (developing vs. mature), perceived risks for investment (high due to fluctuating policies and currency vs. low due to high transparency in policies), innovation and development of high tech particularly AI (high vs. low).

EM e-tailers can be explained as *'international companies that originated from emerging markets and are engaged in outward FDI, where they exercise effective control and undertake value-adding activities in one or more countries'* (Luo and Tung 2007: 482). Contrast to established DM retailers originated in, whose internationalization is based on the premise that they have already created firm-specific advantages which even built thresholds for new entrants, and they seek to exploit these critical assets in foreign markets (Moore et al. 2010), EM e-tailers are typically characterized by their resource-merger nature (Yaprak and Karademir 2010; Yoo and Reimann 2017). EM e-tailers especially look for strategic assets, those of technology, know-how, human capital in particular managerial expertise, branding strategies, brand management, distribution, as well as the sophisticated skills to offer a higher degree of intangible value to their brands and target consumers (Batsakis et al. 2023).

The existing literature identifies several competitive advantages of EM e-tailers. Firstly, EM e-tailers are more flexible and responsive than their DM counterparts to fast-moving markets (Zhang and Peng 2025). Due to originating from EMs where they have experienced unstable policy development and economic conditions, EM e-tailers have developed the ability to deal with and overcome restrictions in terms of administration and infrastructure within a heavily regulated and fast-moving institutional environment (Bai et al. 2021). Secondly, EM e-tailers usually possess higher innovation capability than their DM competitors (Chidlow et al. 2021). Chen et al. (2021) recognize that EM e-tailers are good at cost-driven innovation since they can identify market needs in an accurate and speedy manner, and provide customers with effective, low-cost products by taking advantage of their better understanding of their home country. Thirdly, EM e-tailers are highly innovative in both product and organizational dimension as they do not suffer from inertia and path dependence (Dow et al. 2018). Fourthly, latecomer advantage enables EM e-tailers to engage in free riding on cutting-edge technology to save on R&D costs and lead time and to achieve effective differentiation (Shi and Au-Yeung 2015). Fifthly, they are likely to take up parenting advantages by being the parent companies of established DM companies through international mergers and acquisitions, which enables EM e-tailers not only to acquire brand assets but also to enjoy the spillover effects of technology and

management know-how from their subsidiaries (Islam and Marquez-Ramos 2023). Lastly, Ai and Tan (2020) uncover success factors of EM e-tailers' post-acquisition reverse capability transfer from EMs to DMs.

Dual-internationalization (DI) of EM e-tailers

As the most distinctive feature of EM e-tailers, dual-internationalisation (DI) is explained as '*entering developing countries helps them gain size and operational experience and generate profits, while venturing into developed ones contributes primarily to the capability upgrading process simultaneously*' (Guillén and García-Canal 2009: 28). Similarly, Hsu et al. (2013) reveal that international *ambidexterity* strengthens EM-MNEs' internationalization performance because of their capabilities to simultaneously implement exploitation and exploration business activities in EMs and DMs. Indeed, Shandong Ruyi Group (the China's biggest multi-brand luxury fashion conglomerate) has developed their DI via strengthening production capabilities in EMs and meanwhile extending to retail markets in DMs (Bai et al. 2021). Therefore, the primary challenge of EM e-tailers' DI is the dilemma in how to balance perceived risks (psychic distance) and market attractiveness in host markets (Dinner et al. 2019).

In terms of internationalization strategies, Table 1 below demonstrates radical differences between EM e-tailers and DM retailers. The nature of EM e-tailers' strategic asset-seeking is important to explain why their internationalization is carried out via different approaches from what the conventional theories such as the Uppsala Model suggest (Johanson and Vahlne 2009). For example, rather than choosing other EMs with less psychic distance or fewer perceived risks to start their international expansion, EM e-tailers normally venture first into DMs where strategic assets and opportunities are available (Mohr and Batsakis 2017).

Although they lack international experience, EM e-tailers internationalize at an early stage, and their internationalization tends to be a rapid rather than an incremental or evolutionary process via aggressive internationalization (Mohr and Batsakis 2018). Such expensive and risky strategies are motivated by the urgency of achiev-

Table 1 The radical differences between EM e-tailers and DM retailers in terms of internationalization strategies

	EM e-tailers	DM retailers
Motives	- Critical asset seeking - Strengthen performance at home	- Asset exploitation - Market seeking
Foreign market selection	- Developed markets (seeking critical assets and market opportunity) - Emerging market and less developed market (seeking efficiency)	- Developed markets (seeking market opportunity) - Emerging market and less developed market (seeking efficiency)
Expansion strategies	- Aggressive, risk-taking - Rapid - Overcome <i>Latecomer</i> disadvantages	- Risk avoiding - Stepwise and incremental - Slow
Market entry mode	- Expensive and risky - Merges and acquisitions	- Low cost and low risk

Adapted from: Hsu et al. (2013); Luo and Tung (2018); Bai et al. (2021)

ing market entry and the aim of maintaining high control over operations to secure more valuable critical assets and to trade-off latecomer disadvantages (Luo and Tung 2018).

International marketing strategies of EM e-tailers

Based upon the long-debated standardization and adaptation, Bai et al. (2022b) classify three types of international marketing strategies for DM retailers. Firstly, *International investment* occurs when retailers partially or totally purchase other retailers in host markets with or without daily business operations. Secondly, *Global* strategy helps retailers to remain their brand identity in host markets, and to achieve economies of scale via standardizing their business practices and centralizing decision-making (Nath et al. 2019). While such inflexible strategy could deter retailers to respond fast-moving marketing conditions (Matricano and Vitagliano 2018). Thirdly, *Multinational* strategy allows retailers to identify market changes and to respond via adapted marketing mix accordingly (Jean and Kim 2020). Such responsive strategy helps retailers to overcome perceived risks in host markets but meanwhile requires considerable investment in terms of finance, know-how and time (Wu and Deng 2020). This study does not aim to deepen the debate on the relative merits of standardized *Global* strategy and adapted *Multinational* strategy further but aims to examine which marketing strategy is more appropriate for EM e-tailers' DI.

It is widely recognized that industry characteristics and institutional factors such as policy, culture, economy, consumer characteristics, and market infrastructure all have a great impact on retailers' international marketing strategies (Essel 2023). For example, Knösel et al. (2024) reveal that small e-tailers are keen to use *Global* strategy as the niche market which they target is globally homogeneous. However, fashion retailers are likely to employ *Multinational* strategy in a country with high cross-national difference (Bai et al. 2022b). From the resource-meager perspective, it is more reasonable for EM e-tailers to adopt *Global* strategy as it is an efficient way to reach the highest level of economies of scale and scope (Anwar 2017). Nevertheless, the understanding of operational details of EM e-tailers' DI remains insufficient, especially interrelations between business development and marketing strategies in both DMs and EMs simultaneously.

Methodology

The authors evaluate the interpretivist case study to be the appropriate methodology as the present research investigates *what*, *how* and *why* research questions regarding international marketing strategies of EM e-tailers' DI which is currently under-developed (Yin 2018). The single case study is suitable when an organization is representative (Moore and Birtwistle 2004; Burt et al. 2021), and the sampling frame for a research context is very small (Moore and Birtwistle 2005; Bai et al. 2021).

Samples

The purposive sampling was employed because this study requires the input of specialists with extensive experience of EM e-tailers (Campbell et al. 2020). The Alibaba Group was evaluated and selected as the case company for the following reasons. Firstly, it has successfully transformed into a global conglomerate from a China-based e-commerce platform (Yun et al. 2020). Its annual active consumers (AAC) exceeded one billion in 2025 with significant growth of first-time buyers (Alibaba 2025). It operates in more than 200 countries through its retail marketplaces of AliExpress, Tmall Global, and Lazada, and its wholesale marketplaces at Alibaba.com (Financial Times 2025). Secondly, it has grown into the second largest e-commerce company in the world in 2025 in terms of market cap, achieving a figure of \$396.88 billion (Statista 2025). Thirdly, besides its core retail and wholesale commerce operating in various marketplaces including B2B, B2C and C2C, Alibaba is developing emerging businesses and eco-systems, including cloud computing, digital media and entertainment, and innovation initiatives (Shao 2023).

Data collection

The primary data was collected through semi-structured executive interviews of Alibaba, which was initially accessed by the leading author's personal network. A total of sixteen interviews were carried out between September 2018 to September 2023. The sampling frame helps to strengthen interviewees' sufficient strategic and operational experience (interviewees are shown in Table 2), including: they must be directors of their departments; have been employed for at least five years; and be involved in decision-making on international expansion strategies.

The sample size was evaluated as sufficient due to following three aspects. Firstly, the researchers identified data saturation because no additional information was being generated and repeated insights were emerging (Braun and Clarke 2021). Secondly, the study scope and generalizability of exploratory research require smaller but focused samples (Yin, 2018). Thirdly, suggested sample size of thematic analysis is between twelve and twenty participants (Braun and Clarke 2013).

All interviews lasted between 40 and 120 min, which are considered good timing for gathering detailed insights (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Interviews were carried out through both face-to-face and online. All interviews started with a recap of research aim and a guarantee of data protection and interviewees' anonymity. Due to semi-structured nature of interviews, interviewees were able to extend the discussion based upon the theoretical framework which is international marketing strategies in both EMs and DMs. Finally, all interviewees were provided with a confidential agreement to protect their privacy and data security. The interviewees were coded for data analysis and results presentation to ensure anonymity. Moreover, secondary data were collected from various sources, including annual reports, marketing reports, and news published by reputable organizations.

Table 2 Profile of the executive interviewees

Interviewee	Interviewee position	Managed market
A	(Headquarter) Vice President in Retail	China
B	(Headquarter) Director in International Expansion	China
C	(Headquarter) Senior Director in Supply Chain	China
D	(Headquarter) Director in Strategy	China
E	(Headquarter) Director in E-commerce and Digitalization	China
F	(Headquarter) Director in Marketing	China
G	(Regional) Managing Director	Russia
H	(Regional) Director in Supply Chain	Russia
I	(Regional) Head of Business Development	Russia
J	(Regional) General Manager	Middle East
K	(Regional) Direct of Operations	Brazil
L	(Regional) Head of Marketing	United States
M	(Regional) Direct of Product Management	United States
N	(Regional) Chief Manager	United States
O	(Regional) Head of Business Development	United Kingdom
P	(Regional) Direct of Innovation	France

Source: Authors' own creation

Table 3 Themes and codes of thematic analysis

Research Question	Themes	Codes
RQ1. EM e-tailers' DI in EMs	Standardized <i>Global</i> strategy, Asset-exploitation	Innovative entrepreneurship, Enhanced customer experiences, Efficient and effective logistics, Similar market infrastructure, Economies of scale
RQ2. EM e-tailers' DI in DMs	Adapted <i>Multinational</i> strategy, Asset-seeking	Developing capacities, Learning, Adaptation, M&A, Eco-system, Dynamic

Source: Authors' own creation

Data analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed by the six-step thematic analysis: familiarization with the data; the generation of initial codes; searching for, reviewing, defining and naming themes, before finally producing the report (Braun and Clarke 2013). The authors employed NVivo 12 to identify code and develop themes from interview data and secondary data (codes and themes are demonstrated in Table 3).

In order to strengthen the validity of the data and the results, the authors synthesized data collection methods (interviews and documentary) and data (interview data, annual reports and marketing reports). These multiple data collection methods and data allow to minimize subjective bias of researchers and interviewees (Etikan and Bala 2017).

Results

International marketing strategies of DI in EMs

It is worth to identified Alibaba's competitive advantages developed from home market prior to examine international marketing strategies. Since eBay had gained an overwhelming advantage with a market share of over 70% before Alibaba's establishment in 1999. The first is innovative entrepreneurship, through which Alibaba introduced a new business model distinct from eBay, characterized by being completely free for sellers. The free policy had a significant effect in attracting users, many of whom moved from eBay to Alibaba in a very short period. This was confirmed by the interviewee A:

'Our innovative business model (free of charge for sellers) firstly stimulated SME and micro business in e-commerce in China, as it encouraged many people to start their own online businesses as a part-time job, thus generating a business boom in China'.

The second is prioritization of consumer experience. Alibaba created a series of measures to improve seller and buyer satisfaction. For instance, AliWangwang, an instant messaging tool, enables simultaneous communication between buyers and sellers. It is regarded as one of the most distinct business features of Alibaba compared to eBay (Cai et al. 2020). Besides its efficient and effective online customer services, it also created a variety of online communities, which represented an early-stage social media platform, as explained by the interviewee D:

'...through which buyers can share their shopping experience and communicate with a wide range of audiences. Consequently, it largely increased the stickiness of the e-commerce platform and enhanced consumer satisfaction even loyalty'.

The Third is Alibaba's efficient and effective logistics and delivery system. The Cainiao Network established in 2013 provides domestic and global one-stop-shop logistics services with the collaboration with over 270 logistics companies (McKinsey, 2022). As a data platform, it also facilitates the digitalization of logistics process and provides supply chain solutions with real-time access to data made available to merchants to better manage their inventory and warehousing, to consumers wishing to track their orders, and to express courier companies optimizing delivery routes. The last is the creation of AliPay, the online payment system enabling users to complete

their online payment without the need for a credit card (Xu et al. 2024). It provides safe online payment through escrow services, as the buyer's payment is put on hold by AliPay, and the buyer sent money to the seller's account after confirming that the goods have been delivered properly. Its active users reached 1.6 billion individual consumers and SMEs and micro businesses by 2025, and the transaction values in 2025 was over \$20.1 trillion (Alibaba, 2025). The importance of AliPay was stressed by the interviewee E:

'Due to its safety and convenience, AliPay now is highly trusted by our consumers. It is so popular that it is not just a payment tool for shopping in Alibaba platforms, but also acts as a kind of social infrastructure that is widely used in our almost every daily life scene'.

Similar to the conditions in the home market, under-developed infrastructure, especially in logistics networks and the online payment systems, are also considerable difficulties for most of e-tailers in EMs. However, Alibaba regarded this as a business opportunity and actively transferred its home developed critical success factors and accumulated know-how into potential EMs, such as Brazil, Russia and the Middle East. Especially, Alibaba established a strong market presence in Russia by adopting a standardized *Global* strategy and replicating its Chinese business model. As a result, It has now become Russia's dominant e-tailer, with monthly active users at more than 35 million in 2025, across most small- and medium-sized cities and even underpopulated areas (Yahoo Finance, 2026). The interviewee B explained that:

'So far, the standardized strategy seems to be the correct choice for our operation in Russia, as here suffers from similar problems Alibaba used to have at the initial stage in China'.

In terms of logistics capacity, the Russian postal system caused serious bottlenecks earlier. For example, inefficient route planning caused delivery delay from China. Alibaba shared its know-how on order fulfillment with its Russian partners and helped Russian Post to carry out a reorganization, optimize its business flow, and set up an IT department. Both the head office in China and senior management in Russia realized the necessity of real-time information sharing, and the big data technology has been actively utilized in the delivery route design. The interviewee H highlighted that:

'We worked with Russian Post and launched a project called 20–80, which aimed to achieve the goal that 80% of users in Russia's 20 largest cities can receive their orders within 15 days. Through the project, we recently accelerated warehouse development in Russia, significantly reducing the delivery lead times'.

Moreover, in terms of the online payment system, a similar system to that used in China was replicated in Brazil and Middle East. A surge in transaction volumes used to cause the partner banks' systems to crash, Alibaba shared its knowledge and know-

how of AliPay and helped its partners to improve their online payment infrastructure and upgrade their information systems. This was stressed by the interviewee K:

‘Transfer of know-how especially introducing AliPay was extremely important as Brazil encountered the similar difficulty in China before. Such under-developed infrastructure (online payment system) allowed us to replicate our business model in other Ems’.

Therefore, a standardized *Global* marketing strategy is appropriate for EM e-tailers’ business development in other EMs because it allows them to achieve effectiveness and efficiency of international expansions in other EMs. Specifically, they can efficiently replicate their home-developed critical success factors and business models in similar market conditions.

International marketing strategies of DI in DMs

The United States (US) was the first DM Alibaba entered, dating back to its listing on the New York Stock Exchange in 2014 as the largest initial public offering (IPO) of \$25 billion (Yahoo Finance 2026). The US remains the most important DM to date. Thereafter, Alibaba has raised a considerable amount of financial support from the US market to accelerate its post-entry business development there. Table 4 below

Table 4 Merges and acquisitions of Alibaba in the US

Time	Target firm	Type or amount of transactions	Business of the target company
2010.06	Vendio	Acquisition	Service provider for E-tailers
2010.08	Auctiva	N.A.	Software developer for E-tailers
2013.06	Fanatics	\$170 million	E-tailer
2013.10	ShopRunner	\$75 million & 39%	E-tailer
2013.10	Quixey	\$50 million investment	Search engine
2015		\$60 million additional investment	Search engine
2014.01	1stDibs	\$15 million	E-tailer
2014.04	Lyft	\$250 million	Ride-sharing company
2014.04	Tango	\$217 million	Social networking service firm
2015.05	Zulily	\$56 million	E-tailer
2015	Jet.com	N.A.	E-tailer
2015	Groupon	Acquisition of 5.6% of the stock	E-tailer
2016	Magic Leap	\$800 million	Related technologies (VR displays)
2016	Barefoot Networks	N.A.	Related technologies (programmable network chips)
2016	PlacelQ	N.A.	Related technologies (big data analysis)
2017	MoneyGram	N.A.	Related technologies (overseas remittances) *This deal was rejected by the U.S. government
2018	Opensky	N.A.	E-tailer

Source: Authors’ own creation

indicates valuable critical assets obtained by Alibaba via a series of mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in the US.

It can be recognized that these M&As involved to two major types of business, including established e-tailers and high-tech firms providing complementary services and technologies for e-tailers. Owning both kinds of companies allow Alibaba to extend its online know-how and business scope for the current business model and strengthen its operations in other markets especially EMs. The importance of critical asset-seeking activities from DMs were confirmed and explained by the interviewee L:

‘As the country with the most advanced technology, the US has provided us with a lot of valuable resources, including not only technologies but also management know-how that underpins our global development... It is the opportunity to enhance our global leadership’.

In light of these facts, it can be inferred that Alibaba regards DMs as a supplier of critical assets and management resources, such as funds and technologies, which it can gain and use to compensate for its competitive disadvantage, and to drive its further growth. Meanwhile, Alibaba has also actively propelled its core business e-tailing in the US. As the US market already experiences fierce competition, the company decided to target a niche market and to distinguish itself from their strong rivals (such as eBay and Amazon) by implementing a differentiation strategy. It experienced a series of trials-and-errors in e-tailing and realized that its standardized *Global* marketing strategy (selling Chinese goods to American consumers) was not appropriate for the US. Subsequently, Alibaba re-designed its marketing strategy in the US and other DMs and strategically shifted to an adapted *Multinational* strategy (selling American goods to Chinese consumers). The current strategy has helped numerous SMEs and micro businesses in DMs, who are not able to establish and develop their business in China and even in the global market (Alibaba, 2025). Seven interviewees highlighted that the adapted *Multinational* strategy has led to rapidly increased sales and market share, and repositioned Alibaba as an e-commerce platform working on behalf of foreign companies with multiple eco-systems. The strategic shift in marketing strategy and business model was highlighted by the interviewee O:

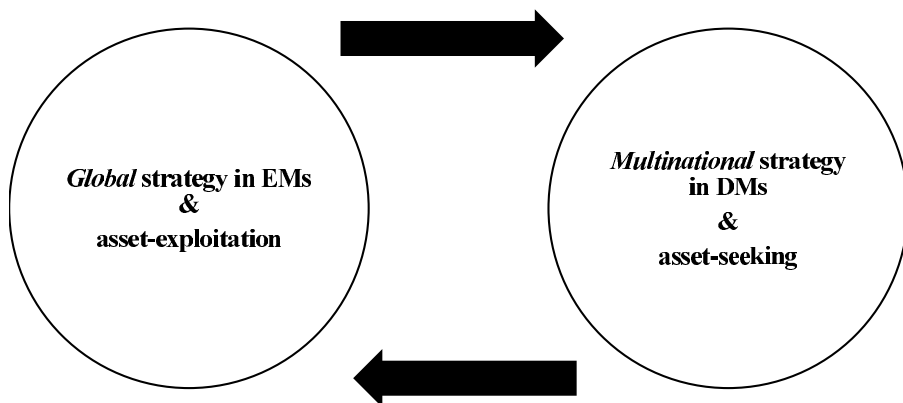
‘We shifted strategy from ‘From China to the world’ to ‘From the world to China’... The shift also means that we have successfully transformed to a platform offering high-value services to foreign SMEs and micro businesses including market research, online store openings, logistics, payments, and consulting’.

Therefore, EM e-tailers should employ an adapted *Multinational* strategy in DMs during their DI. Moreover, from an entire perspective, their DI in EMs and DMs could be implemented concurrently or sequentially, since acquired critical-assets from DMs support EM e-tailers to refine their home-developed competitive advantages and then replicate these factors in other EMs and even DMs.

Table 5 Marketing strategies of EM e-tailers' dual-internationalization

	Global	Multinational
Asset-seeking		Strategy in DMs
Asset-exploitation	Strategy in EMs & under-developed markets	

Source: Authors' own creation

**Fig. 1** Interrelated marketing strategies of EM e-tailers' dual-internationalization

Discussion and conclusion

Based on the above case study of Alibaba, the following conclusions can be presented. It has been revealed that EM e-tailers should pursue different marketing strategies to serve DMs and EMs respectively (as shown in Table 5). More specifically, a standardized *Global* strategy is appropriate in the emerging and under-developed markets. The high similarity in market conditions especially infrastructure and the common problems confronted by these markets are important factors that enabled EM e-tailers to carry out the *Global* strategy. Meanwhile, an adapted *Multinational* strategy should be implemented in DMs, because they need to respond to the market conditions and modify marketing strategies properly.

It has also been revealed that EM e-tailers' expansions into the DMs and EMs have had different strategic orientations. Given the facts that EM e-tailers have raised a large amount of funds and acquired various technologies through M&As in DMs, it can be concluded that its expansion into a developed market has had a strong assets-seeking orientation. In contrast, their expansions into EMs and under-developed markets have been motivated by an asset-exploitation orientation, as illustrated by the fact that in Brazil, Russia and Middle East, Alibaba utilized home-grown assets, aiming to enjoy economies of scale in other EMs (Bai et al. 2021).

During EM e-tailers' DI, marketing strategies adopted in DMs and EMs are strongly interrelated. Figure 1 below illustrates such interrelations and mutual benefit. The asset-exploitation driven *Global* strategy in EMs enable EM e-tailers to achieve economies of scale and profits. On other hand, the profits generated from

the *Global* strategy in EMs supports EM e-tailers' to employ asset-seeking oriented *Multinational* strategy and to obtain critical-assets in DMs. Thereafter, obtained critical-assets in DMs strengthen EM e-tailers' competitive advantages at home and following replication of refined business model in other EMs.

Theoretical and managerial implications

The theoretical contribution of the present paper is threefold. Firstly, extant literature on international retailing has focused on DM originated brick-and-mortar retailers (Alexander and Doherty 2010), the present study thus contributes to the current literature through offering depth understanding of EM e-tailers' DI strategies. These novel findings particularly deepen and extend the understanding of the interrelation between EM e-tailers' international marketing strategies, foreign market selection, and strategic orientation of internationalization (Burt et al. 2021). Secondly, unlike the previous research on EM-MNEs that has mainly focused on their expansion into DMs with an asset-seeking orientation (Guillén and García-Canal 2009; Bai et al. 2021, 2022a), this paper contributes a full picture of EM e-tailers' DI, through which EM e-tailers are adopting interrelated and mutually beneficial marketing strategies to serve both EMs and DMs (Abassi and Eli 2022). Thirdly, beyond international ambidexterity (Hsu et al. 2013), this study further develops the dynamic eco-system of internationalization strategies and expansions (illustrated by Fig. 1). More specifically, EM e-tailers' DI is a continuous business development. It supports them acquiring critical-assets from DMs and strengthening competitive advantages which are replicated in other EMs and even DMs in the following international expansions.

The managerial implications are evaluated by the following three aspects. Firstly, the practitioners in EM e-tailing and even EM-MNEs in other sectors are suggested to value psychic distance during DI. Thus, they can respond local conditions via adjusting their marketing strategies rather than standardising home-developed competitive advantages and business model across all overseas markets (Bai et al. 2022b). Secondly, EM e-tailing and even EM-MNEs in other sectors should benefit from advantages of innovation, flexibility and latecomer during DI. International marketing strategies of DI need to be evaluated in the context of internationalization strategies, strategic orientation, and local conditions in host markets (illustrated by Fig. 1; Table 5). Thirdly, EM e-tailing and even EM-MNEs in other sectors are suggested to design and implement their DI strategically, especially in terms of international expansion direction and foreign market selection criteria.

Research limitations and future research direction

Regardless of the contribution of this study, four kinds of limitations can be identified. Correspondingly, a few future research agendas are proposed. Firstly, due to the nature of the single case study approach, this paper employed purposive sampling and a relatively small sample. However, as one of the very limited EM e-tailers from the high-tech and e-commerce sectors, Alibaba is unique in that it is different from both the state-owned firms which are the focus in current EM-MNEs studies, and the EM-MNEs originating from other emerging markets which have been heavily

influenced by colonialism, such as India and Brazil (Luo and Tung 2018). Therefore, subsequent studies should test the present findings by exploring a larger number of EM e-tailers and multiple channel retailers, and even EM-MNEs in other economic sectors. Secondly, based upon the findings presented in Table 5, future research needs to explore the possibility for EM e-tailers, multiple channel retailers, and EM-MNEs in other sectors to pursue an adapted *Multinational* strategy in EMs and/or a standardized *Global* strategy in DMs (Bai et al. 2024). Thirdly, it has been identified that DMs are regarded as a source of critical-assets and as laboratories of innovation; however, how the resources and experience acquired in DMs can be utilized in EMs remains unexplored (Ai and Tan 2020). Lastly, the present study neglects the barriers of DI implementation in EMs and DMs. The future research is thus suggested to explore challenges of EM e-tailers' and other EM-MNEs' DI implementation and performance in different markets.

Acknowledgments We would like to show our sincere gratitude to all participants.

Author contribution All authors have contributed to all stages of the article.

Funding This work was partly supported by the JSPS KAKENHI [JP20K01820].

Data availability The data used in this study are available upon request.

Declarations

Competing interests There is no conflicting of competing interest of all authors.

Ethical approval This research was approved by Saitama University. It was performed in accordance with the ethical standards as laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The authors adhered to the highest level of integrity and transparency through the process of data analysis and reporting.

Informed consent Informed consent was obtained prior to performing the procedure, including permission for publication of all the participants.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Abassi B, Eli M (2022) R&D internationalization and sector productivity: a host country perspective. *SN Business & Economics* 2:175

- Ai Q, Tan H (2020) Uncovering neglected success factors in post-acquisition reverse capability transfer: Evidence from Chinese multinational corporations in Europe. *Journal of World Business* 55(3):101053
- Alexander N, Doherty A (2010) International retail research: focus, methodology and conceptual development. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 38(11/12):928–942
- Alibaba (2025) Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Report. <https://doc.irasia.com/listco/hk/alibabagroup/annual/2025/ar2025.pdf>
- Anwar S (2017) Alibaba: Entrepreneurial growth and global expansion in B2B/B2C markets *Journal of International Entrepreneurship* 15(4):366–389
- Bai H, He W, Shi J, McColl J, Moore C (2021) Internationalization strategies of emerging market multinationals in luxury fashion retailing – case study of Shandong Ruyi Group. *Thunderbird International Business Review* 63(3):319–327
- Bai H, He W, Shi J, McColl J, Moore C (2022a) Parenting advantages of emerging market multinationals (EMNCs) in luxury fashion retailing. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 50(1):1–17
- Bai H, McColl J, Moore C (2018) Hong Kong, a gateway for mainland China? Examining the impact of luxury fashion retailers' ownership structures on expansion strategies. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 46(9):850–869
- Bai H, McColl J, Moore C (2022b) Luxury fashion retailers' localised marketing strategies in practice – evidence from China. *International Marketing Review* 39(2):352–370
- Bai H, Shi J, Song P, McColl J, Moore C, Fillis I (2024) Localised multiple channel distribution strategies of luxury fashion retailers – evidence from China. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 28(6):1151–1169
- Batsakis G, Theoharakis V, Li C, Konara P (2023) Internationalization and digitalization: Their differing role on grocer and non-grocer retail performance. *Journal of Retailing* 99(3):400–419
- Bezes C (2024) Small independent retailers: digitalize or disappear? An empirical study based on dynamic capacities. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 52(10–11):1020–1037
- Braun V, Clarke V (2013) *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. SAGE, Los Angeles
- Braun V, Clarke V (2021) To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample-size rationale. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 13(2):201–216
- Burt S, Coe N, Davies K (2019) A tactical retreat? Conceptualising the dynamics of European grocery retail divestment from East Asia. *International Business Review* 28(1):177–189
- Burt S, Dawson J, Johansson U, Hultman J (2021) The changing marketing orientation within the business model of an international retailer – IKEA in China over 10 years. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research* 31(2):229–255
- Cai Y, Wang Y, Zhang J (2020) Enhancing e-platform business by customer service systems: a multi-methodological case study on AliWangwang instant message's impacts on Taobao. *Annals of Operations research* 291:59–81
- Campbell S, Greenwood M, Prior S, Shearer T, Walkem K, Young S, Bywaters D, Walker K (2020) Purposive sampling: complex or simple? Research case samples. *Journal of Research in Nursing* 25(8):652–661
- Casanova L, Miroux A (2025) *Emerging Markets Multinationals Report 2025: New Rules, New Opportunities*. Cornell University, New York
- Chen H, Zeng S, Wu C, Fu H (2021) The dual effect of foreign competition on emerging market firms' internationalization. *Management Decision* 59(9):2264–2285
- Chidlow A, Wang J, Liu X, Wei Y (2021) A co-evolution perspective of EMNE internationalization and institutions: An integrative framework of 5Cs. *International Business Review* 30(4):101843
- Creswell J, Creswell J (2018) *Research design: qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (5th Ed.). SAGE, California
- Dinner I, Kushwaha T, Steenkamp J (2019) Psychic distance and performance of MNCs during marketing crises. *Journal of International Business Studies* 50(3):339–364
- Dow D, Liesch P, Welch L (2018) Inertia and Managerial Intentionality: Extending the Uppsala Model. *Management International Review* 58(3):465–493
- Essel R (2023) Foreign direct investment, technological spillover, and total factor productivity growth in Ghana. *SN Business & Economics* 3:144

- Etikan I, Bala K (2017) Sampling and sampling methods. *Biometrics and Biostatistics International Journal* 5(6):00149
- Financial Times (2025) Alibaba Group Announces September Quarter 2025 Results and Interim Results for the Six Months Ended September 30, 2025. https://markets.ft.com/data/announce/detail?dockey=600-202511250532BIZWIRE_USPRX_20251124_BW757764-1
- Guillén M, García-Canal E (2009) The American model of the multinational firm and the “new” multinationals from emerging economies. *Academy of Management Perspectives* 23(2):23–35
- Gupta S, Ramachandran D (2021) Emerging market retail: Transitioning from a product-centric to a customer-centric approach. *Journal of Retailing* 97(4):597–620
- He W, Boating A, Patrick R (2019) Motives, choice of entry mode, and challenges of bank internationalization: Evidence from China. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 61(6):897–909
- Hsu C, Lien Y, Chen H (2013) International ambidexterity and firm performance in small emerging economies. *Journal of World Business* 48(1):58–67
- Hutchinson K, Quinn B (2011) Identifying the characteristics of small specialist international retailers. *European Business Review* 23(3):314–327
- Islam S, Marquez-Ramos L (2023) Service and the internationalization of manufacturing firms in Indonesia. *SN Business & Economics*, 3:49
- Jean B, Kim D (2020) Internet and SME's internationalization: The role of platform and website. *Journal of International Management* 26(1):100690
- Johanson J, Vahlne J (2009) The Uppsala internationalization process model revisited: From liability of foreignness to liability of outsidership. *Journal of International Business Studies* 40(3):1411–1431
- Knösel C, Cheng C, Shiu E (2024) Exploring Social Media Use in Cross-Border E-Commerce and the internationalization Process: A Comparative Study of Cross-Country and Firm Size. *Thunderbird International Business Review* 67(2):257–283
- Kotabe M, Kothari T (2016) Emerging market multinational companies' evolutionary paths to building a competitive advantage from emerging markets to developed countries. *Journal of World Business* 51(5):729–743
- Le H, Nguyen P, Chebbi H, Dinh D (2025) The evolution of international marketing management: AI applications and emerging markets driving international selling in the digital era. *International Marketing Review*, in press. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-04-2025-0176>
- Luo Y, Tung R (2007) International expansion of emerging market enterprises: A springboard perspective. *Journal of International Business Studies* 38(4):481–498
- Luo Y, Tung R (2018) A general theory of springboard MNEs. *Journal of International Business Studies* 49(2):129–152
- Matricano D, Vitagliano G (2018) International Marketing Strategies in the Jewellery Industry: Are They Standardised, Adapted or Both? *International Journal of Marketing Studies* 10(1):1–10
- McKinsey (2022) Five things to know about the Chinese logistics market heading into 2022. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/travel-logistics-and-infrastructure/our-insights/five-things-to-know-about-the-chinese-logistics-market-heading-into-2022>
- Mohr A, Batsakis G (2017) Internationalization speed and firm performance: A study of the market-seeking expansion of retail MNEs. *Management International Review* 57(2):153–177
- Mohr A, Batsakis G (2018) Firm resources, cultural distance and simultaneous international expansion in the retail sector. *International Business Review* 27(1):113–124
- Moore C, Birtwistle G (2004) The Burberry business model: creating an international luxury fashion brand. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 32(8):412–422
- Moore C, Birtwistle G (2005) The nature of parenting advantage in luxury fashion retailing – the case of Gucci group NV. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* 33(4):256–270
- Moore C, Doherty A, Doyle S (2010) Flagship stores as a market entry method: the perspective of luxury fashion retailing. *European Journal of Marketing* 44(1/2):139–161
- Nath P, Kirca A, Kim S, Andras T (2019) The effect of retail banner standardization on the performance of global retailers. *Journal of Retailing* 95(3):30–46
- Nielsen U, Hannibal M, Larsen N (2018) Reviewing emerging markets: context, concepts and future research. *International Journal of Emerging Markets* 13(6):1679–1698
- PWC (2025) Chinese enterprises expand steadily into the Middle East market with heightened confidence. <https://www.pwc.com/ml/en/publications/chinese-enterprises-expand-steadily-into-the-middle-east-market-with-heightened-confidence.html>
- Sainam P, Bahadir S (2024) Emerging Market Firms' Internationalization Pricing Strategies: The Role of Country of Origin and Organizational Learning. *Journal of International Marketing* 32(3):5–22

- Shao S (2023) Impact of dual-class share structure: Alibaba IPO success analysis. *Asia Pacific Business Review* 29(2):350–371
- Sheth J (2011) Impact of Emerging Markets on Marketing: Rethinking Existing Perspectives and Practices. *Journal of Marketing* 75(4):166–182
- Shi J, Au-Yeung A (2015) An innovation perspective on Chinese retailers' competitive advantage. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research* 25(2):120–144
- Statista (2025) Leading e-commerce companies worldwide as of November 2025, by market cap. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/245340/leading-large-cap-e-commerce-companies-market-cap/?srsltid=AfmBOoozd-nDjwuXVvJLAXeIzVDDIfGCEAD0CLTgxESNLM-0B6075dm5>
- Verhoef P (2021) Omni-channel retailing: some reflections. *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 29(7):608–616
- Wu B, Deng P (2020) Internationalization of SMEs from emerging markets: An institutional escape perspective. *Journal of Business Research* 108:337–350
- Xu Y, Ghose A, Xiao B (2024) Mobile payment adoption: an empirical investigation of Alipay. *Information Systems Research* 35(2):807–828
- Yahoo Finance (2026) Asia-Pacific B2C Ecommerce Market Report 2025–2029. https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/asia-pacific-b2c-e-commerce-market-090100244.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAIALbRUkqAxtlteQ9tARB AJ4CuB9AYrvU1UKvSM7ynV2F_npkGx_ZtnImf0FX9W7t4U9ZiDzVdGevsVXL0BgcFgqRT1n4jE1yw4CIC6uhAPxDualw0odCne5uEwRie2FSL4bQmowQeUgKUK1ti4z8bwMFIPpb2HzA72QOnB
- Yaprak A, Karademir B (2010) The internationalization of emerging market business groups: an integrated literature review. *International Marketing Review* 27(2):245–262
- Yin R (2018) *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th edn. SAGE, Los Angeles
- Yoo D, Reimann F (2017) Internationalization of Developing Country Firms into Developed Countries: The Role of Host Country Knowledge-Based Assets and IPR Protection in FDI Location Choice. *Journal of International Management* 23(3):242–254
- Yun J, Zhao X, Park K, Shi L (2020) Sustainability Condition of Open Innovation: Dynamic Growth of Alibaba from SME to Large Enterprise. *Sustainability* 12(11):4379
- Zhang B, Peng B (2025) The role of leading companies in artificial intelligence applications. *The Journal of Technology Transfer* 50(5):1919–1946