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MOTIVATIONS AND CHALLENGES: AN ANALYSIS OF MANUFACTURING FIRMS IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY INTERNATIONALIZING TO ALBANIA

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Abstract

The internationalization of manufacturing firms has been a key point of scholarly research, with the fashion industry emerging as a particularly attractive sector for many such enterprises. Among the many challenges faced by these firms, location choices, especially where to establish the manufacturing process, have been a critical consideration. Extensive literature suggests that developing countries are often perceived as attractive locations for manufacturing due to the associated lower production costs. This study seeks to focus into the motivations that drive firms originated from high-cost countries to establish their manufacturing processes in low-cost countries, with a specific focus on the case of Albania. Albania has garnered attention from foreign firms as an attractive destination for running their manufacturing processes, and this research aims to uncover the underlying factors contributing to this trend. Through a literature review, the study analyze the motivations that influence foreign firms to choose Albania as their target country for manufacturing operations. Furthermore, it explores the barriers these firms encounter and the opportunities that reach in the process. The findings of this study not only contribute to a deeper understanding of the motivations behind the internationalization of manufacturing firms in the fashion industry but also provide valuable insights into the specific case of Albania. By presenting evidence on the reasons firms opt for Albania as a



manufacturing location, the study offers a nuanced perspective on the dynamics in the global fashion industry. The research not only expands the current body of knowledge on the internationalization of manufacturing firms in the fashion industry but also provides practical implications for policymakers, industry practitioners, and academics. In conclusion, this study advances our understanding of the motivations, barriers, and opportunities that shape the decision-making process of manufacturing firms in the fashion industry when internationalizing to low-cost countries, using Albania as a case study. It stands as a valuable addition to the existing literature and opens paths for further research in this dynamic and evolving field.

Keywords: Internationalization, Fashion, Albania, Barriers, Low-cost country, Location choices

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of global business has witnessed a paradigm shift with the internationalization of manufacturing firms, particularly within the fashion industry (Caniato et al., 2012, 2015; Fratocchi & Stefano, 2019; Giacosa, 2014; McMaster et al., 2020; Millspaugh & Kent, 2016; Rashid & Barnes, 2017a). As fashion businesses face complexities of an ever-evolving marketplace, strategic decisions regarding the location of manufacturing processes have become pivotal to their success. This paper aims to investigate the complexity of this decision-making process, with a particular focus on the motivations influencing manufacturing firms from high-cost countries towards the internationalization of their operations.

The attractiveness of developing countries, often characterized by lower production costs, has emerged as a central theme in the internationalization discourse (Ajide et al., 2019; Novillo-Villegas et al., 2022; S., 2014; Van Horen, 2007). This paper aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by focusing into the motivations that drive manufacturing firms, especially those from high-cost countries, to seek manufacturing bases in low-cost countries. In doing so, it addresses a critical gap in understanding the main factors influencing the internationalization strategies of firms operating in the fashion industry.

Within this context, the nation of Albania has been considered as a significant case study, drawing the attention of numerous foreign manufacturing firms as an attractive location for their fashion-related manufacturing processes (Government of Albania and United Nations, 2017; International Labour Organization, 2023; Lica et al., 2021). Albania's rising reputation as a manufacturing location presents a unique opportunity to explore the specific dynamics influencing such decisions (Blau & Janssen, 2020; Icka et al., 2021; Republic of Albania. Council of Ministers, 2022; The World Bank, 2021). By closely examining the motivations behind foreign firms' choices to establish manufacturing processes in Albania, this research aims to

offer valuable insights into the broader global trends shaping the internationalization landscape of the fashion industry.

As the fashion industry continues to operate within an environment characterized by rapid differences in consumer preferences, technological advancements, and supply chain dynamics, understanding the intricacies of firms' choices in internationalization becomes significant (Caniato et al., 2012, 2015; Cuervo-Cazurra, 2011; Lica et al., 2021; Lo & Hou, 2020; McMaster et al., 2020; Rashid & Barnes, 2017b). This research seeks to not only offer insights on the decision-making processes but also to provide practical implications for policymakers, industry practitioners, and academics. By focusing in Albania as a case study, the study aims to understand the complexities of internationalization within the unique context of the fashion industry, thereby enriching the discourse on the globalization of manufacturing firms.

The aim of this study is to analyze the motivations that influence manufacturing firms from high-cost countries to establish their operations in low-cost countries, with a specific focus on Albania within the context of the fashion industry. The research objectives are structured to provide a systematic exploration of these motivations, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the decision-making processes that guide firms toward internationalization. The primary objective is to investigate and analyze the motivations behind manufacturing firms' strategic decisions to internationalize their operations, emphasizing the unique considerations that drive firms to select low-cost countries. This involves a detailed examination of factors such as production cost advantages, regulatory environments, access to skilled labor, and other elements that influence the attractiveness of low-cost destinations. A specific emphasis is placed on Albania as a target country for fashion manufacturing processes. The objective is to understand why Albania has become an attractive destination for foreign manufacturing firms. By going through the specific economic, regulatory, and geographical factors that make Albania attractive, the research seeks to provide insights into the country's unique role in the global fashion supply chain. Beyond the internationalization motivations, the study aims to achieve an understanding of the complexities involved in the decision-making process. This involves exploring how the dynamic nature of the fashion industry, marked by rapidly changing consumer trends and technological advancements, influences firms' choices to internationalize. The objective is to investigate the interplay of various factors that contribute to the decision-making of manufacturing firms within the fashion sector.

Another key objective is to identify and analyze the barriers faced by manufacturing firms when establishing operations in low-cost countries, particularly in the context of Albania. Concurrently, the study aims to analyze the opportunities that arise as a result of this internationalization process. This dual focus provides a comprehensive perspective on the

challenges and advantages that firms encounter, contributing to a well-rounded assessment of the internationalization landscape.

Finally, the research objectives encompass a broader aspiration to contribute meaningfully to the existing literature on the internationalization of manufacturing firms in the fashion industry. The research seeks to advance our understanding of the motivations, challenges, and opportunities inherent in the global expansion of manufacturing activities within the fashion sector. The structured pursuit of these research objectives ensures a rigorous and comprehensive exploration of the internationalization dynamics in the fashion industry, with Albania serving as a microcosm for understanding the broader trends shaping the global landscape of manufacturing firms. The sections of this study are organized as follows. It starts with a literature review analyzing existing studies on internationalization in manufacturing firms followed by methodology, findings and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Exploration of existing studies on internationalization in manufacturing firms

The global landscape of manufacturing has experienced a transformative evolution, particularly within the fashion industry (Di Mauro et al., 2017; Fratocchi et al., 2014; Fratocchi & Stefano, 2019). A comprehensive understanding of this evolution needs a thorough exploration of existing studies on the internationalization of manufacturing firms, where the fashion sector stands out as a key sector to be investigated.

The literature consistently underscores the attractiveness of the fashion industry for manufacturing firms engaging in internationalization. This attractiveness is multifaceted, driven by factors such as the ever-evolving nature of consumer demands, rapid changes in fashion trends, and the necessity for cost-effective production methods (Angulo-Ruiz et al., 2022; Cheng & Yu, 2012; Cuervo-Cazurra, 2011; Pansare et al., 2023; Ti et al., 2023). Studies have revealed that the fashion sector's unique characteristics, characterized by short product life cycles and the need for smart production processes, make it particularly favorable to internationalization endeavors (Angulo-Ruiz et al., 2022; Bai et al., 2021; Montanari et al., 2020; Wadeson, 2020). As a result, scholarly study has increasingly focused on investigating the motivations behind manufacturing firms' strategic decisions to venture into the global fashion market.

A prevalent theme in the literature is the strategic preference of manufacturing firms, including those in the fashion industry, to establish their operations in developing countries. This preference is rooted in the perception of developing nations as attractive manufacturing locations, primarily due to their lower production costs (Canham & Hamilton, 2013a, 2013b;

Merino et al., 2021). Scholars have extensively showed how firms strategically position themselves in these regions to capitalize on cost efficiencies, taking advantage of factors such as lower labor costs and more soft regulatory environments (Datta, 2019; Jansson & Hilmersson, 2009; Kamann & Van Nieulande, 2010; Pasciaroni, 2016; Shamsuddoha et al., 2009). This section of the literature review provides a comprehensive examination of the global trends shaping the choices of manufacturing firms, particularly those in the fashion sector, as they internationalize their operations.

Within the broader context of manufacturing internationalization, the literature on the fashion industry introduces specific considerations that further clarify the decision-making processes of firms. Research highlights the significance of factors such as proximity to key markets, agility in responding to rapidly changing consumer preferences, and the need for sustainable and ethical production practices (Albertoni et al., 2015; Amendolagine et al., n.d.; Di Mauro et al., 2017; Kedia & Mukherjee, 2009; Lica et al., 2021; “Transforming Capabilities in Offshoring Processes: Longitudinal Development of Organisational Resources and Routines in Four Danish Offshoring Enterprises,” 2015). Scholars have investigated into the unique challenges and opportunities that the fashion industry presents in the internationalization context, offering valuable insights into the complexities inherent in these strategic decisions.

While existing studies offer valuable insights into the internationalization of manufacturing firms in the fashion industry, a notable gap remains regarding a specific examination of Albania as an emerging manufacturing destination. The literature has touched upon the attractiveness of certain countries; however, the unique motivations behind firms choosing Albania for their fashion-related manufacturing processes need dedicated investigation (Blau & Janssen, 2020; Icka et al., 2021; Open Society Foundation for Albania – Soros Foundation, 2010; Republic of Albania - Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), 2011; Republic of Albania. Council of Ministers, 2022; The World Bank, 2021). As this paper aims to bridge this gap, the following sections will provide a focused analysis of the motivations, barriers, and opportunities influencing manufacturing firms when selecting Albania as a target country for internationalization within the fashion industry.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this research is designed to provide a robust and comprehensive analysis of the motivations, barriers, and opportunities associated with manufacturing firms' decisions to establish operations in low-cost countries, focusing specifically on Albania within the fashion industry. The chosen methodology focused on a literature review, ensures a better understanding of the multifaceted factors influencing internationalization

decisions. This involves a comprehensive review of academic articles, books, and reports relevant to the internationalization of manufacturing firms in the fashion industry and the specific context of Albania. This desk-based analysis will contribute to the theoretical framework, enrich the research context, and identify gaps and areas for further exploration.

FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

This section is dedicated to presenting the key findings derived from the comprehensive analysis of motivations, barriers, and opportunities associated with the internationalization of manufacturing firms in the fashion industry, specifically within the context of Albania.

The main motivations that drive manufacturing firms from high-cost countries to choose Albania as a strategic location for their fashion-related manufacturing processes are presented in Table 1. Cost advantages, including competitive labor rates and operational efficiencies, emerge as significant factors. These are followed by the attractiveness of Albania's regulatory environment, skilled labor availability, and strategic geographic location (Canham & Hamilton, 2013a, 2013b; Larsen et al., 2013; Youngdahl et al., 2010).

Table 1. Key motivations for manufacturing firms in the fashion industry

Motivations for Choosing Albania	Factors
Cost Advantages	Competitive labor rates
	Operational efficiencies
	Low production costs
Regulatory environment	Trade policies
	Tax incentives
	Ease of doing business
Skilled labor availability	Technical expertise
	Adaptability
Geographic proximity	Access to European markets
	Reduced transportation costs
Emerging status in global supply chain	Integration into evolving production networks
Infrastructure and technological advancements	Modern infrastructure
	Commitment to technological progress
Environmental and sustainable practices	Adherence to eco-friendly initiatives
	Integration of sustainable practices

Examining the barriers faced by manufacturing firms, this study identifies regulatory complexities, cultural differences, logistical challenges, and infrastructure limitations as the main

barriers. Understanding these barriers is crucial for firms to develop targeted strategies for overcoming challenges and enhancing operational resilience (Contractor et al., 2010; Di Mauro et al., 2017; Musteen, 2016; Tate, 2014). Referring to the opportunities, market access and expansion possibilities, innovation and technology adoption, strategic partnerships, and collaboration with local entities emerge as key opportunities (Bartels et al., 2016; Hashi, 2001; Jahan, 2016; Kahiya, 2013; Roy et al., 2016). Main barriers and opportunities are summerized in Table 2.

Table 2. Barriers and opportunities associated with the internationalization of manufacturing firms in the fashion industry

		Factors
Barriers	Regulatory complexities	Bureaucratic processes Legal intricacies Compliance requirements
	Cultural differences	Communication challenges Management practices Interpersonal relationships
	Logistical challenges	Transportation infrastructure Supply chain efficiency Distribution networks
	Infrastructure limitations	Transportation infrastructure Energy infrastructure Telecommunications infrastructure
Opportunities	Market access and expansion	Utilizing Albania as a gateway to broader markets Expanding reach globally Capitalizing on regional opportunities
	Innovation and technology adoption	Embracing cutting-edge technologies Investing in innovation Adapting to technological advancements
	Strategic partnerships and collaboration	Collaborating with local businesses Engaging with governmental bodies Building industry associations and partnerships

This study underline the importance of considering market-specific dynamics in the internationalization process. Albania's unique cultural, economic, and regulatory context needs tailored strategies. The findings reveal that successful internationalization requires a keen understanding of the local business environment and the ability to adapt strategies to align with Albania's specific market conditions.

An important finding that emerges is the growing emphasis on sustainability and ethical practices. Firms that decide to establish their manufacturing process in Albania recognize the importance of aligning with environmental and social responsibility standards. This study highlights the opportunities for firms to integrate sustainable practices into their operations, contributing not only to corporate responsibility but also to enhanced brand reputation.

CONCLUSION

This study offers an understanding of the motivations, barriers, and opportunities influencing manufacturing firms from high-cost countries in their strategic decisions to internationalize within the fashion industry, specifically targeting Albania. Moreover, it highlights how factors such as cost advantages, regulatory environments, skilled labor, geographic proximity, and emerging supply chain dynamics contribute to Albania's attractiveness.

In parallel, the exploration of barriers provides valuable insights into the challenges that manufacturing firms encounter when establishing operations in Albania. Regulatory complexities, cultural differences, logistical challenges, and infrastructure limitations emerged as main factors that needs more attention. Recognizing these barriers is essential for firms seeking to enhance their resilience and effectiveness in a foreign business landscape.

Furthermore, this study provides the main opportunities, offering a roadmap for firms to benefit on Albania's unique advantages. Market access and expansion, innovation and technology adoption, strategic partnerships, and sustainability initiatives emerge as pathways for growth. These opportunities not only contribute to the success of individual firms but also foster positive collaborations within the Albanian business ecosystem.

The findings contribute not only to the literature review on international business but also offer practical implications for firms, policymakers, and industry stakeholders.

Manufacturing firms can leverage the research findings to inform their strategic decision-making processes. Understanding the motivations and challenges specific to Albania provides a light for firms aiming to establish a link with country.

Policymakers can draw insights from this research to refine regulatory frameworks and create an environment that attracts and sustains foreign investment. Making efficient bureaucratic processes, enhancing transparency, and fostering a business-friendly atmosphere can position Albania as an even more attractive destination for international businesses.

This study offers some limitations. In particular, it is focused on a literature review, while using an empirical study analysing the exploration of evolving supply chain dynamics, and longitudinal studies tracking the sustainability practices of manufacturing firms can further enrich the scholarly discourse. Additionally, comparative analyses with other emerging manufacturing destinations can provide broader insights into global trends.

This research contributes not only to the understanding of the motivations, barriers, and opportunities associated with the internationalization of manufacturing firms in the fashion industry but also provides practical guidance for stakeholders facing the complexities of global business. As the global landscape continues to evolve, this study helps to understand the dynamic and transformative nature of international business activities, showcasing the resilience and adaptability of manufacturing firms in pursuit of strategic growth.

In conclusion, this study offers some potential areas for future research. First, it is important to explore the intricacies of cross-cultural management within manufacturing firms operating in Albania. Future research must be done in order to investigate how firms manage cultural differences, communication challenges, and leadership styles to enhance internationalization strategies. Second, there is a need to investigate deeper into the supply chain dynamics of manufacturing firms in the fashion industry, emphasizing sustainability practices. Future research must be done to evaluate the integration of sustainable and ethical considerations throughout the supply chain and its impact on internationalization. Third, a comparative study must be conducted to analyze the choices and experiences of manufacturing firms in the fashion industry when entering other emerging markets. For instance, comparing and contrasting the challenges and opportunities faced in Albania with those in different regions. Fourth, this study suggests to investigate the role of governmental policies in attracting and retaining foreign manufacturing investment in Albania. Future research must be conducted in order to evaluate the effectiveness of policies such as tax incentives, trade regulations, and investment promotion strategies. Finally, this study suggests to explore how manufacturing firms leverage technology and innovation strategies in Albania. For this reason, it is important to analyze the role of innovation in overcoming barriers and enhancing competitiveness in the global fashion supply chain.

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