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ROLE OF DIGITALISATION IN THE INTERNATIONALISATION OF POLISH AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY COMPANIES: RESULTS FROM A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Digitalisation has revolutionised the way enterprises operate, influencing the development of business models, marketing communication, distribution, and customer relationship management. Over the last few years, internationalisation at the intersection of digitalisation research has become a significant topic in academic literature (Appiah et al., 2025). Researchers such as Birkinshaw (2022) and Katsikeas et al. (2020) call for studies on how digitalisation affects the internationalisation of companies. This article aims to identify the role of digitalisation in accelerating internationalisation processes within the agricultural machinery industry, with a particular focus on the industrial sector. A qualitative approach was adopted for this study. Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with six managers responsible for international strategies in agricultural machinery manufacturing companies in Poland.

The research results demonstrated that internationalisation processes can be supported by digitalisation at both the initial stage (e.g., gaining market knowledge and identifying new opportunities) and at the operational stage (e.g., managing foreign marketing activities and overcoming market entry barriers). These findings align with the results obtained by Etemad et al. (2010) and Neubert (2018). To date, research has primarily focused on the internationalisation of service sector firms, tech start-ups, born-global companies, and niche organisations utilising digital tools for expansion. In the context of industrial enterprises, there is a lack of detailed research on the use of digital tools for foreign expansion and on how digitalisation supports establishing and maintaining customer relationships. For business practice, the study suggests that managers should use digital tools to strengthen market intelligence, partner communication, and virtual relationship building, thereby increasing organisational readiness and agility for foreign market entry.

KEY WORDS

internationalisation, digitalisation, marketing internationalisation strategies, international marketing, agriculture

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing digitalisation of economies has highlighted the importance of digital transformation and how it can help enterprises maintain competitiveness in the market (Kraus et al., 2021).

In recent decades, globalisation has exerted increasing pressure on enterprises, forcing them to adapt. To not only survive but also thrive in a competitive environment, companies must integrate effectively. Digital solutions and collaboration tools play a key role in this process (White, 2012). Changes resulting from digitalisation, both within the enter-

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prise and in its environment, can render existing business models obsolete (Parviainen et al., 2017). This phenomenon drives digital transformation across various sectors as a response to dynamic development and disruptive technological innovations. The high level of uncertainty accompanying these changes forces industries and enterprises to adapt to new market conditions. Innovative and agile enterprises incorporate transformation requirements into their strategies to maintain a strong position in competitive markets (Kraus et al., 2021).

Digital transformation is understood as the use of new digital technologies such as social media, mobile technology, analytics, or embedded devices to enable business improvements, including enhanced customer experiences, streamlined operations, or new business models (Fitzgerald et al., 2014). Solis et al. (2014) characterised it as reorganisation or new investments in technology and business models to more effectively engage digital customers at every point of the customer lifecycle. According to Westerman et al. (2011), it is also the use of technology to radically improve the performance or reach of enterprises. Hinings et al. (2018) pointed to digital transformation as the combined effects of several digital innovations that introduce new actors or constellations of actors, structures, practices, values, and beliefs that change, threaten, replace, or complement existing rules of the game in organisations, ecosystems, industries, or fields. Stolterman et al. (2004) defined it much more broadly in the context of changes involving the application of digital technology in all aspects of human society.

A connected world and ubiquitous technology have changed the rules of brand building, marketing strategies, and internationalisation. While the internet enabled these transformations, the true drivers were software and hardware technologies (Vadana et al., 2020). Due to these changes, online customers and users expect simplicity, convenience, and relevance (Hänninen et al., 2017). This has given rise to digital entrepreneurship, which requires new research approaches and explanations (Nambisan, 2017).

Nambisan (2017) describes digital entrepreneurship through digital artefacts, platforms, and infrastructure. Digital artefacts represent online applications and content as part of a new product or service offering specific functionality or value to the end user. Digital platforms serve as a shared set of services and architecture that hosts complementary offerings. Digital infrastructure includes systems that

provide enhanced communication, collaboration, or computing capabilities.

Digital technology has been divided into two main dimensions: digital communication, i.e., internet technologies that facilitate cross-border transactions and operations, such as e-commerce platforms, blockchain, and distributed organisations; and digital technologies, i.e., additive manufacturing, artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, and analytics (Birkinshaw, 2022).

Research and online media indicate the emergence of a new type of companies (Brouthers et al., 2016) that base their business development on the latest technologies and digitalisation, as well as the use of digital technologies to improve business models, providing new opportunities for generating revenue and value (Hänninen et al., 2017; Nambisan, 2017).

Vadana et al. (2020) distinguished four types of enterprises regarding their level of digitalisation advancement:

- “Highly digital” from the start - enterprises implementing digital technologies immediately;
- “Mature highly digital” - traditional enterprises that have undergone digital transformation;
- “Mature low digital” - enterprises with primarily offline operations;
- “Young low digital” - enterprises just beginning their digitalisation.

Digitalisation also offers the creation of e-marketplaces for enterprises to search for customers, conduct business transactions, and expand international networks (Tseng & Johnsen, 2011).

Digitalisation involves the use of digital technology that transforms business activities in areas such as communication, development of new business models, marketing and distribution, and business relationship management (Autio et al., 2021). Digitalisation enables low-cost communication with stakeholders and satisfies the explicit or implied needs of global customers (Tanev, 2012). Furthermore, digital technologies have enabled organisations to collect and analyse vast amounts of data, providing valuable insights into consumer behaviour, market trends, and operational performance. A data-driven approach not only improves strategic decision-making but also enables enterprises to tailor their offerings to the evolving needs and preferences of global consumers while optimising resource utilisation (Durao et al., 2024).

Already, internet technologies have made information about products and services ubiquitous, and social media encourages consumers to share, com-

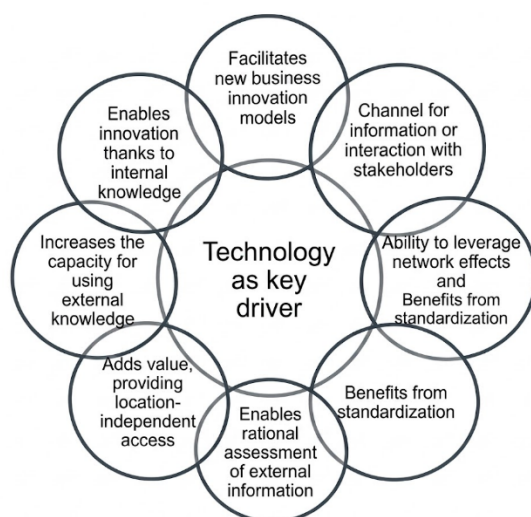


Fig. 1. Benefits of incorporating technology into business strategies

Source: author's elaboration on the basis of (Kraus et al., 2021).

pare, and rate experiences. To acquire customers, companies must know them and, above all, their expectations; they must also be able to reach customers through the appropriate type of interaction. Marketing based on social media and analytics is key to building and understanding data to define trends, measure the effectiveness of activities and investments at key points in the consumer decision path, and understand how and why individuals move along these paths (Brouthers et al., 2016).

Figure 1 illustrates the benefits that enterprises can achieve by incorporating technology into their strategies and operational methods.

According to Li (2020), digital technologies facilitate the development of a wider range of new business models; they not only transform them but also serve as a new channel for information and interaction with customers and other stakeholders. White (2012) points to cloud technologies as a significant technological advancement that provides location-independent access to information. Trantopoulos et al. (2017) signal that IT technologies support innovation by leveraging internal knowledge resources and increasing the capacity to draw upon external knowledge. They present IT as a tool that enables access to external knowledge resources through data management systems and network connectivity. Network connectivity fosters a greater absorption of information from external sources. The development of mobile connectivity and the emergence of social networks contribute to an exponential growth in the volume of data, which, in the opinion

of Berman (2012), requires business analytics to evaluate rational information for effective utilisation. Among other reasons for adopting new information technologies, Kraus et al. (2021) further highlighted the potential for network effects and standardisation benefits.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last few years, internationalisation at the intersection of digitalisation research has become a significant topic in academic literature (Appiah et al., 2025). Researchers in the field of international business, such as Birkinshaw (2022) and Katsikeas et al. (2020), call for studies on how digitalisation affects the internationalisation of enterprises.

Both early-internationalising “born global” enterprises and late-internationalising companies are currently experimenting with new ways of utilising digital technologies in their internationalisation perspectives and related activities (Appiah et al., 2025). Appiah et al. (2025) and Lee et al. (2019) pointed to platforms such as eBay, Amazon, Facebook, and Alibaba as those providing vast opportunities for earlier and rapid internationalisation. Digital platforms enable direct sales to foreign customers and the immediate delivery of digital products and services to global clients, which is of great importance, particularly in e-commerce. The authors of the publication highlight the possibilities of using digital tools in industrial enterprises and their role in streamlining

business processes, building relationships with partners, and increasing the efficiency of international expansion.

Compared to conventional, time-consuming approaches to exporting via trade fairs and personal interaction, internet-based exporting involves lower transaction costs for customer search, global exposure, and instantaneous information transmission. The internet has accelerated enterprises' internationalisation by reducing psychic distance and enhancing international market growth (Deng et al., 2022). In the past, enterprises had to spend enormous sums on travel to gather information about foreign markets. However, the influx of internet-enabled tools such as social media, big data, and predictive analytics allows for the creation of knowledge and networks at a faster pace, which in turn increases the efficiency of decision-making processes and the speed of internationalisation (Gnizy, 2019; Neubert, 2018).

Internationalisation processes can be supported by the internet both at the initial stage (such as gaining knowledge about international markets or identifying new opportunities) and at the operational stage (through managing marketing activities abroad and overcoming barriers to entry into foreign markets). Furthermore, the internet plays a vital role within enterprises by supporting processes such as developing entry strategies for new markets, building marketing competencies, or refining business models (Etemad et al., 2010). Enterprises have also adopted the internet to streamline delivery and payment by receiving revenue and making payments for exports or raw materials used in production (Hinson et al., 2007). Using internet-based platforms, such as Zoom or Skype, to support communication and collaboration between companies and customers enables entrepreneurs to benefit from better learning experiences. These experiences translate into knowledge generation, which can potentially accelerate the internationalisation process. In turn, the use of social media allows enterprises to establish higher-quality international business contacts, better understand customer views and preferences, build brand awareness, and gather knowledge about competitors in international markets (Appiah et al., 2025).

Li (2020) identified four social media marketing strategies: social commerce, social content, social monitoring, and social customer relationship management (CRM). The use of social media by exporting enterprises increases the likelihood of engaging with foreign customers and fostering stronger relationships. Social media serves as an easy-to-use social

marketing channel and provides rich information that ensures a better understanding of these customers (Eid et al., 2020).

The significance of digitalisation for international market performance is reflected in the effectiveness of the internet, online channels, big data, and predictive analytics in internationalisation activities (Appiah et al., 2025). Selected authors have focused on the impact of digital technology on online channel management and sales, communication, networking, market research, and the enhancement of exporters' images. These mechanisms are particularly relevant for industrial enterprises operating in international markets, where maintaining relationships with business partners and coordinating cross-border operations are essential.

Pini et al. (2018) argue that digital reorganisation, involving the introduction of digital technologies that necessitate changes in business processes and improvements in internal digital skills, is significantly associated with SMEs' international activities and is thus a vital driver of export growth. The probability of increasing exports is correlated with the adoption of more advanced digital technologies as part of a firm's organisational innovation, thereby gaining a competitive advantage.

Rialp-Criado and Rialp-Criado (2018) and Zhang et al. (2013) examined the impact of information systems on the performance of enterprises, particularly among exporters and global players. In such companies, communication with foreign partners occurs digitally, and ICT technologies support their competitive advantage by lowering communication costs with customers/suppliers and facilitating the acquisition of information about foreign markets (Zhang et al., 2013). This is especially important in industrial enterprises, where long-term cooperation with international suppliers, distributors, and customers plays a crucial role in foreign expansion. According to Bianchi et al. (2016), internet technologies play a key role in capturing new markets. However, their effectiveness depends on the utilisation of international networks and the firm's entrepreneurial capabilities. To achieve international success, enterprises should develop dynamic capabilities by combining entrepreneurial orientation with technology. Internet and network capabilities are particularly important for exploring new markets and increasing international performance. For industrial enterprises, these capabilities support coordination within international supply chains and facilitate the development of long-term business relationships. Research results

by Alarcón et al. (2024) demonstrate that better Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capabilities positively influence social media use, streamline communication, and lead to stronger relationships with foreign customers, but they do not directly reduce export costs. Social media can lower operational costs, which subsequently reduces the marketing expenses of exporting firms (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Neubert (2018) demonstrated that the effective use of the internet reduces communication costs with foreign customers and suppliers, as well as the costs of gathering information about foreign competitors. This significantly increases the effectiveness of export marketing, improving profitability, growth, sales volume, market share, and global strategic competitiveness.

Kuivalainen et al. (2013) compared two approaches to using the internet: as a sales channel and as an alternative to physical presence in foreign markets. The researchers emphasised that although the internet offers new opportunities for internationalisation, enterprises should approach strategies based solely on online channels with caution, considering market environment dynamics and the necessity of balancing online and offline activities. Additionally, traditional export channels, such as agents and distributors, can increase their value through services that support exporters in utilising online information more effectively. While using the internet as a sales channel positively affects the export performance of SMEs, replacing traditional intermediaries with the internet does not always lead to better results. Supporting online strategies through offline activities, such as traditional intermediaries and tailored customer service, is crucial for successful foreign expansion.

A study by Zhou and Charoensukmongkol (2020) highlights the efficiency and effectiveness of specific platforms, such as Facebook, in the context of export sales. Due to its global network and network effect, Facebook enables export sellers to better access information about foreign customers and improve their lead qualification. This highlights the importance of choosing the appropriate platform in sales digitalisation processes. In the study by Alarcón-del-Amo et al. (2018), exporting enterprises were divided into three segments: potential social media users, beginner users, and social media experts. This segmentation showed differences in the level of managerial engagement in social media. Firms belonging to the “expert” segment achieved significantly better

results than firms in other groups. A higher level of social media engagement translates into better export performance.

Research by Wang (2011) confirms that communication and transaction functions on exporters’ websites increase their foreign sales effectiveness. For exporters, it is essential to provide reliable product information and facilitate online ordering while considering local needs by adapting content to the language and market specifics. Additional features, such as order tracking, online assistance, and transparent sales terms, can increase customer loyalty and encourage more frequent use of online channels. In turn, experienced exporters should develop communication functions by providing an extensive database and facilitating quick access to relevant information for users. The ability for users to post content can transform a website into an industry portal or a business community hub, increasing competitive advantage. Saban and Rau (2005) stated that websites enable enterprises to publish information about the company and products and interact with customers in foreign markets. Furthermore, websites had a positive impact on international presence because the more data was sent and received by website visitors, the more knowledge the firm gained about visitors to support and accelerate the internationalisation decision-making process.

The study by Eid et al. (2020) concerned the B2B segment; according to the authors, perceived usefulness has the greatest impact on the acceptance and use of social media marketing by managers of small and medium-sized B2B enterprises. Managers who believe that social media brings tangible benefits to international marketing are more inclined to adopt it. The visibility of results from using social media is the second most important factor influencing its adoption. The study’s results suggest that B2B organisations that have not previously used social media but plan to invest in the future can expect an overall improvement in performance through its use. B2B enterprises that have not yet implemented social media in their marketing activities may find themselves under pressure from customers expecting interaction via these platforms, as well as from competitors who increasingly use these tools to their advantage.

Research on digitalisation in the process of enterprise internationalisation focuses on various types of organisations, considering their specific nature and methods of expansion into new markets. In the context of technology start-ups, analyses were conducted

by Yoos (2012), Maltby (2012), and Neubert (2018). The internationalisation of service enterprises in a digital environment was studied by Grönroos (2016). For born-global companies or International New Ventures (INVs), which are focused on rapid entry into foreign markets, research was carried out by Lee et al. (2019), McCormick and Somaya (2020), and Crespo, Crespo, Silva, and Nicola (2023). Niche enterprises were analysed by Foscht et al. (2018). In turn, online trade was examined by Arenius et al. (2005) and Mahnke et al. (2003). An important aspect is also B2B e-commerce platforms, whose functioning in the context of global markets was studied by Deng et al. (2016), or platform enterprises, which were the subject of research by Stallkamp and Schotter (2021).

Yoos (2012) analysed market channels and support programmes used by six technology start-ups that internationalised rapidly. It was shown that all analysed start-ups used the internet for sales, but most also utilised additional channels, suggesting that an online presence alone is insufficient for rapid international expansion. Regarding digital tools, start-ups used the internet as a primary tool for sales and communication, and some also employed support programmes covering contact networks, education, and marketing. Maltby (2012), on the other hand, examined the role of social media as a low-cost tool, specifically the use of online forums, for interaction with customers and partners, bypassing the traditional, gradual approach to internationalisation and supporting the international expansion of tech start-ups. Start-ups can build relationships and gain the trust of customers and partners through an active online presence. Entrepreneurs can leverage their expert knowledge by sharing it in discussions, which increases their credibility and attracts customers on online forums. Thus, start-ups can reduce promotion expenses by offering solutions to problems discussed in online communities. Neubert (2018) demonstrated that digitalisation enabled global start-ups to use social data (market networks) and intellectual data (market knowledge) to predict future market developments.

In his research on service enterprises, Grönroos (2016) indicated that although traditional internationalisation strategies, including exports and internet marketing, remain relevant, digitalisation has significantly expanded the possibilities for global expansion, especially for services. The development of the internet, mobile technologies, and digital tools has enabled the emergence of “born global” compa-

nies operating internationally from the very beginning. Digitalisation has allowed for the global offering of services that were previously available only locally, such as through online games.

According to McCormick and Somaya (2020), using the internet helps young born-global enterprises overcome internationalisation barriers by lowering transaction costs and accelerating foreign expansion. The publication by Lee et al. (2019) assumed that enterprises that effectively utilise digitalisation can internationalise faster. The development of international business competencies is key to rapid internationalisation in the digital era. Digitalisation should be treated as a key factor enabling earlier and more dynamic expansion into foreign markets, and export support programmes should consider the level of digitalisation across different industries; those more dependent on digital technology will require additional assistance regarding business and digital competencies. The research by Crespo et al. (2023) focused on digitalisation-supported internationalisation strategies and their key role in achieving high levels of innovation during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the main changes due to COVID-19 was the growing pressure on both people and enterprises to use digital technologies and online operations. This crisis forced organisations to innovate in their products, processes, or business models to survive and thrive through the hardships of the pandemic. The presence of a strategic approach, combining an international vision with the ability to utilise digital technologies, brought key benefits for early expansion into foreign markets, effectively resulting in INVs leveraging technological advantages.

The conclusions from the study by Foscht et al. (2006) indicated that small, niche enterprises can successfully internationalise through e-commerce, which enables them to expand without large capital investments or complicated foreign operations. E-commerce proved to be a key tool for rapid entry into international markets at lower cost and risk. Building a community around the brand and interactive relationship management were also significant success factors for niche organisations.

Arenius et al. (2005) suggested that the internet can be used in two ways: as a complementary sales channel or as a primary sales channel, depending on the requirements of the target markets. The internet as a sales channel transforms the traditional, stage-based method of internationalisation. Instead of gradually expanding into new markets, enterprises

can move faster into international activities, simplifying their marketing and sales organisation and reducing the need for a physical presence in target countries. In turn, Mahnke et al. (2003) point out that eBay, as a provider of digital goods, is a good example of how many firms combine digital and physical goods (e.g., book sales, banking). They further emphasise that features such as transport, reproduction, and adaptation costs, as well as network effects, play a key role in decisions regarding the choice of market entry strategies and internationalisation paths.

According to Deng et al. (2016), B2B e-commerce facilitates international expansion by lowering information search and transaction costs. The fast, convenient, and broad market access offered by these platforms can allow early-stage exporters to gain an advantage over late exporters in terms of learning. However, the benefits for first-mover enterprises last only for 3-5 years and completely disappear after 6-7 years. Enterprises should actively change their strategy by increasing product diversification or moving to premium segments.

The study by Stallkamp and Schotter (2021) combined internationalisation theory with research on network effects to better understand the international strategies of platform firms. In the case of strong cross-country network effects, building a global user base becomes crucial, which may allow later players to enter new markets more effectively. User networks are a significant asset, but platform firms often also possess advanced managerial and technological competencies that can constitute location-independent advantages. The authors also indicate that the origin of a platform enterprise can influence its international expansion. For example, firms from English-speaking countries or those with a large diaspora may find it easier to enter markets with similar cultural and linguistic characteristics. Platform organisations operate in dynamic industries where the boundaries between sectors are blurring, and technological innovations force the adaptation of strategies to the specifics of individual markets.

To date, research has primarily focused on the internationalisation of service sector enterprises, technology start-ups, born-global companies, and niche organisations utilising digital tools for expansion into new markets. The role of digital and e-commerce platforms in the internationalisation process has also been a significant area of analysis. However, in the context of industrial enterprises, there is a lack of detailed research regarding the use of

digital tools for foreign expansion and the ways in which digitalisation supports the establishment and maintenance of international customer and partner relationships. Consequently, the authors of this publication have undertaken to verify these issues by analysing which digital technologies are used by industrial enterprises and how they contribute to building and maintaining business relationships in an international environment.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The authors selected the individual in-depth interview (IDI) as the research method because: (1) it is employed when the problem requires a more profound knowledge of the participants; (2) it is used in research involving difficult-to-reach individuals; (3) it is applied when there is a need to obtain not only an evaluation of a given phenomenon but also an understanding of the process of its formation, and when the free and open expression of opinions is required; and (4) it creates an intimate atmosphere (Bryman & Bell, 2007; McDaniel & Gates, 2010).

The purposive sampling strategy was adopted because the study was exploratory and aimed to obtain in-depth insights from information-rich cases rather than to achieve statistical representativeness. The firms were selected to ensure variation in terms of size, export involvement, product specialisation, and market experience. All selected companies were active participants in the Agro Tech fair in Kielce and represented the agricultural machinery manufacturing sector. The final sample included both large enterprises and SMEs, capturing different perspectives on digitalisation and internationalisation processes.

The interviews were conducted with respondents who possessed direct knowledge of marketing, digital marketing, export activities, and foreign market development. This respondent profile was intentionally selected because managers, marketing specialists, export managers, and commercial directors are directly involved in decisions and practices related to international expansion and the use of digital tools.

A total of six interviews were conducted (each lasting 60-90 minutes), involving representatives of senior management from agricultural machinery manufacturing enterprises. These were carried out in March 2025 during the Agro Tech trade fair in Kielce, Poland. Although the sample was limited to six interviews, the material collected was sufficient for the

study's exploratory purpose. After the sixth interview, no substantially new themes emerged regarding the main research questions, indicating an acceptable level of thematic saturation.

With respondents' consent, the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The transcripts constituted the basis for further qualitative analysis.

In accordance with literature guidelines, it was assumed that sampling in qualitative research is understood as a method of collecting carefully selected "cases" that form a set of empirical examples enabling the most fruitful analysis of the studied phenomenon (purposive sampling) (Flick, 2007). Following the guidance of Flick (2007) and given the subject of the study, it was assumed that the quality of the sampling would consist of ensuring significant diversity within the group and its "adequacy". The study covered six enterprises from the agricultural machinery manufacturing industry:

- Company A is a large producer of agricultural and municipal machinery, including mowers, rakes, tedders, snow ploughs, and sweepers, offering a wide range of products and realising a significant portion of its sales in foreign markets. The company is classified as a large-scale enterprise.
- Company B is an extensive manufacturing organisation specialising in the production of trailers, agricultural and municipal machinery, and disc wheels, possessing a global distribution network and a high share of exports. This enterprise also belongs to the category of large enterprises.
- Company C is a company with a long history, focusing on the production of tillage machinery, such as equipment for sowing, plant protection, potato cultivation, and forage harvesting. This entity is classified as a large enterprise.

- Company D represents the SME sector; it is a medium-sized enterprise specialising in the production of front loaders and attachments for loaders and agricultural machinery.
- Company E is a medium-sized manufacturer of agricultural machinery, whose offer includes ploughs, cultivators, seeders, sprayers, and rollers; the firm is part of the SME sector.
- Company F also belongs to the SME sector and represents medium-sized enterprises; it specialises in the production of manure spreaders, trailers, and broadcasters, combining manufacturing activities with the application of anti-corrosion protection technologies.

Experts from the enterprises described above, representing marketing, digital marketing, and export, including specialists, managers, and directors, were invited to participate in the interviews. The selection of experts for the qualitative research combined marketing and commercial perspectives, which are crucial in foreign expansion strategies. Digitalisation plays a significant role in these areas, and specialists with experience in marketing and exports can provide valuable information on effective strategies for implementing technology in enterprise internationalisation processes. Marketing department specialists and managers possess knowledge of promotional strategies, brand image, and digital marketing tools, which are key during foreign expansion. Conversely, export managers and commercial directors have practical knowledge of the processes of entering foreign markets and strategies for establishing a presence in new markets.

As a research tool, the authors employed an interview guide (interview schedule) relating to the key issues addressed in the article. The objective of the study required respondents to express free and

Tab. 1. Structure of the in-depth interview participants

COMPANY	EXPERT	POSITION	GENDER
Company A	Expert 1	Marketing Specialist	F
Company B	Expert 2	Head of Marketing Department	F
Company C	Expert 3	Export Manager	M
Company D	Expert 4	Digital Marketing Specialist	F
Company E	Expert 5	Export Director	M
Company F	Expert 6	Export Director	M

Source: author's elaboration.

unrestrained opinions, which was made possible only by asking open-ended questions that did not impose specific answers.

In connection with the primary goal of the article to identify the role of digitalisation in accelerating the internationalisation processes of enterprises in the agricultural machinery industry, with particular emphasis on the industrial sector, the interviewees were asked the following research questions:

1. What digital technologies are utilised in their enterprises for foreign expansion?
2. How do agricultural machinery companies use digital tools to build and maintain relationships with customers and distribution partners in foreign markets?
3. Which digital tools assist in international brand promotion?
4. What digital tools support the sales and customer service processes?
5. What new digital technologies are used to create or modify products for foreign markets?
6. What digital technologies are planned for future implementation within the enterprise?
7. What problems in foreign markets could be resolved through the digitalisation of the enterprise?

The analytical procedure consisted of several stages. First, the interview transcripts were read several times to gain familiarity with the empirical material. Second, open coding was applied without imposing predefined categories. The intention was to define the research issues rather than imposing an interpretation of events based on a previously formu-

lated theory (Gibbs, 2018). Third, similar codes were grouped into broader thematic categories related to digital technologies, foreign expansion, relationships with distribution partners, sales and customer service, product adaptation, and barriers to internationalisation. The coding and interpretation process was conducted over several weeks.

The research approach was inductive-abductive in nature. The theoretical concepts did not influence the coding process but emerged at the stage of interpreting and discussing the findings.

To limit interpretive subjectivity and strengthen the robustness of the analysis, the coding results were reviewed and discussed by the authors. Discrepancies in interpretation were resolved through discussion and by returning to the original transcripts. This procedure helped ensure that the identified categories were grounded in the empirical material rather than in the researchers' assumptions.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

The findings of the qualitative research indicate a varied but clearly increasing level of digital technology utilisation in the internationalisation processes of enterprises. In the area of foreign expansion, tools enabling the identification of and contact with business partners play a crucial role. Respondents emphasised the importance of the internet as a primary source of information about potential contractors, stating, among other things: "I search the web for

Tab. 2. Results of qualitative analysis: digital tools and their roles in foreign market expansion

CODE	DESCRIPTION	STATEMENTS
Online partner search	Use of the internet to identify distributors	"I search the web for potential distributors and contacts using Google and industry portals in specific markets. Then I send an introductory e-mail, make phone calls, and try to establish contact. Usually, if successful, we meet abroad at trade fairs or during my business trips to selected markets. Personal contact is still extremely important in our industry" (Expert 6)
Remote communication	Tools for online work and networking	"Teams is certainly a good example. Today, there is no longer a need to travel abroad for meetings, as we have many different possibilities, and such meetings are not any less valuable. I also look for new contacts with potential dealers through my network - in every country, I already know someone I can ask about certain issues. Experience and connections make a difference." (Expert 5)
CRM Systems	Managing relationships with foreign partners	"Teams is certainly a good example. Today, there is no longer a need to travel abroad for meetings, as we have many different possibilities, and such meetings are not any less valuable. I also look for new contacts with potential dealers through my network - in every country, I already know someone I can ask about certain issues. Experience and connections make a difference." (Expert 4)

Source: author's elaboration.

potential distributors” (Expert 6). At the same time, attention was drawn to the growing role of remote communication tools that reduce the need for face-to-face meetings, as illustrated by the statement: “Today, you no longer need to meet physically; we have Teams” (Expert 5). In more advanced organisations, significant importance is also attributed to CRM systems, which, as noted, “play a key role” (Expert 4) in managing relationships with foreign partners.

In the context of building customer relationships, a noticeable dichotomy exists between enterprises employing advanced digital solutions and those relying on simpler forms of communication. Some of the surveyed companies declared the use of CRM systems as central customer databases (“We have a CRM

where we concentrate our customer base”, Expert 6), while others admitted that “we do not have a typical CRM as such” (Expert 5). Regardless of the level of technological advancement, all enterprises emphasised the importance of digital tools in maintaining relationships, highlighting their role in building long-term cooperation (Expert 4).

In the area of brand promotion in foreign markets, digital media and social media in particular play a dominant role. Respondents indicated that promotional activities are increasingly carried out via online channels, as exemplified by the statement: “At the moment, we do it mainly through Facebook” (Expert 5). At the same time, it was emphasised that “digital communication channels are beginning to prevail” (Expert 1), and the proportion of marketing efforts

Tab. 3. Results of qualitative analysis: digital tools in building and maintaining customer and distribution partner relationships

CODE	DESCRIPTION	STATEMENTS
CRM as a database	Centralisation of customer information	“We use the IT CUBE CRM system, where we concentrate the database of all our customers. It integrates the responsibilities of all departments, although our dealers do not yet have access to it. We also operate a dedicated Dealer Portal and Service Portal, through which dealers place orders, manage warranties and complaints, and register machine sales. In this way, we collect customer data from all over the world and build our own database of end customers for future marketing campaigns.” (Expert 6)
Lack of formal systems	No CRM implemented	“We do not have a typical CRM system yet. We are currently in the process of building a dealer support platform with access to materials that are currently shared through drives and e-mails. In the future, we would also like to use it to collect data from dealers. At the moment, most communication still takes place via e-mail, so technologically we are still a step behind.” (Expert 5)
Digital communication	Use of communication tools	“To build long-term relationships with both B2B and B2C customers, we use a variety of digital tools. CRM systems play a key role in managing cooperation with distributors and automating sales processes. In communication with end customers, including farmers, we rely on social media, e-mail campaigns, newsletters, and targeted online campaigns on Facebook and LinkedIn tailored to specific foreign markets.” (Expert 4)

Source: author's elaboration.

Tab. 4. Results of qualitative analysis: digitalisation of international marketing strategies

CODE	DESCRIPTION	STATEMENTS
Social media	Promotion through social platforms	“At the moment, we do it mainly through Facebook. Posts are prepared in several languages and tailored to specific markets. We also use some Google advertising, and each material appears in the language version appropriate for a given market.” (Expert 5)
Digital marketing	Increasing importance of online channels	“Online communication channels are clearly beginning to prevail, and this trend increased especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are moving away from printed trade press towards industry articles on online portals. Online campaigns on Facebook and Google are now a permanent element of our marketing plan.” (Expert 1)
Digital advantage	Shift in the proportion of marketing activities	“I think the proportion is shifting in favour of online activities. We invest less in trade fairs now and often allocate those funds to online promotion in selected markets. Trade fairs are very expensive, while online advertising allows us to reach customers more cheaply and more quickly.” (Expert 2)

Source: author's elaboration.

Tab. 5. Results of qualitative analysis: the supporting role of digital tools in sales and customer service

CODE	DESCRIPTION	STATEMENTS
Lack of e-commerce	Absence of online sales	<i>"We do not conduct our own online sales. Since the pandemic, however, our foreign dealers have increasingly focused on attempts to sell online through agricultural portals similar to OLX or OTOMOTO, especially in Germany."</i> (Expert 6)
Distribution model	Sales through intermediaries	<i>"We do not carry out online distribution. Some service-related issues and spare parts are managed through our CRM and made available to dealers, but spare parts are only partly distributed online through our partners' online stores."</i> (Expert 5)
Digital service	Online customer support	<i>"An additional convenience for customers is the machine configurator available on our website. It allows users to adapt agricultural machines to their individual needs, select parameters and equipment options, and submit an online form. The customer then receives a quotation, which is also transferred to our CRM system, enabling us to respond quickly and tailor the offer to the customer's needs."</i> (Expert 4)

Source: author's elaboration.

Tab. 6. Results of qualitative analysis: digital technologies in product innovation and production processes

CODE	DESCRIPTION	STATEMENTS
Lack of digitalisation	No use of technology	<i>"At the moment, we do not have [any]"</i> (Expert 6)
Robotisation	Automation of production processes	<i>"Our machinery park is developing. This includes robotisation: we have purchased two new robots, profile lasers, and six-metre press brakes. These are mainly production machines."</i> (Expert 5)
R&D	Development through research centres	<i>"We have our own research and development centre equipped with specialist devices. We print 3D models, conduct strength calculations, use systems for strength analyses of different design variants without the need to build machine prototypes, and use devices for 3D scanning."</i> (Expert 2)

Source: author's elaboration.

"is shifting in favour of digital activities" (Expert 2). This demonstrates an ongoing transformation of marketing strategies towards digitalisation.

An analysis of the use of digital tools in sales and customer service processes abroad indicates certain limitations, however. Most of the surveyed enterprises do not engage in direct online sales, which was expressed explicitly in the statements: "We do not conduct our own online sales" (Expert 6) and "We do not carry out online distribution" (Expert 5). The sales model is largely based on a network of distributors, while digital technologies serve a supporting function, particularly in terms of communication and customer service ("Digital contact is an additional convenience", Expert 4).

Regarding the use of new digital technologies in product development and modification, there is a clear divide between enterprises. Some of them have not yet implemented such solutions ("At the moment, we do not have [any]", Expert 6), while others are actively investing in technological development, pointing to the "robotisation" of production processes (Expert 5) or the operation of their

"own research and development centre" (Expert 2). This indicates that the level of digital advancement in the area of product innovation is highly diversified.

Respondents' statements regarding the future of exports clearly indicate the growing importance of digital technologies as a factor determining the competitiveness of enterprises. Particular attention is paid to the development of integrated customer relationship management systems ("We want to implement a new CRM that combines all the data", Expert 6), which are intended to enable more efficient information management. The strategic nature of technological investments was also emphasised, noting that "one of the priorities is the development of technology" (Expert 4).

Finally, an analysis of the problems encountered in foreign markets indicates that digitalisation is perceived as a tool capable of supporting their resolution. In particular, attention was drawn to the need for improving communication ("improving sales through communication", Expert 6) and better management of customer data on a global scale ("collect-

Tab. 7. Results of qualitative analysis: future development plans

CODE	DESCRIPTION	STATEMENTS
Data integration	Development of integrated CRM systems	<i>"We want to implement a new CRM system that will combine all areas. At the moment, we have a separate CRM, separate accounting software, and separate warehouse management tools. We are working on implementing an ERP system that will connect all these areas."</i> (Expert 6)
Technology development	Investment in technology	<i>"One of our priority projects is the implementation of a mobile application with a machine configurator. It will allow customers to easily personalise agricultural equipment directly from a smartphone. We are also considering further automation of customer service through chatbots and virtual assistants."</i> (Expert 4)

Source: author's elaboration.

Tab. 8. Results of qualitative analysis: digitalisation as a tool for resolving foreign market challenges

CODE	DESCRIPTION	STATEMENTS
Communication	Communication problems/issues	<i>"Sales could certainly be improved through better communication, for example by using chatbots on websites and a configurator on our own website. Such a chatbot could send an initial offer to the customer."</i> (Expert 6)
Global data	The need for customer data integration	<i>"I think it is about collecting global customer data. There are many customers across different business areas, including recycling, municipal machinery, agricultural machinery, and components. An ideal solution would be a CRM system that gives us control over data from all branches of our business."</i> (Expert 2)
Global systems	Expanding CRM to foreign markets	<i>"We definitely need to make our CRM available to the entire foreign dealer network, train our distributors in how to use it, and move towards cooperation largely based on this system. At the moment, communication still often takes place by e-mail, while we want processes such as placing orders to be handled fully within the system, with dealers also able to track the status of their orders."</i> (Expert 1)

Source: author's elaboration.

ing global customer data", Expert 2). Respondents recognise the potential of digital technologies to increase process transparency and improve the efficiency of operations in international markets.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The obtained results align with the growing body of research on the impact of digitalisation on enterprise internationalisation processes (Appiah et al., 2025), a field developed by scholars such as Birkinshaw (2022) and Katsikeas et al. (2020), who emphasise the need for an in-depth analysis of the role of digital technologies in firms' international activities. In light of the Resource-Based View (RBV), the technologies utilised by the surveyed enterprises, such as CRM systems, online communication tools, and analytical solutions, can be interpreted as strategic resources supporting the creation of a competitive advantage (Bianchi et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2013). Simultaneously, the findings confirm that technological resources alone are insufficient. The ability to integrate and effectively utilise them is of key impor-

tance, which corresponds with the concept of dynamic capabilities and the conclusions of Bianchi et al. (2016), pointing to the necessity of combining technology with entrepreneurial orientation and organisational competencies.

From the perspective of internationalisation theory, the research results confirm that digitalisation modifies the traditional, stage-based approach to foreign expansion. The internet and digital tools reduce psychic distance and the costs of acquiring information, thereby accelerating the internationalisation process (Deng et al., 2022; Neubert, 2018). This is reflected in respondents' statements regarding the use of the internet to identify partners or communicate with foreign customers. At the same time, the results indicating the persistent role of distributors are consistent with the findings of Kuivalainen et al. (2013), who emphasise that online channels do not fully replace traditional forms of internationalisation but rather complement them. Similar conclusions can be drawn from studies by Yoos (2012), which highlight the complementarity of digital and traditional channels in the foreign expansion process.

The research results can also be interpreted through the lens of relationship marketing and digital marketing. The use of CRM systems and social media confirms the growing importance of customer relationship management in an international environment (Eid et al., 2020). According to the findings of Li (2020), enterprise activities can be assigned to various social media presence strategies, such as relationship management or social monitoring. Meanwhile, the varied level of implementation among the surveyed firms reflects the segmentation proposed by Alarcón-del-Amo et al. (2018), which points to the existence of enterprises with different degrees of advancement in digital tool utilisation, from beginners to advanced users. This may limit the effectiveness of export activities, a notion further supported by research indicating that a higher level of social media usage translates into better export performance.

The results also correspond with the literature regarding the role of digital platforms and B2B marketplaces in internationalisation. The use of the internet in communication and marketing mentioned by respondents fits into the broader opportunities offered by industrial and global B2B platforms (e.g., Alibaba, Mascus, or TractorHouse), which, as emphasised by Appiah et al. (2025) and Li (2020), enable rapid and direct expansion into foreign markets by increasing brand visibility and simplifying the sourcing process. Conversely, the limited use of direct online sales in the surveyed enterprises does not necessarily imply a failure to exploit technology, but rather reflects the specific nature of the agricultural machinery industry. In this sector, high unit values, the need for technical customisation, and the crucial role of local after-sales service make traditional e-commerce models (e.g., “click-and-buy”) less applicable than in the consumer goods sectors studied by Foscht et al. (2006) or Arenius et al. (2005). Thus, while these authors point to the significant role of e-commerce in accelerating international expansion, in the industrial context, this acceleration occurs primarily through digital support for lead generation and distributor relationship management rather than direct online transactions.

Finally, the findings align with the concept of digital transformation, which, according to Pini et al. (2018), encompasses not only technology implementation but also changes in organisational processes and the development of digital competencies. In the surveyed firms, however, this transformation is primarily focused on communication and marketing, while more advanced applications such as fully auto-

mated online sales or digital support for innovation remain less developed. In the specific context of the agricultural machinery industry, the limited adoption of direct online sales should not be viewed as a lack of progress, but rather as an adaptation to the high complexity of the product, which requires personal advice and a physical distribution network. This indicates a transitional stage of digital maturity, consistent with the observations of Neubert (2018), who stresses that fully leveraging the potential of digitalisation requires developing organisational capabilities and the ability to strategically utilise data and technology to support, rather than replace, established industrial relationships.

The conducted research reveals that in the context of the agricultural machinery industry, digitalisation does not imply a simple transition to direct online sales. Instead, it creates a hybrid model where digital tools such as online configurators, remote diagnostics, or digital spare parts catalogues support and enhance traditional distribution networks. Unlike the general consumer goods sector, internationalisation in this industry relies on increasing the efficiency of B2B relationships and providing specialised technical support across borders, rather than leveraging mass-market retail platforms. Therefore, the acceleration of internationalisation observed in this study manifests itself through the optimisation of information flow and relationship management, which are critical for high-involvement industrial products.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study provides insights into how digitalisation influences the internationalisation process from the perspective of managerial experience. Based on the analysed qualitative material, it can be concluded that digitalisation plays a significant role in the eyes of managers, enabling companies to potentially enter new markets more quickly by reducing perceived information barriers. The findings suggest that digital tools are viewed as catalysts that can streamline market entry, although the actual physical pace of this process requires further quantitative verification.

The qualitative data indicates that digitalisation enhances the organisational readiness for international expansion. Respondents highlighted that the use of digital tools is perceived to accelerate the flow of information and simplify communication with foreign partners, which, in their view, translates into

a more dynamic internationalisation process. However, it is important to note that these conclusions reflect the subjective experiences of the interviewed managers rather than direct longitudinal measurements of export growth or the exact time-to-market.

The study shows how managers perceive the usefulness of digitalisation in mitigating traditional distance barriers. While the research does not provide a direct measure of the impact on the speed of internationalisation, it identifies the mechanisms, such as improved market intelligence and virtual relationship building, that managers believe are crucial for faster expansion. In the analysed cases, digitalisation was identified as a key factor that, according to the practitioners, significantly lowers the threshold for entering new, often distant, geographic locations.

Ultimately, while the study emphasises the transformative potential of digital tools, the “acceleration” mentioned by the authors should be interpreted as an increased organisational capacity and a managerial belief in the greater agility of the firm, rather than a statistically proven change in the pace of the process.

This study has several limitations. First, it is based on a qualitative approach and a small sample of six companies, which limits the generalisability of the results. Second, the focus on one industry agricultural machinery manufacturing means that the findings may not fully apply to other sectors. Third, the data rely on managers’ perspectives, which may introduce subjectivity. Finally, the study captures digitalisation at a single point in time, despite its dynamic nature.

Future research should include quantitative studies on larger samples to verify the identified relationships. Comparative analyses across industries and countries would also be valuable. Additionally, longitudinal studies could better capture how digitalisation and internationalisation evolve over time. Further research may also focus on specific digital tools and the role of organisational capabilities in shaping their effectiveness.

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