

## **PhD Studentships for Academic Year 2026-27**

### **Global Studies Centre (GSC)**

#### **About the Research Centre**

Our research themes include emerging economies, Grand Challenges, international marketing strategy, global strategy, international human resource management, internationalisation, digitalisation, and SMEs.

Find out more at: [Global Studies Centre - Durham University Business School](#)

#### **Topic 1**

##### **Title of Proposed Research Topic:**

International Marketing Strategy and Performance

##### **Potential Supervisors:**

[Professor Xinming He](#)

[Professor Jorge Lengler](#)

##### **Description of Possible Research Topic:**

International markets are becoming increasingly important for businesses, offering greater market size and expanded opportunities. However, foreign markets also present significant challenges, such as cultural and institutional distance, the liability of foreignness, decoupling, and rising nationalism, all of which contribute to heightened uncertainty. To succeed, international firms must develop key capabilities and strategies, such as innovation, pricing, and distribution channels, to gain a competitive advantage and achieve superior performance. Leveraging digital technology can also play a critical role in helping firms navigate these complexities and enhance their global success.

##### **Key References:**

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Li, Y., Sousa, C.M.P., He, X., & Hu, Y. (2022). Spinning Straw into Gold: Innovation Recycling, Innovation Sourcing Modes, and Innovation Ability in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 39(5), 83-603. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12643>

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Sousa, C.M.P., Li, Y., & He, X. (2020). Impact of Exploitation and Exploration on Export Sales Growth: Moderating Role of Domestic and International Collaborations. *Journal of International Marketing*, 28(4), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069031X20963617>

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He, X., Brouthers, K.D., & Filatotchev, I. (2018). Market Orientation and Export Performance: The Moderating Role of Export Channel and Institutional Distance. *International Marketing Review*, 35(2), 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-09-2015-0194>

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He, X., Brouthers, K.D., & Filatotchev, I. (2013). Resource-Based and Institutional Perspectives on Export Channel Selection and Export Performance. *Journal of Management*, 39(1), 27-47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206312445926>

Li, M., He, X., & Sousa, C.M.P. (2017). A Review of the Empirical Research on Export Channel Selection between 1979 and 2015. *International Business Review*, 26(2), 303-323. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2016.09.001>

Topic 2

## **Title of Proposed Research Topic:**

Digital Globalisation

## **Potential Supervisors:**

[Professor Joseph Amankwah-Amoah](#)

[Dr Edward Gillmore](#)

[Professor Xinming He](#)

[Professor Jorge Lengler](#)

[Professor Rudolf Sinkovics](#)

## **Description of Possible Research Topic:**

Information and communication technologies have significantly transformed the business environment and processes. Digital technologies present both challenges and opportunities for businesses, particularly in their global value chains. Traditional international business (IB) practices and theories, developed prior to the digital era, now require adaptation to address the shifts brought about by digitalisation. Key questions that arise include how digitalisation influences firms' decisions, behaviours, and outcomes in internationalisation - affecting areas such as sourcing, production, market selection, entry mode, international ventures, learning, and marketing, among others.

## **Key References:**

Dong, Y., He, X., & Blut, M. (2024). How and When Do Digital Resources, Capabilities, and Strategy Influence Export Performance: A Meta-Analysis. *International Marketing Review*, 41(6), 1388-1413. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-02-2024-0044>

Gong, C., He, H., & Lengler, J. (2024). Internationalisation through Digital Platforms: A Systematic Review and Future Agenda. *International Marketing Review*, 41(5), 938-980. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IMR-08-2023-0213>

Vu, K.C., He, X., & Lengler, J. (2024). Exploring How Big Data Analytics Influences the Degree of Internationalization: The Role of Performance Feedback, Technological Discontinuity, and Organizational Legitimacy, *Navigating Disruptions and Transformations in International Business* (Palgrave Macmillan), edited by V. Jafari. <https://durham-repository.worktribe.com/output/2483561>

Ahi, A.A., Sinkovics, N., & Sinkovics, R.R. (2023). E-Commerce Policy and the Global Economy: A Path to More Inclusive Development? *Management International Review*, 63(1), 27-56. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-022-00490-1>

Bouncken, R.B., Fredrich, V., Sinkovics, N., & Sinkovics, R.R. (2023). Digitalization of Cross-Border R&D Alliances: Configurational Insights and Cognitive Digitalization Biases, *Global Strategy Journal*, 13(2), 281-314. <https://doi.org/10.1002/gsj.1469>

Ahi, A.A., Sinkovics, N., Shildibekov, Y., Sinkovics, R.R., & Mehandjiev, N. (2022). Advanced Technologies and International Business: A Multidisciplinary Analysis of the Literature, *International Business Review*, 31(4), 101967.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2021.101967>

Gillmore, E., Andersson, U., & Memar, N. (2018). How Subsidiaries Influence Innovation in the MNE Value Chain. *Transnational Corporations*, 25(1), 73-100.

<https://doi.org/10.18356/d998ea62-en>

## Topic 3

### **Title of Proposed Research Topic:**

Emerging Markets, MNEs, and FDI

### **Potential Supervisors:**

[Professor Roberta Aguzzoli](#)

[Professor Joseph Amankwah-Amoah](#)

[Professor Xinming He](#)

[Dr Rui Hou](#)

[Professor Dylan Sutherland](#)

### **Description of Possible Research Topic:**

International business scholars have become really focused on understanding the nature of emerging market (E) MNEs. In what ways, for example, are they different (if at all?) to developed market MNEs? This question has led to extensive theorising regarding EMNNEs, as well as lots of empirical papers. Our researchers have significantly contributed to the EMNE debate, publishing on a wide variety of topics in leading international business and management journals. We go out of our way to ask new and critical questions and explore these questions using original and novel methodologies. For example, we have explored; the role of greenfield FDI

establishment mode and sub-national location choices as a means to undertake firm-level catch-up strategies; undertaken large-scale EMNE/DMNE comparative analysis of strategic asset seeking deal outcomes using novel DID (time variant approaches); critically questioned the use of FDI data as it is applied to EMNEs (how do we track EMNE FDI when so much is channelled via ‘phantom’ companies in offshore tax havens and financial centres?); explored comparative outcomes of intangible asset growth for EMNEs undertaking different types of asset seeking FDI. These are a few of the areas we have researched. There are still so many more interesting questions and fruitful opportunities to answer these – so we welcome future researchers to contact us to discuss their ideas with a view to undertaking further studies. We welcome both qualitative and quantitative research approaches.

### **Key References:**

Adomako, S., Shenkar, O., Liu, X., Amankwah-Amoah, J., & Ahsan, M. (2025). Editorial on Doing Business in Africa: Navigating Opportunities and Challenges in Africa’s Emerging Markets. *Journal of International Management*, 30(5), 101189. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2024.101189>

Adomako, S., Gyensare, M.A., Amankwah-Amoah, J., Akhtar, P., & Hussain, N. (2024). Tackling Grand Societal Challenges: Understanding When and How Reverse Engineering Fosters Frugal Product Innovation in an Emerging Market. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 41(2), 211-235. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12678>

Amankwah-Amoah, J. (2023). Burning Issues: Unravelling the Nexus Between Dysfunctional Institutions and Counterfeiting in Developing Countries. *Social Science and Medicine*, 337, 116292. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2023.116292>

Amankwah-Amoah, J., Debrah, Y.A., & Acquaaah, M. (2023). Business Failures in Institutionally Weak Environments: An Examination of Virgin Atlantic’s Failed Adventure in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Business Review*, 32(5), 102146. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2023.102146>

Liu, F., He, X., & Wang, T. (2023). In the Name of the Family: The Effect of CEO Clan Culture Background on Firm Internationalization. *Journal of Business Research*, 161, 113837. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.113837>

Amankwah-Amoah, J., Boso, N., & Kutsoati, J. K. (2022). Institutionalization of Protection for Intangible Assets: Insights from the Counterfeit and Pirated Goods Trade in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of World Business*, 57(2), 101307. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jwb.2021.101307>

He, X., Rizov, M., & Zhang, X. (2022). Workforce Size Adjustments as a Strategic Response to Exchange Rate Shocks: A Strategy-Tripod Application to Chinese Firms. *Journal of Business Research*, 138, 203-213. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.09.013>

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Sutherland, D., Anderson, J., Bailey, N., & Alon, I. (2020). Policy, Institutional Fragility, and Chinese Outward Foreign Direct Investment: An Empirical Examination of the Belt and Road Initiative. *Journal of International Business Policy*, 3(3), 249-272. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42214-020-00056-8>

He, X., & Zhang, J. (2018). Emerging-Market Multinationals' Foreign Acquisition Completion: Institutional Image and Strategies. *Journal of Business Research*, 93, 139-150. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.04.014>

Kang, Y., & He, X. (2018). Institutional Forces and Environmental Management Strategy: Moderating Effects of Environmental Orientation and Innovation Capability. *Management and Organization Review*, 14(3), 577-605.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/mor.2017.56>

Geary, J., & Aguzzoli, R. (2016). Miners, Politics and Institutional Caryatids: Accounting for the Transfer of HRM Practices in the Brazilian Multinational Enterprise. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 47, 968-996.

<https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2016.24>

He, X., Zhang, J., & Wang, J. (2015). Market Seeking Orientation and Performance in China: The Impact of Institutional Environment, Wholly Owned Structure and Firm Experience. *Management International Review*, 55, 389-419.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-014-0227-2>

Aguzzoli, R., & Geary, J. (2014). An 'Emerging Challenge': The Employment Practices of a Brazilian Multinational Company in Canada. *Human Relations*, 67(5), 587-609. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726713497523>

Zhang, J., & He, X. (2014). Economic Nationalism and Foreign Acquisition Completion: The Case of China. *International Business Review*, 23(1), 212-227.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2013.04.002>

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## Topic 4

### **Title of Proposed Research Topic:**

Expatriation and Migration

### **Potential Supervisors:**

[Professor Roberta Aguzzoli](#)

### **Description of Possible Research Topic:**

International migration has occurred for centuries. The UN estimates that 281 million people are migrants. However, the literature differentiates between migrants and expatriates, particularly based on their nationality. We explore the contexts of migrant workers and the motives for migration, focusing specifically on assigned expatriates and self-initiated expatriates. By addressing this underexplored area, we aim to contribute to governments, companies, and migrants, particularly by helping to develop practices that better integrate migrants into the economic labour market.

### **Key References:**

Aguzzoli, R., Śliwa, M., Lengler, J., Brewster, C., & Quatrin, D. (2024). How Does Colonial History Matter for Expatriate Adjustment? The Case of Brazilians in Portugal. *Journal of International Business Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-024-00754-y>

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Śliwa, M., Aguzzoli, R., Brewster, C., & Lengler, J. (2024). Workplace Accentism as a Postcolonial and Intersectional Phenomenon: The Experiences of Brazilians in Portugal. *Human Relations*, 77(10), 1468-1501. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267231198965>

## Topic 5

### **Title of Proposed Research Topic:**

MNE Structure and Strategy



## **Potential Supervisors:**

[Dr Edward Gillmore](#)

## **Description of Possible Research Topic:**

A core area of focus in international business is global strategy; our researchers focus on MNEs adoption of strategies that balance global integration with local responsiveness to manage their international operations effectively. We focus on understanding how MNEs implement global strategies to achieve efficiency and standardization while adapting to local markets through decentralized structures that allow flexibility. Key questions that we explore are how MNEs use transnational strategy, combine global coordination with local adaptation, and how matrix structures are adapted to manage complex operations across geographic lines. Central to this is how MNEs strike a balance between control and responsiveness when mandating subsidiaries across the MNE network to enhance innovation and maintain competitiveness internationally.

## **Key References:**

Gillmore, E., Andersson, U., & Dellestrand, H. (2023). Between a Rock and a Hard Place: The Consequences of Complex Headquarters Configurations for Subsidiary R&D Activities. *Global Strategy Journal*, 13(1), 217-247.

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Gillmore, E. (2022). Mandate Dynamics and the Importance of Mandate Loss for Subsidiary Evolution. *International Business Review*, 31(6), 101- 994.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2022.101994>

Gillmore, E., Andersson, U., & Ekman, P. (2021). The Enduring Effects of Relational Attributes on Subsidiary Evolution After Mandate Loss. *Global Strategy Journal*, 11(3), 402-433. <https://doi.org/10.1002/gsj.1391>

## Topic 6

### **Title of Proposed Research Topic:**

Caregiving and International Entrepreneurship

### **Potential Supervisors:**

[Dr Farzana Chowdhury](#)

### **Description of Possible Research Topic:**



We invite highly motivated and intellectually curious prospective Ph.D. students to join a dynamic research agenda at the intersection of caregiving and international entrepreneurship—two domains that are increasingly central to understanding contemporary economic, social, and organizational change. This research stream explores how caregiving responsibilities, structures, and identities shape entrepreneurial behavior, internationalization strategies, and firm resilience across diverse institutional and cultural contexts.

**Key References:**

None provided

Topic 7

**Title of Proposed Research Topic:**

Digitalization and International Entrepreneurship

**Potential Supervisors:**

[Dr Farzana Chowdhury](#)

**Description of Possible Research Topic:**

We invite highly motivated and intellectually curious applicants to apply for a Ph.D. position focused on the rapidly evolving intersection of digitalization and international entrepreneurship. This research opportunity is designed for students who are passionate about understanding how digital platforms and emerging digital infrastructures are reshaping international entrepreneurial processes and how digital technologies are transforming the way entrepreneurial firms internationalize, compete, and create value across borders. We particularly encourage applications from candidates who are eager to conduct impactful, theory-driven, and socially relevant research on how digital transformation is reshaping global entrepreneurship.

**Key References:**

None provided