

# Internationalisation strategies for South African companies: A focus on innovation

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## Abstract

The study examines the relationship between internationalisation and innovation in South African companies, emphasizing the distinct obstacles and possibilities they encounter. The research is driven by the necessity to comprehend how these organizations utilize innovation to augment their global competitiveness. The study employs a thorough analysis of secondary data, such as scholarly articles, industry publications, and yearly business reports, to identify crucial methods and characteristics that contribute to success. The primary discoveries indicate that companies such as Sasol and MTN attain noteworthy global achievements by means of technology advancements and strategic collaborations. This research enhances the subject by offering a detailed comprehension of how South African companies may include innovation into their strategy for expanding internationally. This enables them to overcome hurdles specific to each market and maintain a competitive advantage.

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## Introduction

International businesses rely on internationalisation and innovation as crucial methods for achieving growth and ensuring long-term viability (Kyläheiko, et al., 2011). Given the specific socioeconomic conditions in South Africa, these techniques become even more significant due to the distinct problems and opportunities that exist in the country. South African enterprises are progressively acknowledging the necessity to extend their activities beyond the confines of their country to access untapped markets and broaden their sources of income (Mucheka, 2019). Simultaneously, innovation is regarded as a crucial catalyst for competitiveness (Farida & Setiawan, 2022), allowing organizations to distinguish themselves in a saturated market and adapt to swiftly evolving consumer demands and technical progress.

Internationalisation is the act of expanding a company's market reach outside national borders using many techniques, including exporting, foreign direct investment (FDI), joint ventures, and strategic alliances (Shenkar, et al., 2021). These techniques facilitate companies in gaining access to new consumer bases, resources, and synergies. Nevertheless, the choice to expand internationally is intricate and impacted by various aspects, such as the company's objectives, accessible resources, and market circumstances (Rundh, 2023). Successful global expansion would require careful planning and execution that can help minimize the risk and maximize the opportunities of foreign markets.

In contrast, innovation comprises not just technology progress but also organizational and operational improvements that boost a company's capacity to compete globally (Azeem, et al., 2021). Innovation enables organizations to create novel products and services, enhance operational effectiveness, and adjust to a wide range of market demands (Rajapathirana & Hui, 2018). In South Africa, businesses operate in a distinct socioeconomic context that presents both opportunities and constraints commonly found in rising nations (Mmbengeni, et al., 2021); consequently, innovation plays a particularly vital role.

Although internationalisation and innovation are both important, there is still a substantial lack of understanding of how these two strategic imperatives interact (Du, et al., 2023), this also applies to the South African setting. Prior research has frequently analysed internationalisation and innovation as distinct occurrences, concentrating on methods for expanding into new markets and making technological progress separately (Papanastassiou, et al., 2020). However, the ways through which these techniques have been incorporated in the South African enterprises have not been well explored, thus creating a significant gap in the existing body of knowledge.

The following is the format of the paper: the next section provides a thorough assessment of the literature, looking at the theoretical models and empirical research that are pertinent to internationalisation and innovation. The research methodology section that follows describes the strategy for data collection and analysis. The study's main conclusions are presented in the section that follows, showing how South African companies like MTN and Sasol have effectively incorporated innovation into their internationalisation strategy. The management implications, study limitations, and recommendations for more research are covered in the paper's conclusion.

## **1.1. Background**

South African firms are becoming more aware of the significance of internationalisation and innovation in achieving sustained growth and competitiveness. However, there is still a notable lack of comprehension of the interaction between these two crucial objectives in the specific context of South African companies. Prior research has frequently investigated internationalisation and innovation as distinct occurrences, concentrating on tactics for expanding into new markets and

making technological progress. Nevertheless, the intricate incorporation of these tactics within the South African context has not been adequately investigated.

It is crucial to address this gap since there is a significant connection between internationalisation and innovation. This connection can result in improved performance, competitive advantage, and the ability to withstand global economic shocks. South African enterprises operate under a distinct socioeconomic context that is characterized by the opportunities and problems commonly seen in developing economies, in contrast to corporations in industrialized countries. The distinctive circumstances can have a substantial impact on the approaches used for global expansion and creativity.

## **1.2. Problem Statement**

South African companies are becoming more aware of the importance of innovation (Matekenya & Moyo, 2022) and internationalisation for long-term growth and competitiveness. However, there is still a significant lack of understanding of how these two strategic imperatives interact with each other (Du, et al., 2023). Prior research has examined internationalisation and innovation as separate subjects, with a particular emphasis on strategies for expanding into new markets and breakthroughs in technology (Zucchella & Siano, 2014). However, the complex interactions of their integration within the unique setting of South African companies have not been sufficiently examined.

The urgency of addressing this gap in the research arises from the strong correlation between internationalisation and innovation, which leads to enhanced performance outcomes, competitive positioning, and organizational resilience in the face of global economic shocks (Juergensen et al., 2022). In comparison to corporations in developed countries, South African organizations function within a unique socioeconomic environment characterized by opportunities and challenges often found in emerging economies. This could potentially influence the strategies implemented for internationalisation and innovation.

## **1.3. Research objectives**

Primary Research Objective

- To explore the internationalisation strategies implemented by South African companies

### **1.3.1.1. Secondary Research Objectives**

- To understand how innovation contributes to the internationalisation process of South African companies.
- To identify key success factors and challenges for South African companies in integrating innovation into their internationalisation strategies.

- To provide recommendations that can be proposed to enhance the effectiveness of internationalisation efforts for South African companies through the integration of innovation.

## **2. Literature Review**

The connection between internationalisation and innovation has been extensively studied in academic research, especially in the context of developing economies. This literature review examines current ideas and empirical research that investigate how internationalisation methods can improve a company's ability to innovate, specifically focusing on enterprises in South Africa.

South African companies have both significant opportunities and formidable challenges due to the globalization of markets. To effectively traverse the complex global landscape, businesses must develop robust internationalisation strategies that prioritize innovation as a fundamental element. This literature review examines various theoretical frameworks, practical strategies, and empirical studies that provide light on the potential success of South African enterprises in the international arena. This study examines the evolution of internationalisation theories, the significance of innovation, the potential role of governments, and the influence of strategic networks and government support in shaping corporate strategies for the global market.

### **2.1. Definition of Internationalisation Strategies**

Internationalisation strategies are essential for companies seeking to extend their market presence across national boundaries (Stallkamp & Schotter, 2021). These strategies comprise a wide range of approaches that organizations can use to establish and develop their presence in international markets, making it easier for them to access new client bases, resources, and synergies. The main methods encompass exporting, licensing, foreign direct investment (FDI), joint ventures, and strategic alliances, each addressing distinct strategic requirements and capabilities of organizations (Kormakova, et al., 2023).

The selection of an internationalisation strategy is a crucial decision that depends on a company's goals, available resources, and market conditions (Rundh, 2023). Each plan provides different degrees of control, risk, and investment requirements (Nuruzzaman, et al., 2020). Implementing these methods successfully might result in significant expansion and a strong competitive edge in the global market. Therefore, companies must thoroughly examine their objectives and the external circumstances to choose the most appropriate internationalisation strategy (Beugelsdijk, et al., 2018).

### **2.2. Theories of Internationalisation**

The Uppsala model, developed by Johanson and Vahlne in 1977, is one of the basic theories that explains how companies penetrate international markets (Gulanowski, et al., 2018). This idea states

that companies should go global gradually, expanding overseas as they gain more knowledge and insight into the market (Gulanowski et al., 2018). In the beginning, companies enter new markets haphazardly; this could include exporting through independent agents (Samiee & Chirapanda, 2019). They could expand their presence in the target country by establishing manufacturing facilities or sales departments after their understanding and operations have solidified. This meticulous methodology is a result of the model's emphasis on reducing uncertainty in untested markets.

Dunning's eclectic paradigm, first introduced in 1988, offers a more thorough framework for understanding internationalisation. This theory states that a company's decision to expand internationally is influenced by three different types of advantages: ownership (O) advantages, which result from having competitive assets that can be easily transferred to another nation (Williamson & Wan, 2018); location (L) advantages, which come from doing business overseas; and internationalisation (I) advantages, which result from managing resource distribution and exploitation across national borders (Rahman, et al., 2018).

To produce a comprehensive lens through which the strategic actions of multinational firms may be assessed, this paradigm incorporates components from numerous economic theories, such as the theory of the firm, theories related to international commerce, and market imperfections.

Meanwhile, there has been ongoing debate over how appropriate these traditional methods are for emerging countries. Critics argue that the models primarily replicate the internationalisation practices of wealthy corporations, occasionally ignoring the unique paths and rapid internationalisation observed in businesses from developing nations (Nelaeva & Nilssen, 2022). Consequently, different viewpoints that offer alternatives to these widely held views have come to light.

### **2.3. Innovation in International Business**

Innovation is a crucial determinant of a company's capacity to compete on a global scale (Ferreira et al., 2020). It enables organizations to differentiate themselves in highly competitive global markets and adapt to the varied requirements and preferences of customers across different social, cultural, and economic settings (Agazu & Kero, 2024). According to (Behnam & Grijalvo, 2018), innovative capacities extend beyond product innovation. In addition, it encompasses organizational and process innovations that play a crucial role in enhancing responsiveness and operational efficiency in global settings (Shams et al., 2021). Examples of these advancements include the implementation of cutting-edge technology in manufacturing, the utilization of advanced data analytics to enhance decision-making, and the restructuring of organizational frameworks to promote agility and communication among foreign offices.

In addition, (Buccieri, et al., 2020) highlight the importance of aligning innovation plans with the evolving and frequently changing demands of international markets. To meet the specific

requirements of each market, this alignment involves not just developing new products or services but also consistently improving and customizing existing ones. Businesses have the option to modify their marketing strategies to better match the values and expectations of local consumers or revamp their supply chain systems to efficiently handle different regulatory environments.

In addition to these elements, firms must also foster a creative culture among their staff to sustain global expansion (Azeem, et al., 2021). Typically, this type of cultural transformation necessitates instructing staff members to adopt a global perspective and act within their local context, encouraging innovative approaches to problem-solving, and fostering an environment that recognizes and incentivizes creative thinking. By promptly adapting to emerging technological breakthroughs and market trends, the organization can maintain a competitive advantage due to this type of culture.

It has been argued by (Papanastassiou, et al., 2020) that effective innovation management is crucial and involves the integration of market research and development, product development, and marketing strategies across several geographical locations. This comprehensive approach ensures that innovations are not only financially and culturally viable in various areas, but also technically achievable. Companies that effectively implement comprehensive innovation activities are anticipated to see enhanced global market penetration, increased market share, (Edeh, et al., 2020) and improved consumer loyalty (Woo, et al., 2021).

#### **2.4. The Role of Innovative Networks and Partnerships**

Companies depend on innovative networks and strategic alliances as a crucial component of their internationalisation endeavours, particularly when acquiring vital resources is challenging (Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019). These collaborations play a crucial role in facilitating the exchange of technologies, providing financial resources, and gaining valuable industry knowledge. They are crucial for organizations aiming to expand into new geographical areas (Cantwell, 2017). In emerging economies, where enterprises may face institutional deficiencies or restricted access to the market, these networks serve a vital role in facilitating their connection to external resources and information.

The research undertaken by Anand et al. (2021) highlights the substantial influence of cross-border knowledge networks, enabling enterprises from less developed markets to bypass conventional growth stages and directly advance to advanced degrees of internationalisation. The strategy, referred to as "leapfrogging," allows enterprises to quickly adapt and integrate into global markets by leveraging the knowledge and infrastructure benefits gained via worldwide networks (Shams, et al., 2021). These networks are highly effective in companies that are characterized by rapid technological breakthroughs, where staying ahead of innovation trends is essential for gaining a competitive advantage.

In addition, strategic alliances may involve collaborations with foreign firms that possess complementary competencies, so facilitating mutual growth and the acquisition of knowledge (Robson, et al., 2019).

## **2.5. Value Chain Innovation for South African Companies**

Value chain innovations are crucial for businesses hoping to grow globally (Ambos, et al., 2021). These innovations include enhancements and new applications in the sequence of actions a good or service goes through from its inception to its ultimate distribution to customers (Kahn, 2018). Innovations in product design, manufacturing procedures, shipping, and post-purchase support are a few examples of this. These technologies may assist South African businesses to compete in international markets by increasing operational efficiency and scalability in addition to improving product quality (Serumaga-Zake & van der Poll, 2021).

According to the study by (Pietrobelli & Rabellotti, 2011), value chain innovations have particularly changed South Africa's manufacturing and agricultural industries. Modern technologies and lean manufacturing methods have simplified production procedures, decreased waste, and accelerated time-to-market in the manufacturing sector—all crucial components in meeting global demand (Ding, et al., 2023). Similar to this, advances in supply chain management systems, precision farming, and the use of genetically modified crops for increased yield and resilience have fundamentally altered the ways in which agricultural products are produced, harvested, stored, and distributed (Karunathilake, et al., 2023).

These inventions enhance not just the competitive position of specific businesses but also the standing of South African goods generally in international trade. Higher quality and dependability will enable South African companies to fulfil the demanding standards frequently needed in global markets. Value chain improvements through innovation can also result in cost savings, which enables businesses to provide more competitive prices in global marketplaces without sacrificing profit margins.

## **2.6. Challenges and Opportunities in Internationalisation and Innovation**

South African companies face both possibilities and challenges when operating in global markets. Enterprises aspiring to expand internationally encounter many challenges that have the potential to significantly impact their activities and strategies.

**Cultural disparities:** Dealing with cultural differences is a major challenge in the process of globalization. These variances can affect all aspects of corporate operations, encompassing consumer behavior, marketing strategies, and negotiation and management practices (Boso, et al., 2019). To effectively target a diverse consumer base, South African firms must acknowledge and value these

unique cultural characteristics when developing marketing and communication strategies (Sasaki, et al., 2021). Failure to adequately account for cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts that put commercial partnerships and market penetration strategies at risk.

**Limitations on available resources:** Another major hindrance is the accessibility of resources; global expansion requires substantial technological, human, and financial resources (Fey, et al., 2016). Obtaining the necessary finance to enable global expansion is a challenging task for numerous South African enterprises, especially those that are small or medium-sized (Msomi & Olarewaju, 2021). Moreover, tackling the operational difficulties associated with entering new markets and attracting and retaining professionals with global expertise are significant hurdles.

Despite these challenges, organizations who excel in innovation still have enough opportunities. Employing innovation can enable businesses to overcome these barriers and capitalize on the opportunities offered by international markets (Saqib & Satar, 2021).

**Harnessing creativity to overcome challenges:** Successful businesses differentiate themselves from competitors, tailor their solutions to specific market needs, and enhance their global competitiveness through effective innovation (Mahmood & Mubarik, 2020). Implementing innovative approaches to corporate practices, service delivery, and product design can help organizations fulfil various regulatory requirements; and meet diverse customer expectations (Woo, et al., 2021).

## **2.7. South African Internationalisation Landscape**

Over the past few decades, South African firms have faced substantial changes in the internationalisation landscape, which has been reflected in the nation's political and socioeconomic transformations (Klein & Wöcke, 2007). Businesses in South Africa have traditionally used internationalisation strategies as a defensive measure in response to domestic political turmoil and the economic restrictions imposed by the apartheid era (Kiss, 2020). Securing resources that were confined within the country and diversifying market risks were the primary objectives of these strategies.

Post-apartheid era, South African companies experienced a dramatic transformation from these defensive, cautious approaches to more assertive, market-seeking strategies aimed at exploring growth opportunities in new markets (Chabane, et al., 2006). This change may be seen in the growing presence of South African companies abroad (Klein & Wöcke, 2007), especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. These businesses benefit from shared cultural and economic ties as well as regional synergy.

The current phase of South African internationalisation is characterized by a methodical search for global markets that goes beyond survival to include a larger goal of becoming important global players. Top businesses, like MTN and Sasol, have been competing internationally by using South Africa's resource-based industries and technological advancements. For instance, Sasol has joined



international energy markets by employing its state-of-the-art coal-to-liquids technologies (Sasol, 2006), while MTN has profited from growing global communications needs by expanding into various Middle Eastern and African countries.

Nevertheless, there are drawbacks to aggressive internationalisation as well. These include the need for greater adaptability in a range of business settings and increased competition from both local and foreign businesses in developing nations (Hansen, 2020).

## **2.8. Innovation in South African Business**

The phenomena of innovation in South African companies are intricate and heavily impacted by regional circumstances, including the extent of government support, the proficiency of the labor, and the accessibility of infrastructure (Nel-Sanders & Thomas, 2022). These elements greatly influence businesses' capacity to innovate since they establish the limits and possibilities for commercial activities.

Infrastructure availability is crucial for innovation (Hussain, et al., 2024), especially in the fields of technology and logistics. Businesses in South Africa enhance their ability to do creative operations, such as research and development and efficient distribution of innovative products, by having reliable access to modern telecommunications and transportation networks. Nevertheless, variations in the quality of infrastructure across different locations in South Africa could lead to unequal opportunities for innovation. Urban places such as Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg are more likely to have a higher concentration of creative firms due to their superior infrastructure (Scholvin, 2020). In contrast, rural areas may face challenges in terms of access, which might hinder the progress of new technologies and commercial endeavours.

Staff skill levels are a crucial component that impacts a company's ability to innovate (Meissner & Shmatko, 2019). To develop new products and services, as well as improve existing ones, it is necessary to have access to a highly qualified workforce, particularly individuals with knowledge in developing technologies (Li, 2022). South African companies often have challenges in competing globally due to a shortage of proficient professionals in crucial technical (Adcorp Group, 2022) and managerial domains. Improving education and professional training programs is crucial for cultivating a workforce capable of sustaining creative growth.

Governmental support plays a significant role in fostering innovation by providing necessary legislative frameworks, financial incentives, and support programs that stimulate research and development (Jugend, et al., 2020). The policies and support mechanisms implemented by the government have a big impact on the advancement of innovation. Fredrich et al. (2022) assert that specific government initiatives, such as funding for technology firms and tax incentives for research and development, have significantly contributed to fostering an environment conducive to innovation. In addition, discuss the role of public-private collaborations in bridging the knowledge divide between

industry and research institutions, facilitating a more direct flow of information into the business sector.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

This study utilises a case study methodology to investigate the correlation between internationalization and innovation in South African firms, specifically focusing on Sasol and MTN. The case study approach was selected due to its capacity to offer a comprehensive comprehension of intricate phenomena within their authentic context. This technique enables a thorough examination of how two famous South African multinational enterprises have successfully operated in global markets and utilized innovation to sustain their competitive edge.

#### **Utilising a Case Study Approach: Depth, Context, and Practical Implications for International Business Research**

- i. **Depth and Detail:** It enables a comprehensive examination of intricate phenomena within their authentic context. Researchers can gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of internationalization efforts on innovation by closely examining specific companies such as Sasol and MTN.
- ii. **Contextual Understanding:** This method offers a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being studied (Hancock, et al., n.d.), which is crucial for analysing the impact of various contexts on corporate strategies.
- iii. **Flexibility:** Case studies can incorporate diverse forms of data and approaches. The flexibility of this approach enables a thorough exploration of several dimensions of a research inquiry, utilizing qualitative and quantitative data as required.
- iv. **Insights can be generated through meticulous analysis,** whereby case studies have the potential to reveal valuable information that may not be uncovered through alternative research methodologies. These discoveries have the potential to foster the creation of novel theories or enhance the sophistication of current ones, particularly in dynamic and intricate domains such as international business (Welch, et al., 2020).
- v. **Practical Significance:** Through the analysis of actual instances, this methodology guarantees that the results are pertinent and can be directly applied by professionals in the respective field.

#### **Rationale for Case Selection**

The choice of Sasol and MTN as case study organisations was determined by multiple criteria:

- i. Sasol and MTN are industry frontrunners in the energy and telecommunications sectors, respectively. They have effectively extended their business activities outside the borders of

South Africa, establishing a strong global presence. These characteristics make them well-suited candidates for examining the effects of internationalization on innovation.

- ii. The energy sector, represented by Sasol, and the telecoms sector, represented by MTN, offer differing perspectives on the strategies employed by different industries in terms of internationalization and innovation. This diversity enables a more comprehensive examination of the tactics utilized in different industries.
- iii. Both institutions provide comprehensive documentation accessible through public documents, annual reports, and previous research investigations. This kind of accessibility enables a comprehensive examination of their strategy for expanding into international markets and the results of their efforts to innovate.
- iv. Sasol and MTN, as South African enterprises, encounter distinctive difficulties and prospects that reflect the wider economic and socio-political conditions in South Africa. The significance of this study guarantees that its conclusions can be applied to other South African companies that are contemplating or actively involved in internationalization.

### 3.1. Data Collection

The present and historical internationalisation strategies of Sasol and MTN were obtained through a comprehensive examination of company reports, industry analyses, academic journals, and other publications. The secondary data complemented the information gathered and offered a comprehensive perspective on the internationalisation process of each company. Literature and document review, often known as desk review, encompass a wide range of research activities.

The desk review was conducted using several scholarly databases, including Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Scopus, and others. The search terms used were "internationalisation strategies," "innovation," "South African companies," and "global expansion."

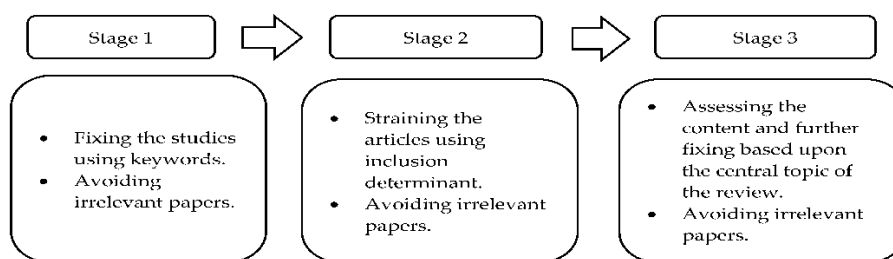


Figure 1: The Methodology adopted (source: Naradda Gamage)

### 3.2 Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and patterns within the data gathered. The task entailed coding and organising the data into themes related to internationalisation strategies, innovation, and competitive advantage. This qualitative methodology facilitated a

comprehensive comprehension of the strategic choices and advancements implemented by Sasol and MTN.

The study conducted a comprehensive analysis of approximately 100 documents and employed in-depth thematic to provide a detailed understanding of the impact of innovation on internationalisation strategies of South Africa companies including Sasol and MTN. The thorough data analysis conducted ensured that the conclusions made were strong and reliable, offering significant insights that might guide strategic decisions for other South African companies seeking international growth.

#### **4. Innovation as a Key Internationalisation Strategy: A Case Study of MTN and Sasol**

Innovation has played a vital role in the international expansion endeavours of several South African companies. By employing innovative methods, these firms have effectively overcome various challenges to penetrate new markets and have also sustained their competitive edge in the global market. This section explores the impact of innovation on the international success of prominent South African corporations, namely Sasol and MTN, by analysing case studies.

Sasol, a multinational firm that specializes in chemicals and energy, exemplifies how innovation propels international expansion. The company's success can be attributed to its pioneering Fischer-Tropsch method, which converts coal and natural gas into liquid fuels. Sasol's exclusive technology has enabled it to differentiate itself in the highly competitive global energy sector. Sasol has maintained its technological superiority by continually allocating resources to research and development (R&D), which has facilitated its expansion into several international markets including as the United States, Germany, and China (Trott & Simms, 2021).

Sasol's innovative approach extends beyond its core technology. The corporation has also pioneered novel business tactics and established strategic partnerships to facilitate its worldwide growth. For instance, Sasol's cooperative relationships and strategic alliances have been crucial in effectively joining and thriving in global markets. The coordinated efforts have provided not just access to local market knowledge and resources, but also mitigated the risks associated with global expansion (Sasol Annual Report, 2022).

The MTN Group, a global mobile telecommunications company, demonstrates the successful application of innovation to attain worldwide success. MTN's distinctive efforts have played a crucial role in its rapid expansion across Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. MTN's expansion into international markets was significantly aided by its prompt adoption and effective use of mobile technologies tailored to the needs of developing nations. MTN made significant growth by focusing on unexplored countries and offering affordable and readily available mobile services (Trott & Simms, 2021).

MTN's commitment to innovation is evident in its substantial investment in mobile financial services. The implementation of MTN Mobile Money has led to a substantial revolution in financial inclusion across numerous African countries, enabling millions of individuals who lack access to conventional banking services to avail themselves of financial services. As stated in the 2022 MTN Group Annual Report, this solution not only enhanced MTN's value proposition but also established the firm as a leading player in mobile financial services across many locations.

### **The Role of Innovation in Overcoming Barriers and Sustaining Competitiveness**

The examples of Sasol and MTN demonstrate how innovation can effectively tackle the diverse issues linked to internationalisation. Sasol utilized technological innovation to create distinctive products tailored to fulfil specific market needs, thereby surmounting competitive challenges in the worldwide energy industry. MTN's inventive mobile solutions facilitated the company's ability to negotiate through regulatory intricacies and cultural disparities in many areas.

Innovation is crucial for maintaining competitiveness in global marketplaces. Sustained research and development efforts, together with the capacity to adjust and launch novel offerings, are crucial for preserving a competitive edge. South African enterprises frequently participate in technical innovation, as well as process and business model changes, to improve operational efficiency and consumer engagement.

## **5. Discussion and Findings**

The analysis of secondary data, including literature reviews, industry documents, and annual integrated reports, provided significant insights into the internationalisation strategies of South African companies and the role of innovation. The findings are synthesized into several key themes that align with the theoretical frameworks and empirical studies discussed in the literature review.

### **5.1. The Prevalence of Innovation-Driven Internationalisation**

The findings constantly demonstrate that South African companies that use innovation as a fundamental element of their internationalisation plans are more likely to achieve greater market penetration and maintain competitive advantages more efficiently. Companies like Sasol and MTN serve as prime examples of this phenomenon, displaying how advancements in technology and innovative business models enable prosperous international growth (Cinar, et al., 2021). These companies have utilized sophisticated technologies and customized business strategies to fulfil the unique needs of many global markets, supporting the conclusions of (Buccieri, et al., 2020) that link innovation with market demands.

## **5.2. The Significance of Technological Innovation**

Technological innovation plays a vital role in the international success of South African companies. It allows companies to produce distinctive value propositions, optimize processes, and better meet the specific needs of the market. The significance of technical innovation is demonstrated by organizations like Sasol and MTN, whose strategic utilization of technology has enhanced their global competitiveness and growth.

### **Sasol's Fischer-Tropsch technology**

Sasol, a prominent player in the energy and chemicals industries, has set itself apart with its innovative Fischer-Tropsch technology. This technique transforms coal and natural gas into liquid fuels, providing a more environmentally friendly option compared to conventional petroleum-based fuels. Sasol's utilization of this technology has facilitated the production of top-notch synthetic fuels that adhere to rigorous environmental regulations, a crucial aspect in the worldwide pursuit of sustainability.

Sasol has distinguished itself in the extremely competitive global energy market by utilizing its exclusive technology. The technological advantage has not only enabled the company to enter many worldwide markets, but also allowed it to sustain its competitive position in the face of changing global oil prices and altering regulatory environments (Sasol, 2022).

Sasol's dedication to research and development and technological progress goes beyond the Fischer-Tropsch process. The corporation allocates significant resources towards innovation to better its production processes, optimize energy efficiency, and minimize emissions. Sasol has utilized these technology advancements to adhere to global environmental rules and attract environmentally aware clients, thereby enhancing its worldwide market position.

### **MTN's Swift Embrace of Mobile Technology**

MTN Group, a prominent multinational mobile telecommunications corporation, serves as a striking illustration of how technology innovation can propel global achievements. MTN's rapid expansion across Africa and other regions has been influenced by its strategic implementation and utilization of mobile technology that is specifically designed to meet the requirements of emerging markets (MTN Group, 2024). MTN developed cost-effective and scalable mobile solutions to address the specific difficulties faced by these markets, including low-income levels and insufficient infrastructure. These solutions enabled wider access to telecommunications services.

## **5.3. The Significance of Strategic Partnerships and Networks**

This research highlights the crucial importance of strategic alliances and networks in promoting the international expansion of South African enterprises. Participating in joint ventures, alliances, and partnerships enables companies to overcome substantial obstacles related to accessing and functioning

in foreign markets. These cooperative endeavours grant access to vital resources, augment comprehension of the local market, and introduce imperative technological innovations necessary for worldwide competition.

### **Acquisition of Essential Assets**

Strategic relationships offer the advantage of accessing vital resources that might otherwise be inaccessible or too costly. The resources encompass financial wealth, human skills, and technical advances. South African enterprises can better their own operations by forming partnerships with local firms or multinational corporations, allowing them to harness the strengths and capabilities of their partners. Through its joint ventures, Sasol has successfully obtained the required capital investments and superior technology inputs, which have played a crucial role in facilitating its expansion into global markets (Sasol, 2022).

### **Improving Understanding of the Local Market**

Comprehending the intricacies of the local market is a substantial obstacle for organizations expanding into foreign regions. Strategic alliances and networks allow companies to get significant knowledge about local consumer patterns, legal frameworks, and cultural subtleties. Having a deep understanding of the local market is crucial for customizing products and services to cater to the unique requirements of various markets. For example, MTN has established multiple alliances with indigenous telecoms firms and service providers across different nations. Through these agreements, MTN has been able to customize its mobile financial services to suit the specific needs of each local market, resulting in a higher level of acceptance and utilization (MTN Group, 2024).

Technological capabilities refer to the range of skills, knowledge, and resources that a person or organization possesses in relation to technology. These capabilities encompass the ability to understand, use, and use technology effectively.

Within the framework of internationalisation, having access to state-of-the-art technology capabilities can have a significant impact on the outcome. Strategic alliances frequently entail the exchange of technology and knowledge, leading to a notable improvement in a company's competitive advantage. By engaging in partnerships with global technology companies, South African companies could incorporate innovative technologies into their operations, resulting in enhanced efficiency and innovation. Sasol's collaborative partnerships have played a crucial role in gaining access to and implementing cutting-edge technology for its chemical and energy production operations, thereby enhancing its competitive advantage in international markets.

### **Reducing Risks**

Engaging in global markets entails a range of hazards, such as political volatility, economic oscillations, and regulatory hurdles. Strategic alliances can effectively reduce these risks by

distributing the load and duties among the partners. Joint ventures and alliances allow corporations to transfer risk more fairly, so making multinational ventures more practical and less intimidating. Sasol's strategic relationships have played a vital role in mitigating the risks associated with large-scale multinational projects, hence assuring greater stability and sustainability in its operations.

#### **5.4 Government Policies and Support Mechanisms**

The internationalisation strategy and innovation capabilities of South African corporations are significantly influenced by government policies and support mechanisms. The data examined in this study suggest that companies that receive favourable trade policies, investment incentives, and research and development (R&D) financing are in a more advantageous position to engage in innovation and compete globally.

##### **The role of government policies**

Trade policies are crucial in enabling South African enterprises to enter and grow in foreign markets. These policies encompass bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, export incentives, and tariff reductions, all of which decrease the obstacles to international trade. These policies facilitate enterprises' access to new markets and enhance their competitive advantage by establishing a more favourable trade environment. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement seeks to establish a unified marketplace for goods and services throughout Africa, thereby greatly improving the global expansion opportunities for South African companies.

##### **Financial incentives to encourage investment**

Investment incentives, such as tax exemptions, financial assistance, and government grants, are specifically formulated to stimulate corporations to engage in emerging technology and broaden their global business activities. These incentives alleviate the financial costs linked to internationalisation and innovation, hence increasing the feasibility for enterprises to engage in global opportunities. The South African government, facilitated by agencies such as the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC), provides a range of incentives to stimulate industrial growth and encourage innovation. These incentives include the Automotive Investment Scheme (AIS) and the Manufacturing Competitiveness Enhancement Programme (MCEP).

##### **Allocation of funds for research and development (R&D)**

Research and development financing is crucial for cultivating innovation within companies. Government grants and financing programs offer the essential resources for companies to spend in research and development activities that propel technical developments and product innovations. THRIP and the Innovation Fund are two projects in South Africa that provide financing for research and development (R&D). These initiatives assist enterprises in obtaining money, which in turn enables them to create creative solutions that improve their competitiveness in global marketplaces.



## **Developing and fostering innovation ecosystems**

Government assistance in establishing resilient innovation ecosystems is essential for maintaining the innovation endeavours of companies. This entails establishing connections between industry, academia, and research institutes to ease the exchange of knowledge and promote collaboration. Innovation hubs, scientific parks, and technology incubators are examples of programs that create a favourable atmosphere for fostering innovation. The Innovation Hub in Pretoria and the Cape Innovation and Technology Initiative (CiTi) in Cape Town are notable instances of these ecosystems in South Africa.

## **Effects of Government Interventions**

The literature extensively documents the beneficial effects of government interventions on the internationalisation and innovation activities of firms. The study conducted by Andreoni and Tregenna (2020) examines the ways in which government policies might establish a conducive atmosphere that facilitates the international expansion and innovative capacities of companies. Their research indicates that specific government actions can improve companies' ability to participate in global markets and maintain their competitive advantage by consistently innovating.

## **5.5. Challenges and Opportunities in Global Markets**

South African enterprises have a multitude of obstacles while operating in global markets, such as intricate regulations, cultural disparities, and limited resources. Nevertheless, companies that integrate innovation into their plans can adeptly manage these challenges and capitalize on fresh prospects. The repeating feature of success stories from organizations such as Sasol and MTN is their ability to effectively address and overcome market-specific obstacles through the implementation of creative solutions (Mahmood & Mubarik, 2020).

### **Limitations on available resources**

South African enterprises have considerable challenges in their efforts to expand internationally due to resource constraints, such as insufficient financial resources, technological skills, and human capital. These limitations can restrict a company's capacity to spend in essential infrastructure, market research, and innovation, which are crucial for competing in global markets.

Addressing resource limitations requires implementing efficient management techniques, utilizing digital advancements to minimize expenses, and establishing collaborative partnerships to exchange resources and knowledge.

### **Exploring Possibilities with Innovation**

Although there are difficulties, the global markets also present substantial prospects for South African firms, especially those who incorporate innovation into their operations. Innovation has the potential to bring about product distinction, improve operational efficiency, and establish new business models that strongly appeal to global consumers.

Technological innovation enables organizations to create distinctive products that cater to specific market demands, thus setting themselves apart from their rivals. Sasol's pioneering Fischer-Tropsch technology serves as a prominent illustration of how technological innovation can establish a distinct advantage in global markets. MTN's implementation of mobile financial services, including MTN Mobile Money, effectively tackles the issue of financial exclusion in several African nations. This showcases how inventive solutions can create opportunities in untapped market sectors and generate other sources of income.

Furthermore, organizations who engage in innovative practices in their business models, such as using digital platforms for sales and customer engagement, could access a wider range of customers and optimize their operations. By implementing e-commerce platforms and digital marketing methods, organizations may effectively transcend geographical limitations and easily reach a worldwide customer base.

## **6. Managerial Implications**

The research findings have significant managerial implications for South African companies aiming to expand internationally.

### **6.1. Emphasize the importance of innovation in the process of developing strategies**

Managers ought to give priority to innovation when developing their internationalisation plans. This entails allocating resources towards research and development, cultivating a work environment that prioritizes ongoing enhancement, and promoting the creation of innovative products, services, and business strategies that can effectively cater to the specific requirements of global markets. Through this action, firms can distinguish themselves and attain long-lasting competitive advantages.

### **6.2 Utilise Technological Innovations**

Placing significant importance on technological innovation is crucial for achieving success on a global scale. Managers should prioritize the adoption and development of state-of-the-art technology that can offer a competitive advantage in international markets. This encompasses not just advancements in products but also improvements in processes that enhance effectiveness and decrease expenses.

### **6.3 Establish and Sustain Strategic Alliances**

Establishing strategic alliances and networks is crucial for achieving successful internationalisation. Managers must actively pursue partnerships with nearby companies, research institutions, and

government organizations to acquire essential resources, market intelligence, and technological proficiency. These collaborations can help reduce risks and expedite market penetration.

#### **6.4 Take use of government support and incentives.**

Managers should utilize existing government rules and support channels to facilitate the process of expanding internationally. This involves capitalizing on trade agreements, investment incentives, and chances for research and development financing. Keeping abreast of government policies and actively participating in discussions with legislators can offer considerable assistance for internationalisation endeavours.

#### **6.5 Formulate adaptive strategies to address challenges specific to different markets.**

Managers need to design flexible strategies to tackle the distinct challenges posed by each worldwide market. This entails undertaking comprehensive market research to comprehend local rules, cultural subtleties, and customer inclinations. Companies can enhance their ability to overcome obstacles and capitalize on favourable circumstances by customizing their strategies to align with specific market conditions.

### **7. Conclusions, Contributions, Limitations, and Future Research**

#### **Conclusion**

This study emphasizes the critical significance of innovation in the worldwide expansion strategies of South African companies. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of secondary data, which included a meticulous review of literature and industry publications, several significant conclusions have been uncovered.

The results indicate that firms that integrate creative approaches into their strategies for expanding into global markets are more likely to effectively penetrate these markets and sustain a competitive advantage. In this context, innovation encompasses not only advancements in technology, but also creative business ideas, processes, and organizational approaches. Companies that regularly participate in innovation can differentiate their products and services, meet diverse market demands, and respond more effectively to global competition.

The case studies of Sasol and MTN demonstrate how enhancements in technical and commercial models can successfully drive global expansion. Sasol's strategic deployment of resources towards the development of proprietary technologies, such as Fischer-Tropsch technology, has enabled the company to effectively enter and compete in global markets by offering unique and incomparable goods. MTN's rapid expansion across Africa and other regions has been facilitated by its early adoption of mobile technologies specifically tailored for developing nations.

South African companies face numerous obstacles when operating in global markets, including complex legislative frameworks, cultural differences, and resource constraints. Companies that include innovation into their strategy can effectively overcome these challenges and take advantage of new possibilities. To attain sustained global success, it is imperative to adopt a strategic methodology that entails understanding and adapting to the unique conditions of each market.

In summary, this study provides solid evidence that innovation is essential for enabling South African firms to successfully expand into global markets. To enhance their ability to compete on a global scale and achieve consistent expansion in foreign markets, firms may choose to prioritize innovation, establish strategic alliances, leverage government support, and develop flexible strategies. The results derived from this study offer valuable guidance for managers and policymakers aiming to enhance the international presence of South African companies.

The following recommendations can be made based on the findings of the impact of innovation in internationalisation for South African companies and guide organisations seeking to increase their competitive advantage through global engagement:

- i. Companies must link their innovation strategy with the aspirations of expanding internationally. It will require R&D and innovation activities to go hand-in-hand with the entry into new markets so that it could build up on local competence, developing unique solutions tailored to serve different market needs.
- ii. Companies should be able to design resilient market intelligence systems that would help in the consistent tracking and evaluation of trends, technology, and consumer behaviours in the global markets. This would offer invaluable insights into strategic decision-making and would allow managers to respond proactively to possible changes, which may require new solutions.
- iii. Managers should encourage a culture of flexible innovation within the organization, wherein all levels of hierarchy are encouraged to actively seek and provide ideas that would successfully manage certain challenges encountered in the international markets.
- iv. Develop virtual global teams wherein diverse employees from various geographies work together on creative projects. Using this method, it would quite effectively use diverse perspectives and deep expertise to foster innovation from a global perspective.

## **Research Contributions**

Empirically, this research explores how South African companies leverage internationalisation opportunities and the significance of innovation in their strategic operations. The research offers significant insights into the operational and strategic advantages of internationalization by analysing how different companies increase their global reach and improve their competitive edge through innovation. This work is crucial as it highlights the actual methods that organizations use to take

advantage of international opportunities to promote innovation, thereby enhancing the empirical proof of the connection between internationalisation and innovation.

Theoretically, the research expands our knowledge of how internationalisation impacts innovation within the frameworks of strategic management and international business theory. The study enhances the theoretical landscape by examining how organisations might use internationalisation and innovation to improve their ability to innovate.

### **Limitations**

While this research provides valuable insights, it is not without its limitations. The use of secondary data means that the results depend on the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the existing literature and reports. Furthermore, the study primarily focuses on well-known organizations such as Sasol and MTN, which may not provide an accurate representation of the experiences of smaller or less established firms. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by a broader range of South African enterprises, it would be beneficial to incorporate primary data collection methods, such as interviews and surveys, into future research.

### **Future study**

Future studies should explore many domains to build upon the findings of this research:

- Conduct comparative analyses across multiple industries to determine the impact of innovation on internationalisation strategies in various sectors.
- Perform longitudinal study to examine the evolution of innovation's impact on internationalisation and the related adaptations made by firms in response to changing market conditions.

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