



ORGANIZATIONAL AMBIDEXTERITY IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETING: A STUDY OF EXPORTING FIRMS FROM MATO GROSSO

Gladistone Soares Lopes da Silva¹ & Thelma Valeria Rocha¹ ¹Escola Superior de Propaganda e Marketing – São Paulo (SP), Brazil.

ARTICLE DETAILS

Received:
Oct 24, 2025Accepted:
Nov 19, 2025Available online:
Mar. 10, 2026

Double Blind Review System

Editors

Priscila Rezende da Costa
Mário Ogasavara
Alex Fabianne de Paulo
Diogo Barbosa Leite
José Jassupei da Silva Morais

ABSTRACT

Objective: This article analyzes how organizational ambidexterity—balancing *exploration* (new market exploration) and *exploitation* (resource optimization)—influences the international marketing strategies of exporting firms from Mato Grosso. **Method:** An exploratory qualitative study based on a multiple-case study design, involving in-depth interviews with strategic managers from four medium- and large-sized exporting firms in Mato Grosso. Data were analyzed through thematic content analysis, organized into categories derived from the literature, ensuring alignment with the research objectives and strengthening comparability across cases. **Main Results:** Firms that are mature in international markets prioritize standardization to reduce costs, whereas firms at an early stage of exporting adopt adaptation and incremental innovation strategies to meet the specific demands of markets such as Europe and Asia. **Relevance / Originality:** The study addresses a gap in the literature by examining how firms from emerging markets, such as Mato Grosso, employ organizational ambidexterity to expand internationally, integrating innovation and efficiency in dynamic global environments. **Theoretical / Methodological Contributions:** This study demonstrates how organizational ambidexterity can be applied by mid-sized exporting firms, and offers managerial insights into how to balance innovation and efficiency to ensure competitiveness and sustainability in global markets.

Keywords: Exporting, Mato Grosso, Ambidexterity, Exploration, Exploitation, International Marketing.

AMBIDESTRIA ORGANIZACIONAL NO MARKETING INTERNACIONAL: ESTUDO COM EXPORTADORAS DO MATO GROSSO

RESUMO

Objetivo: Este artigo analisa como a ambidestria organizacional, equilibrando *exploration* (exploração de novos mercados) e *exploitation* (otimização de recursos), influencia as estratégias de marketing internacional das empresas exportadoras de Mato Grosso. **Método:** Pesquisa qualitativa exploratória baseada em estudo de caso múltiplo, envolvendo entrevistas em profundidade com gestores estratégicos de quatro empresas exportadoras de médio e grande porte de Mato Grosso. Os dados foram analisados por meio de análise de conteúdo temática, organizada em categorias derivadas da literatura, assegurando alinhamento com os objetivos da pesquisa e fortalecendo a comparabilidade entre os casos. **Principais Resultados:** As empresas maduras no mercado internacional priorizam a padronização para reduzir custos, enquanto as empresas em estágio inicial de exportação adotam estratégias de adaptação e inovação incremental para se adequar às demandas específicas de mercados como o europeu e asiático. **Relevância / Originalidade:** O estudo preenche uma lacuna na literatura ao investigar como empresas de mercados emergentes, como o Mato Grosso, utilizam a ambidestria organizacional para se expandir internacionalmente, integrando inovação e eficiência em ambientes globais dinâmicos. **Contribuições Teóricas / Metodológicas:** Este estudo evidencia como a ambidestria organizacional pode ser aplicada por empresas exportadoras de médio porte, além de oferecer *insights* gerenciais de como equilibrar inovação e eficiência para garantir competitividade e sustentabilidade em mercados globais.

Palavras-chave: Exportação, Mato Grosso, Ambidestria, *Exploration*, *Exploitation*, Marketing Internacional.

DETALHES DO ARTIGO

Recebido:
24 out., 2025Aceito:
19 nov., 2025Disponível online:
10 mar., 2026

Sistema de revisão “Double Blind Review”

Editores

Priscila Rezende da Costa
Mário Ogasavara
Alex Fabianne de Paulo
Diogo Barbosa Leite
José Jassupei da Silva Morais *Corresponding author: glaslsilva@hotmail.com<https://doi.org/10.18568/internext.835>

INTRODUCTION

Internationalization has increasingly become a relevant strategy for firms seeking to expand their operations and capture new markets. For exporting firms from Mato Grosso, this movement is even more significant, given the state's strategic role as an economic and export hub in the agro-industrial sector. These firms face the challenge of balancing innovation—required to enter and develop new markets—with operational efficiency, which is essential to sustain competitiveness and long-term viability. This reflects how organizations balance *exploration* and *exploitation* to achieve improved performance outcomes (Guerra & Souza, 2022). This balance between the pursuit of new opportunities (*exploration*) and resource optimization (*exploitation*) characterizes organizational ambidexterity (OA), which is the focus of this study.

OA refers to a firm's capability to manage *exploration* and *exploitation* activities. *Exploration* involves the search for new growth opportunities, the development of new products, and entry into emerging markets. Conversely, *exploitation* is characterized by the refinement and efficiency of established internal processes, aiming at maximizing resources and reducing operating costs. The effective integration of these two approaches enables firms to adapt to different market realities while maintaining efficiency and continuous innovation in their operations (Roth et al., 2024).

This context of constant change makes OA a critical strategic factor for firm success in the business environment known as Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA), in which adaptability and resilience are continuously tested (Fernández-Pérez de la Lastra & Sánchez-Gardey, 2024).

Within this context, the central question of this article is: "How do exporting firms from Mato Grosso integrate *exploitation* and *exploration* strategies in their international marketing operations?". Answering this question requires an analysis of the practices adopted by these firms and the outcomes achieved in terms of innovation and operational efficiency. Understanding this dynamic enables the provision of practical guidance to support managers in balancing these two dimensions of management, ensuring both the innovation required for expansion into global markets and the internal efficiency needed to sustain such expansion.

The overall objective of this study is to examine how exporting firms from Mato Grosso have integrated these two strategies into their international marketing operations, with a focus on identifying the main *exploration* and *exploitation* practices.

Exports are important to the Brazilian economy, contributing to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and generating employment and income. The state of Mato Grosso, in particular, is among the country's leading exporting firms, with an economy primarily supported by agribusiness (Figueiredo et al., 2024). It was the fourth-largest national exporter in 2023, totaling US\$ 32 billion, corresponding to 68 million tons exported, and recorded Brazil's largest trade balance, with a positive balance of US\$ 29 billion. Mato Grosso reached US\$ 35.2 billion in trade transactions, ranking seventh nationally. During the year, the cumulative value of exports was US\$ 29.73 billion, showing variation compared to previous years—the last time the US\$ 15 million threshold had been exceeded was in 2012. The state's imports totaled US\$ 283 million in December 2023, representing a reduction of approximately 23% compared to the same month of the previous year (FIEMT, 2023; MDIC, 2024). Notably, Mato Grosso is an important player in the international agricultural commodities market, with China as its largest buyer, while also maintaining a diversified set of markets, such as Vietnam, Thailand, Spain, among others.

Analyzing the practices adopted by exporting firms from Mato Grosso will make it possible to understand how these organizations have addressed the challenge of integrating *exploration* and *exploitation* in their international operations—exploring growth markets such as Asia and Latin America while simultaneously optimizing internal processes. This combination of practices is fundamental for these firms to remain competitive in the global market, ensuring both innovation and operational efficiency—key elements for long-term success (Roth et al., 2024).

This article contributes to the literature by examining the relationship between OA and international marketing, particularly in specific regions such as Mato Grosso. For exporting firms located in the state of Mato Grosso, this strategy is especially relevant given the region's agro-industrial profile, as one of Brazil's main producers of agricultural commodities such as soybeans, corn, and beef.

This article is organized into five parts: introduction; theoretical background; methodological approach; results and discussion; and final considerations.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This section presents the concepts of OA, focusing on the balance between *exploration* (new market exploration) and *exploitation* (resource optimization). The theoretical background addresses international marketing practices and how they contribute to organizational competitiveness and sustainability in international markets.

1.1. Organizational ambidexterity (*exploration and exploitation*)

OA, a concept introduced by March (1991), refers to an organization's ability to simultaneously reconcile two seemingly contradictory activities: *exploration* and *exploitation*. While the former concentrates on the pursuit of new opportunities and innovations, the latter focuses on optimizing and refining existing capabilities (Roth et al., 2024). This dual approach enables organizations to sustain competitiveness in dynamic and uncertain environments, or VUCA (Fernández-Pérez de la Lastra & Sánchez-Gardey, 2024).

Contemporary strategy research has associated ambidexterity with *dynamic capabilities*, defined as a firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competences to address rapidly changing environments (Teece et al., 1997). These capabilities are fundamental to balancing *exploration* and *exploitation* because they underpin strategic adaptation in turbulent markets, such as international ones. Teece (2007) emphasizes that strategic innovation—especially in global contexts—requires the orchestration of assets and processes under conditions of uncertainty, demanding the coexistence of operational efficiency (*exploitation*) and continuous renewal (*exploration*). Therefore, OA can be understood as a practical manifestation of dynamic capabilities, as it requires organizations not only to execute with excellence but also to deliberately transform their strategic pathways. In the context of exporting firms from emerging markets, this articulation is particularly critical to sustaining competitiveness given the complexity of external environments and the ongoing need for cultural and operational adaptation in destination markets.

Beyond March's (1991) classic definition, contemporary literature identifies different types of OA, which broaden the understanding of how firms reconcile *exploration* and *exploitation* activities. *Structural ambidexterity* involves the creation of separate organizational units to address innovation and efficiency, as proposed by Tushman and O'Reilly (1996). *Contextual ambidexterity*, according to Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004), occurs when the same individuals and organizational units manage the tension between *exploration* and *exploitation*, supported by incentive systems and an organizational culture that fosters balance. Finally, *cyclical (or sequential) ambidexterity*, as discussed by Burgelman (2002), refers to alternating between periods dedicated to innovation and efficiency in response to strategic or market cycles. These three types offer valuable analytical lenses for interpreting the cases examined, as they enable an assessment of whether firms adopt formal structures, cultural mechanisms, or temporal shifts in pursuing ambidexterity throughout their internationalization processes.

In the context of internationalization, OA is essential for firms to adapt to new demands in global markets while maximizing internal efficiency. This is particularly relevant for exporting firms from Mato Grosso, which must explore new international markets—such as Mercosur and Asia—while optimizing their logistics processes and distribution channels (Silva et al., 2023).

Exploration is directly linked to innovation, enabling organizations to develop new products and approaches for growing markets. *Exploitation*, in turn, provides operational efficiency by refining processes and allocating resources in an optimized manner (Stein et al., 2024). This duality is crucial to ensuring both innovation and stability in international operations.

Balancing *exploration* and *exploitation* not only promotes organizational agility but also improves overall firm performance (Stein et al., 2024). However, managing this ambidexterity may generate tensions in contexts where resources are limited or market demands are conflicting (Roth et al., 2024). The Resource-Based View (RBV) emphasizes the importance of managing both tangible and intangible resources, complementing the ambidextrous perspective (Guerreiro & Souza, 2022).

In multinational and exporting firms, organizational ambidexterity is an indispensable strategic tool,

enabling these organizations to innovate in global markets without compromising efficiency in their domestic markets (Silva et al., 2023).

New market exploration and resource optimization are two fundamental approaches for firms seeking to expand their international operations efficiently. New market exploration involves identifying growth opportunities in foreign territories, whereas resource optimization focuses on the effective use of the firm's internal assets to maximize performance (Lubis & Muniapan, 2024). This combination enables organizations to remain competitive by pursuing new horizons without undermining operational efficiency.

Market analysis and selection constitute a critical first step in the export process. Firms conduct detailed market research to identify regions with high demand potential, using multi-criteria approaches to rank and select target markets based on factors such as economic, cultural, and regulatory feasibility (Neamțu & Neamțu, 2013). This rigorous analysis ensures efficient resource allocation and the effective capture of opportunities in new markets.

Simultaneously, resource optimization requires in-depth internal analysis, particularly with respect to the firm's value chain. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of its operations allows organizations to position their resources strategically, improving efficiency in both new and established markets (Goldberg et al., 2011). In addition, the development of efficient distribution channels ensures timely product delivery, which is essential for increasing customer satisfaction and market penetration (Lubis & Muniapan, 2024).

In the internationalization context, firms must choose their market entry strategies. Options include direct exporting, joint ventures, or other forms of partnership, and it is essential to adapt strategies to the cultural specificities of local markets to ensure acceptance and operational success (Lubis & Muniapan, 2024). Thus, integrating new market exploration and resource optimization becomes the foundation of an ambidextrous strategy.

1.1.1. Ambidexterity in firms' internationalization

New market exploration and resource optimization represent two fundamental pillars in the international expansion of exporting firms, especially in dynamic and challenging contexts such as Mato Grosso. *Explo-*

ration refers to the active pursuit of new growth opportunities, associated with innovation, new product development, and entry into emerging markets (Roth et al., 2024). In contrast, resource optimization—known as *exploitation*—is oriented toward improving internal processes in order to maximize efficiency and reduce operating costs (Silva et al., 2023).

Firms that integrate these two approaches by adopting an ambidextrous posture are able to adapt to different markets, optimizing operations while keeping innovation and expansion opportunities in view. Lubis and Muniapan (2024) emphasize that, to integrate these approaches effectively, firms conduct detailed market analysis and use multi-criteria decision models to identify target markets with high growth potential. These models enable a careful selection of markets that best align with the firm's strategic capabilities (Neamțu & Neamțu, 2013).

In addition, resource optimization strategies involve a detailed analysis of the firm's value chain. Goldberg et al. (2011) point out that, by identifying strengths and weaknesses in their operations, firms can allocate resources more efficiently, improving both logistics and distribution. This process not only enhances market penetration but also strengthens customer satisfaction—elements that are essential for success in international markets (Lubis & Muniapan, 2024).

Finally, the choice of entry strategy also plays a crucial role in new market exploration. Firms may choose joint ventures, direct exporting, or cultural adaptation depending on the characteristics of the target market, which directly affects their efficiency and competitiveness (Lubis & Muniapan, 2024). Therefore, balancing new market exploration with resource optimization is a fundamental strategic factor for the success of exporting firms.

The integration of *exploration* and *exploitation* strategies is essential for the sustainable success of firms in international markets. *Exploration* refers to an organization's ability to seek new opportunities, innovate, and develop new products, whereas *exploitation* involves optimizing existing resources and processes to ensure operational efficiency (Rengkung, 2022). This balance enables firms to sustain continuous innovation while maintaining efficiency in their international operations, creating an environment conducive to sustainable growth.

Firms that adopt an ambidextrous approach—i.e., that can balance *exploration* and *exploitation* simultaneously—are more resilient and adaptable in volatile and uncertain contexts. This balance strengthens their ability to respond to external challenges and capture emerging opportunities in global markets (Shi et al., 2024). Through data-driven market and business analyses, firms can identify when it is more strategic to explore new opportunities or optimize operations, maximizing resource utilization and promoting long-term competitiveness (Rosin et al., 2022).

Technology plays an essential role in integrating these two strategies, especially in the context of Industry 4.0. Tools such as big data, cyber-physical systems, and artificial intelligence facilitate process optimization while enabling rapid adaptation to market changes (Rosin et al., 2022). The implementation of these technologies reinforces organizational agility, enhancing both innovation and efficiency, which is crucial for exporting firms from regions such as Mato Grosso.

However, finding the optimal balance between *exploration* and *exploitation* can be challenging, as an excessive focus on one strategy may undermine the other, resulting in inappropriate resource allocation and negatively affecting overall performance (Rengkung, 2022). Thus, integrating these practices is essential to sustaining competitiveness and ensuring success in international markets.

1.1.2. International marketing strategy

International marketing strategy is an approach that enables firms to expand their operations into global markets while maintaining a competitive position. This strategy involves balancing two key principles: standardization and adaptation of the marketing mix elements, such as product, promotion, price, and distribution. The choice between these approaches depends on the characteristics of international markets, including cultural preferences, local regulations, and economic conditions (Rashkova et al., 2023).

Standardization refers to developing a homogeneous strategy across markets, enabling firms to achieve economies of scale and reduce costs in production and promotion (Hariyana & Syahputra, 2022). This approach provides a consistent brand image across regions, facilitating the firm's global recogni-

tion and promoting a unified identity (Rashkova et al., 2023). However, standardization may be limited in markets with substantial cultural variability, where a more flexible approach is needed to meet local needs.

Adaptation, in turn, involves tailoring marketing strategies to the characteristics and expectations of consumers in each market. Firms that adopt adaptation adjust aspects such as product design, promotional strategies, and pricing policies, taking into account macro- and micro-environmental factors such as culture and consumers' purchasing power (Hultman & Oghazi, 2024). Adaptation can be essential to ensure compliance with local regulatory standards, which may vary across countries (Song, 2021).

The standardization-adaptation dichotomy has been a central axis of international marketing literature since Levitt's (1983) classic work, which advocated standardization as a strategy to achieve economies of scale and global brand coherence. Subsequently, scholars such as Douglas and Wind (1987) and Jain (1989) argued for contingency approaches, recognizing that the choice between standardization and adaptation depends on contextual factors such as cultural differences, local competition, and the maturity of the target market. Cavusgil and Zou (1994), in turn, proposed that export performance is related to a strategic fit among product, market, and the institutional environment, which requires a degree of managerial flexibility. More recently, Vrontis et al. (2009) reinforced the idea that successful firms adopt a hybrid approach in which some elements of the offering are standardized for efficiency, while others are adapted to address local specificities. This perspective resonates with the notion of organizational ambidexterity by suggesting that competitive advantage in international markets derives from the ability to reconcile new market exploration with the efficient exploitation of existing resources. In the context of the present study, these contributions enrich the analysis of strategies adopted by exporting firms from Mato Grosso, which alternate or combine adaptation and standardization moves depending on the nature of target markets and the stage of international maturity.

The literature suggests that an intermediate approach, known as glocalization, is often the most effective because it combines the benefits of standardization and adaptation. Glocalization allows firms to maintain global brand consistency while adjusting

certain aspects of the marketing mix to maximize local relevance (Eze et al., 2024). According to Khan et al. (2016), this hybrid approach offers flexibility to adjust strategies to market needs, mitigating risks and increasing the likelihood of success.

The literature indicates that balancing *exploration* and *exploitation* is vital in international markets with diverse cultural and economic characteristics. According to Shi et al. (2024), the ability to integrate innovation and operational efficiency strengthens long-term competitiveness. Firms that can balance these strategies achieve superior performance, especially in global markets that require continuous adaptation to meet local demands without losing global efficiency (Hultman & Oghazi, 2024). Thus, integrating strategies that encompass both standardization and adaptation becomes a competitive differentiator in dynamic international environments.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach based on a multiple-case study design. Case selection followed the following criteria: medium or large firm size, given the organizational capacity to integrate complex *exploitation* and *exploration* practices; participation in the agro-industrial sector, which predominates in Mato Grosso's export profile, ensuring sectoral relevance to the study; established or emerging operations in international markets, enabling comparison across different stages of export maturity; and availability of, and access to, strategic managers involved in international marketing decision-making.

The choice of a multiple-case study method within a qualitative approach is justified by the exploratory and interpretive nature of the research question, which requires an in-depth understanding of a complex phenomenon across different contexts. According to Stake (1995), a collective case study enables the investigation of similarities and variations across cases to illuminate a broader issue, maximizing learning about the phenomenon. This constructivist perspective holds that knowledge is constructed through interactions with participants, requiring thick description and contextual sensitivity. This methodological choice is therefore consistent with the objective of analyzing how exporting firms integrate *exploration*

and *exploitation* in their international strategies, capturing the nuances of managerial practices across different internationalization trajectories.

According to Yin (2018), a multiple-case study enables comparisons across units of analysis to strengthen external validity and produce more robust insights into replicable patterns across distinct contexts. By investigating firms with different stages of export maturity and international marketing strategies, the multiple-case design helps identify common factors and variations, providing a solid empirical basis for developing a framework applicable to different realities within the exporting sector.

In addition, Eisenhardt (1989) argues that multiple-case studies are particularly suitable for theory building grounded in empirical qualitative data, as they allow key dimensions of a phenomenon to be identified through cross-case comparison. The purpose of combining detailed data from different organizations is precisely to develop more refined and generalizable theoretical propositions. This approach aligns with the purpose of this article, which is to investigate how organizational ambidexterity influences international marketing strategies.

Moreover, in their seminal work, Glaser et al. (1968) emphasize that qualitative case-based approaches foster empirically grounded theory building because they "enable theoretical propositions to emerge from systematically collected and analyzed data" (Glaser et al., 1968, p. 2). This characteristic reinforces the suitability of the method for examining how exporting firms integrate *exploitation* and *exploration* in their international marketing strategies.

In another seminal work, Merriam (2009) also underscores that qualitative case study research seeks to understand "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and the meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 23), which aligns with the aim of this article to explore managerial perceptions and practices across different internationalization trajectories.

Four exporting firms headquartered in the state of Mato Grosso were selected, all medium or large in size. This choice was guided by objective and consistent criteria. First, the firms' economic representativeness within the state's export profile, since sectoral data indicate that 78.2% (Ministério da Economia, 2024) of Mato Grosso's exporting firms are classified as medi-

um and large, concentrating most export operations and playing a central role in local economic dynamics. Second, the theoretical-analytical criterion of the capacity to integrate *exploration* strategies (search for new markets; innovation in products and processes) and *exploitation* strategies (resource optimization and operational efficiency). Larger firms in this context tend to have organizational structure, resources, and managerial complexity more conducive to adopting ambidextrous practices, which is aligned with the study's objective of investigating how such practices are articulated in international marketing strategies. Finally, the selection considered diversity in export target markets, with demonstrated involvement in relevant global markets such as China, Vietnam, Europe, and Latin America, ensuring a rich empirical basis for analyzing the tensions between standardization and adaptation in international marketing.

In-depth interviews were guided by a semi-structured protocol developed from the theoretical review and organized in a linkage matrix (Table 1), which ensured alignment with the research objectives. This matrix included two main analytical categories: Management Strategy (with the subcategories *exploration* and *exploitation*) and International Marketing Strategy. Table 1 details the main thematic categories and subcategories that guided the interview protocol, aligned with the research objectives. The core categories were Management Strategy, subdivided into *exploration* and *exploitation*; and International Marketing Strategy, with subcategories such as export history, difficulties faced, market entry, and standardization and adaptation of the marketing mix (Zou & Cavusgil, 2002).

The subcategories covered topics such as export history, initial decision-making, main difficulties, solutions, and the standardization and adaptation of product, price, distribution channels, and international promotion (Zou & Cavusgil, 2002). Thus, the protocol covered both internal factors (organizational knowledge, efficiency, innovation) and external factors (competition, partnerships), ensuring coherence with the objective of investigating the integration of *exploration* and *exploitation* in international marketing strategies.

The development of these categories was validated with two academic experts in the field of internationalization and strategic management,

reinforcing the rigor of the methodological design. In addition, the protocol was flexible, allowing new questions to emerge during interviews, consistent with the exploratory nature of the qualitative approach (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 1995). This systematic structure ensured coverage of relevant theoretical elements, guided data collection in a comparable manner across cases, and ensured coherence between the research objectives and the questions explored with managers.

For data treatment, thematic content analysis was employed (Bardin, 2011; Krippendorff, 2018), aimed at identifying recurring patterns, variations, and convergences across the cases studied, in order to detect common patterns and trends among the firms regarding the integration of *exploitation* and *exploration* strategies. The content analysis selected for this study was thematic content analysis, given its suitability for identifying, interpreting, and comparing the core meanings emerging in the statements of the interviewed managers. According to Bardin (2011), thematic analysis organizes the material into meaning categories that recur or evolve across cases, enabling comparisons and inferences about the phenomenon under study. This differs, for instance, from classic categorical analysis, which prioritizes segmenting the text into minimal units coded by frequency (quantitative or qualitative), and from discourse analysis, which focuses more on understanding the ideological and rhetorical structures underlying speech. It also differs from enunciation analysis, which focuses on linguistic markers of the subject in the text; evaluative analysis, centered on explicit judgments or opinions; and expression analysis or structural co-occurrence analysis, which examines relationships among terms or concepts in the textual corpus (Bardin, 2011). The choice of thematic analysis is justified because the central objective of the research is to capture how managers interpret and articulate *exploration* and *exploitation* practices within their international marketing strategies, identifying shared or divergent patterns of meaning across firms with different profiles. Accordingly, this technique made it possible to systematize narratives around the main strategic and market dimensions under study, ensuring coherence with the exploratory objectives of the investigation and preserving the interpretive qualitative nature of the method.

Tabela 1. Linkage matrix.

Analysis category	Subcategories	Authors	Interview guide topics
Management strategy	Company export history	- -\	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Start of exports - Who made the decision to export and why - Strategies adopted at the outset - Initial export outcomes - Exported products - Export destinations - Main difficulties - Solutions
	<i>Exploitation</i>	Popadiuk (2010)	<u>External environment</u> Company performance in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competition - Partnerships
	<i>Exploration</i>	Popadiuk (2010)	<u>Internal environment</u> Company performance in relation to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organizational knowledge - Organizational efficiency - Strategic orientation - Innovation
International marketing strategy	Product standardization	Zou & Cavusgil (2002)	- The extent to which a product is standardized across the country markets
	Promotion standardization	Zou & Cavusgil (2002)	- The extent to which the same promotional mix is implemented across the country markets
	Standardized channel structure	Zou & Cavusgil (2002)	- The extent to which the firm uses the same channel structure in all country markets
	Standardized pricing	Zou & Cavusgil (2002)	- The extent to which the firm uses the same price in all country markets
	Marketing concentration; activities	Zou & Cavusgil (2002)	- The extent to which a firm's marketing activities—including promotional campaign development, pricing decisions, distribution activities, and after-sales services—are deliberately carried out in one or a few countries
	Marketing coordination; activities	Zou & Cavusgil (2002)	- The extent to which a firm's marketing activities in different country locations—including promotional campaign development, pricing decisions, distribution activities, and after-sales services—are planned and executed interdependently on a global scale
	International market coverage	Zou & Cavusgil (2002)	- The extent to which a firm carries out marketing operations in all major markets worldwide

Data were organized according to the analytical categories presented in Table 1, enabling a structured view of the variables involved. The analytical catego-

ries were used to ensure that the most relevant dimensions were addressed, allowing a comparative analysis of the practices adopted by the firms studied.

Interviews were fully transcribed with the support of Transkriptor software, ensuring accuracy in capturing participants' discourse. Subsequently, categories and subcategories were coded manually, without the use of specialized software such as NVivo or Atlas.ti, while following systematic procedures for categorization and thematic comparison. This choice prioritizes the researcher's interpretive immersion in the empirical material, consistent with the qualitative tradition (Glaser et al., 1968; Merriam, 2009).

To strengthen the reliability of the results, data triangulation was employed, combining interviews with strategic managers, analysis of firms' organizational documents, and sectoral studies based on the Financial, Economic, Industrial, Normative, and Technological (FEINT) model. This strategy enabled the confrontation of different sources of evidence and enhanced the study's internal validity (Yin, 2018). Triangulation also included peer validation through independent academic reviews of the interview protocol and preliminary interpretations, seeking to ensure theoretical and empirical consistency in the findings. The analysis of empirical data was complemented by triangulation with secondary data, including foreign trade reports from the Ministry of Development, Industry, Trade and Services (MDIC, 2024) and sectoral information from the Federation of Industries of the State of Mato Grosso (FIEMT, 2023), with the purpose of validating the practices reported by interviewees and adding greater analytical robustness to the interpretation of results.

The multiple-case study was conducted with four exporting firms from Mato Grosso, medium and large in size. Firms with this profile represent 78.2% of the state's 247 exporting firms. These firms have greater capacity to implement complex *exploitation* and *exploration* practices in their marketing and management strategies, resulting in a more substantial contribution to investigating the relationship between strategic decision-making and marketing dimensions, in line with the objectives of this research. Selecting this firm profile enabled a deeper analysis of internationalization practices and a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the region's exporting sector.

Regarding the interviewees' profiles, only one interview was not conducted with the founder-owner. In that firm, a director responsible for the commercial,

international, and marketing areas was appointed. This professional was hired precisely at the beginning of the firm's internationalization due to experience negotiating with foreign companies and fluency in another language. This professional also held decision-making authority, as did the other interviewees. All interviews were conducted at the firms' headquarters between January and May 2023, audio-recorded, and transcribed with the support of Transkriptor software. The transcripts were also reviewed manually to correct potential issues and clarify the transcription when necessary.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Below, we present the analysis of the results obtained in the four cases and the discussion of the findings.

3.1. Case 1: Company A

Company A, founded in 1988 as a small home-based producer of *pão de queijo* in Mato Grosso, evolved into a bakery manufacturing firm exporting to several countries. In 2020, it began its internationalization process after participating in international trade fairs, with an initial focus on the Chinese market. Adapting products to different cultures and regulatory requirements represented a significant challenge.

Company A operates in Latin American countries and emerging markets, such as Asia. Its *exploitation* strategy focuses on product standardization in more homogeneous markets, such as Mercosur, which reduces costs and maximizes efficiency. Simultaneously, its *exploration* strategy adapts products for more demanding markets, such as Europe and Asia, responding to local requirements related to quality and sustainability. This balance between adaptation and standardization reflects its ambidextrous approach, enabling the firm to explore new markets without compromising operational efficiency.

In highly competitive markets such as China, the company invested in incremental innovation, adjusting its product to meet quality standards and local regulatory requirements. Exploring these new markets—combined with the use of technologies to optimize production and distribution—enabled its international presence. This process required ambidextrous leadership capable of fostering an organiza-

tional culture that supports both innovation and operational efficiency.

The integration of *exploitation* and *exploration* enabled Company A to develop strategic flexibility, adapting its operations to the requirements of each market. The company aligned its resources to maximize operational effectiveness and competitiveness. This flexibility was evidenced in product adaptation for European and Asian markets, where demands for sustainability and innovation are high.

Company A's export success is also attributable to the implementation of optimized internal processes, such as the automation of certain production activities and the use of supply chain management technologies, which increased delivery capacity and reduced logistics costs. This optimization of internal processes improved the conditions for the company to expand its global footprint in a sustainable manner while maintaining competitiveness.

Furthermore, the ability to balance *exploration* and *exploitation* allowed Company A to identify new market opportunities while leveraging its internal structure. This ambidextrous posture enhanced the firm's competitiveness in international markets such as Asia and Europe, where it needed to respond to changes in market conditions.

Like Company A, by integrating *exploitation* and *exploration*—combined with ambidextrous leadership and efficient processes—firms from Mato Grosso can balance innovation with operational efficiency, thereby improving competitiveness sustainably in the international arena.

3.2. Case 2: Company B

Founded 25 years ago, Company B started as a microenterprise producing upholstered furniture. Its internationalization process began in 2012 after participating in international fairs organized by the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (SEBRAE), such as ExpoCruz, within Mercosur. Entry into the Bolivian market was facilitated through contact with retail chains specializing in high-quality furniture.

Company B exports to Latin American and Asian markets, adopting a different approach from Company A in how it integrates *exploration* and *exploitation* strategies. Whereas Company A seeks a balance between adaptation and standardization, Company B

adopts a more exploratory posture, placing greater emphasis on innovation and product adaptation for emerging markets. This stronger focus on *exploration* expanded its operations into regions such as Asia, in more dynamic and competitive markets.

Company B focuses its *exploration* strategy on adapting products and services to meet local demands, especially in Asian markets, adjusting to regulations and consumer preferences. The firm prioritizes incremental innovation and adopts a customized approach, diversifying its products and marketing strategies to address the cultural and economic requirements of each market—differentiating itself from Company A and the standardization it has adopted in Latin America.

This exploratory posture was accompanied by investment in market research, which enabled the firm to identify opportunities in new markets. The focus on innovation and product development paved the way for the company to establish a presence in emerging markets and compete with local rivals. This continuous adaptation process was also facilitated by ambidextrous leadership that promoted innovation as part of the organization's culture.

Company B balanced *exploitation* and *exploration*. In traditional markets, such as Latin America, it implemented standardization to optimize operations and reduce costs, maintaining efficiency under homogeneous conditions. Simultaneously, it pursued new opportunities in international markets, ensuring efficient operations while seeking growth—thereby combining new market exploration with resource optimization.

One of the main challenges faced by Company B was balancing innovation with efficiency. In markets such as Asia, where requirements for quality and innovation are high, the firm needed to adjust its operations to remain competitive. This demanded resource reconfiguration and the implementation of new technologies to ensure that the firm could innovate without compromising operational efficiency. At the same time, the company adopted flexible management practices that enabled adaptation to changes in market conditions.

Exploitation occurred in markets where the firm had already established a strong presence, ensuring that operations could be optimized to reduce costs and improve efficiency. However, a distinguishing fea-

ture of Company B was its ability to use *exploration* to identify new markets and adjust its marketing strategies to meet the specific demands of those markets. By doing so, the company expanded its global presence without sacrificing operational efficiency.

The integration of *exploration* and *exploitation* in this organization illustrates how exporting firms from Mato Grosso can adapt to the demands of global markets by using innovation and efficiency as complementary tools. This ambidextrous posture supports Company B's global competitiveness.

A more exploratory approach, as in Company B, combined with process optimization in traditional markets, can enable exporting firms from Mato Grosso to expand their operations in a sustainable and innovative manner. The ability to identify innovation opportunities while maintaining operational efficiency constitutes a model for integrating *exploration* and *exploitation* for firms seeking to compete in the international arena.

3.3. Case 3: Company C

Company C was founded in 1990 in Mato Grosso, initially focusing on manufacturing transformers for the domestic market. In 1992, it began its internationalization process, mainly toward neighboring countries such as Bolivia and Uruguay, with the aim of leveraging idle capacity at its plant.

As a mid-sized exporter, it is at an earlier stage of internationalization compared with Companies A and B. Its strategy stands out for a strong focus on *exploration*, with less emphasis on *exploitation*, reflecting its intention to expand into emerging international markets, especially in Europe and Asia. *Exploration* is seen as a pathway for the firm to establish a strong presence in new markets, particularly due to the need for rapid adaptation to local requirements.

Company C's strategy prioritizes adaptation and innovation in its products to meet the specific demands of stringent markets, such as Europe. The firm adapts its product line by adjusting design, packaging, and product composition according to local preferences. It also invests in incremental innovations—that is, progressive changes that improve products without major technological disruptions, yet sufficient to meet quality and sustainability standards and specifications in demanding markets.

Exploration is also reflected in Company C's marketing campaigns, which are tailored to each market. The firm uses market research to understand foreign consumers and adjust its advertising messages and promotional strategies in line with local culture. For example, upon entering the European market, it emphasized the sustainability of its products in order to attract consumers in that region. By contrast, in Asian markets, the firm highlighted innovation and product modernity to appeal to younger consumers oriented toward technological trends.

Despite its strong *exploration* focus, Company C seeks to optimize its internal operations and resources by implementing technologies and processes that increase efficiency over time, which may enhance its ability to manage both new market exploration and internal optimization. Because it is at an early stage of internationalization, the focus on *exploration* consumes internal resources, which may create difficulties in process management. That said, a strategy is needed to improve this situation and to seek external partners to optimize logistics and distribution operations.

The emphasis on *exploration* has generated positive outcomes for Company C, particularly regarding adaptation to European markets. The firm's flexibility in adjusting its products and marketing strategies enabled expansion into that market, demonstrating that innovation and adaptability enhance competitiveness in more demanding international markets.

The integration of *exploration* and *exploitation* in Company C is more *exploration*-driven, with greater emphasis on seeking new opportunities than on *exploitation* through internal process optimization. This imbalance results from the firm's priority to establish itself in international markets before focusing on operational efficiency.

Company C illustrates how exporting firms in the early phase of internationalization may face challenges in balancing *exploration* and *exploitation*. The focus on *exploration* enabled the firm to expand into new markets and adapt to local demands, while giving less attention at this stage to efficiency-seeking and resource management.

3.4. Case 4: Company D

Company D, founded in 2019, began operations as a small business producing artisanal furniture made

of wood and resin. In 2021, it initiated its internationalization process by using digital marketing strategies and participating in international trade fairs. Its first export destination was Bolivia.

The firm's presence in international markets indicates an ability to balance the two aforementioned strategies. With operations in demanding markets such as Europe, the company exhibits organizational ambidexterity in the context of international marketing. Company D's strategy integrates new market exploration with ongoing optimization of internal processes, characterizing an ambidextrous management model.

Company D's strategy emphasizes the adaptation of products and marketing strategies to specific markets. The European market, for instance, has been one of the firm's primary focuses, and the company has invested heavily in adapting its products to meet that region's stringent quality and sustainability requirements. This *exploration*-oriented approach, focused on innovation and product customization, attracted discerning consumers and increased competitiveness in foreign markets.

Beyond product adaptation, the firm also customizes its promotional strategies according to the cultural characteristics of each market. In the Asian market, for example, the company developed marketing campaigns that reflected local traditions. This adaptation strategy also reflects the firm's *exploration* capability, as it uses market research to plan campaigns according to each foreign market.

In addition to *exploration*, Company D also invests in *exploitation* practices, optimizing internal processes and resources to increase operational efficiency. The firm is concerned with developing optimized logistics and production processes to maximize operational efficiency. This *exploitation* strategy enables Company D to reduce costs and increase profit margins, maintain product quality in international markets, and foster strong relationships with customers who value the exclusivity of its products.

The firm integrates *exploration* and *exploitation*, as reflected in its strategic flexibility to adapt products and processes to the demands of different markets. Operations maintain internal efficiency, enabling competitive advantage in global markets. This balance is achieved through ambidextrous management that promotes both innovation and resource optimi-

zation, allowing the firm to grow in a sustainable and competitive manner.

The integration of *exploration* and *exploitation* in Company D is reflected in its international marketing approach. The firm adopts a hybrid strategy, combining elements of standardization and adaptation. In more homogeneous markets, such as those in Latin America, product and operational standardization allows the firm to reduce costs and achieve economies of scale. In more diverse markets, such as Europe and Asia, the firm chooses to adapt its operations to meet local demands, maintaining competitiveness and product acceptance.

Despite its capacity for innovation and adaptation, Company D faces challenges related to managing OA. The need to balance innovation and efficiency may generate internal tensions, especially when resources are limited to meet the requirements of global markets. At this stage, the firm's strategy is to foster an internal culture that supports both innovation and process optimization. The development of dynamic capabilities has also been a factor enabling the firm to adapt to market changes and to deploy resources efficiently.

Another noteworthy element of Company D's strategy is its sustainability-oriented approach. The focus on sustainable practices not only helped the firm stand out in markets such as Europe, but also strengthened its global brand image by associating it with values of social and environmental responsibility. This sustainability focus is an important competitive differentiator, enabling the firm to strengthen its position in markets where demand for sustainable products is increasing.

Exporting firms can effectively integrate *exploration* and *exploitation* strategies in their international marketing operations. The ability to balance adaptation and innovation with internal efficiency enables firms to expand global operations sustainably while maintaining competitiveness in demanding markets. Ambidextrous management, combined with the ability to adapt to local realities and optimize resources, provides advantages for firms in their internationalization processes.

3.5. Analysis of ambidexterity characteristics across cases

In the context of exporting firms from Mato Grosso, Table 2 shows that these firms have adopted

distinct approaches to balancing the two strategies. Firms with greater maturity in international markets, such as those in Cases 1 and 2, showed a tendency to balance their *exploration* and *exploitation* practices,

directing efforts toward exploring new markets—such as Asia and Latin America—while optimizing their logistics and production processes to ensure higher operational efficiency (Roth et al., 2024).

Tabela 2. Comparative analysis of management strategy: ambidexterity.

	Criterion	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
Internal environment – exploitation	Competition	Moderate competition with local and international competitors	High competitiveness in international markets	Intense competition in already established markets	Competition with major regional players
	Partnerships	Strategic partnerships with local distributors and sales representatives	Alliances with local suppliers to ensure continuity	Long-term partnerships with representatives and distributors	Collaborations with logistics partners to ensure efficiency
	Exploitation	Identification of new opportunities in adjacent markets, such as South America	Development of new products for emerging foreign markets	Exploration of niches in neighboring countries and alternative markets	Development of new products and services for international markets, with a focus on Europe
External environment – exploration	Organizational knowledge	Internal training programs to build the export team's capabilities	Continuous learning and specialized export training	Training to adapt to new foreign-market demands	Hiring specialized consultants in exports and foreign trade
	Organizational efficiency	Optimization of production processes to meet external demand	Improvements in logistics and distribution processes for new markets	Structuring dedicated areas focused on foreign markets	Implementation of new technologies to increase efficiency and reduce costs
	Strategic orientation	Adaptation to international market demand and strategic flexibility	Strategic planning focused on gradual international growth	Gradual opening of new markets as opportunities emerge	Solid and gradual growth with well-defined strategies for each market
	Innovation	Development of products adapted to each specific market	Focus on incremental innovation to meet new market requirements	Product innovation to meet specific target-market demands	Continuous innovation based on feedback from international customers
	Exploration	Improvement of internal processes to increase competitiveness	Optimization of existing resources to expand into new markets	Use of internal resources with adaptation to external needs	Maximization of internal capabilities to support international growth
	Ambidexterity	Balance between adaptation and exploration of new international markets	Balancing innovation for new markets and operational efficiency	Combination of new market exploration and internal optimization	Using innovation to explore new markets while maintaining operational efficiency

In contrast, firms in the early phase of internationalization, such as those in Cases 3 and 4, prioritized the exploration of new emerging markets and invested in incremental innovations to meet the specific demands of more stringent markets, such as Europe. Their ability to adapt quickly to these demands while maintaining internal resource efficiency demonstrates the strategic flexibility required to compete globally (Silva et al., 2023).

Table 2 graphically illustrates this cross-case comparison, highlighting how firms that are more mature in international markets (Cases 1 and 2) tend to balance *exploration* and *exploitation* to manage entry into diversified markets and operational efficiency. By contrast, firms at an early stage (Case 3) focus more intensively on new market exploration, reflecting distinct strategic priorities. This visual representation helps make evident the contextual and sectoral factors that influence the prioritization between innovation and efficiency across the different external environments in which these firms operate.

Organizational ambidexterity, as noted by Stei et al. (2024), involves building an internal culture that supports both innovation and process optimization. Firms such as the one in Case 4 were able to establish this balance by developing products and marketing strategies adaptable to different international realities, while maintaining a clear focus on logistics and production efficiency. The challenge, however, is to ensure that new market exploration does not compromise the firm's ability to optimize internal resources.

This ambidextrous approach also emerged in interviewees' statements, which revealed tensions and strategic decisions shaped by the search for balance. As one manager from Company B noted: *"We need to keep growing, but without losing our base. If we innovate too much, costs blow up; if we don't innovate, we disappear from international buyers' radar"* (Interviewee B).

Similarly, another executive highlighted the role of regional adaptation: *"In Asia, we had to redesign the label and even revisit the product's flavor—something we would never do in the European market"* (Interviewee C).

These accounts reinforce the operational and cultural challenges faced by exporting firms when operating across multiple markets, and demonstrate how the *exploration* and *exploitation* logic coexists within their day-to-day decisions.

This balance is achieved through ambidextrous leadership and the deployment of dynamic capabil-

ities that enable the detection of new opportunities and the rapid and efficient reconfiguration of firm resources (Ng & Ahmed, 2024). Firms with greater strategic flexibility, such as the one in Case 2, tend to adapt more effectively to global changes, maximizing the use of internal resources to ensure efficiency and continuous innovation.

3.6. International marketing strategies in the firms

The international marketing strategies adopted by the firms studied vary significantly, particularly regarding the balance between standardization and adaptation of the marketing mix. Some chose to standardize their products and marketing campaigns across markets, whereas others adapted products, prices, and promotional strategies to meet local requirements.

Standardization, as noted by Lubis and Muniapan (2024), can generate economies of scale, enabling exporting firms from Mato Grosso to maintain a uniform offering across multiple markets. In Case 1, for example, product standardization was a key strategy to maintain brand consistency and reduce operating costs. These firms chose to maintain a standardized product portfolio in markets with lower regulatory variability, such as those in Latin America, where economic and cultural conditions are more homogeneous.

However, in more demanding markets, such as Europe, firms adopted adaptation strategies to meet local consumer preferences. According to Hultman and Oghazi (2024), adapting products and services is essential for firms to capture consumers' attention and comply with regulatory requirements. Table 3 shows that firms such as the one in Case 4 prioritized adapting products to local specifications, such as developing sustainable products for the European market, where requirements for quality and sustainability are high. It also complements this discussion by comparing firms' internal strategies for managing the marketing mix, showing that standardization predominated in firms with consolidated operations in more homogeneous markets, such as Company A, whereas adaptation was essential in more regulated and culturally diverse markets, as in Case 4. This graphical analysis reinforces the importance of alignment between internal strategy (processes, organizational design) and the nature of target markets to ensure international competitiveness.

Tabela 3. Comparative analysis of marketing aspects.

Criterion	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
Product standardization	Products adapted according to local regulatory criteria and cultural preferences	Standardized products, with minimal adjustments for local fit	Products modified to meet local specifications in each market	Products adjusted to meet specific standards and regulations in each market
Promotional mix standardization	Marketing messages culturally adapted to improve local accessibility	Promotional mix developed jointly with local partners	Local marketing developed by regional agencies	Promotions and campaigns adapted to the specificities of each target market
Channel structure	Distribution structure with local partners and representatives	Distribution channels adapted to each country and region	Local representatives with their own distribution networks	Strategic partnerships to expand reach and distribution efficiency
Pricing strategy	Prices adjusted according to logistics costs and taxes in each market	Prices centrally defined, with adjustments according to local needs	Flexible pricing strategy to match the dynamics of each market	Prices adapted to maximize competitiveness and meet consumer expectations
Marketing activities	Marketing actions coordinated by headquarters, with local adaptations	Development of marketing activities jointly with local partners	Digital campaigns adapted to regional characteristics	Marketing focused on digital channels, local events, and participation in international trade fairs

Adapting promotional strategies also emerged as a relevant practice among the firms studied, such as Company B, which tailored its marketing campaigns to address cultural sensitivities in Asian markets, where consumers value promotional campaigns aligned with local traditions and preferences. As Lubis and Munia-pan (2024) argue, adapting marketing strategies is an effective way to foster brand acceptance and ensure consumer loyalty.

The standardization-adaptation duality was evident across the different cases analyzed. Firms operating in highly competitive markets with greater regulatory diversity, such as Case 3, opted for highly adaptive strategies, whereas those operating in more stable markets maintained a standardized approach to maximize efficiency and economies of scale.

The analysis also shows that exporting firms from Mato Grosso operate in an international environment characterized by strong elements of the so-called VUCA environment, requiring agile and strategic responses from organizations (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). The interviews indicate that, in the face of volatile international prices and geopolitical insta-

bility (such as relations with China and trade sanctions in Europe), firms adopt *exploitation* strategies to mitigate operational risks, maintaining lean cost structures and leveraging established logistics efficiencies. Conversely, uncertainty regarding entry into new markets and regulatory changes was addressed through *exploration* initiatives, such as diversifying commercial channels and customizing packaging and labeling for specific markets.

This strategic alternation is also related to the complexity of managing multiple international stakeholders, such as distributors, importers, and regulatory agencies. Firms demonstrated the ability to handle this complexity by integrating adaptive marketing practices and centralized decision-making under leaders with prior experience in foreign trade. Ambiguity, in turn, appears in divergent perceptions regarding brand positioning abroad, which prompted some organizations to test differentiated digital communication approaches across countries, demonstrating ambidextrous learning-oriented behaviors. Thus, the VUCA environment emerges as a key variable driving the simultaneous adoption of *exploration*

and *exploitation* strategies, reinforcing the role of organizational ambidexterity as a critical capability in uncertain global markets (Schoemaker et al., 2018).

3.7. Discussion

The comparative analysis across the four cases reveals differences in how the firms studied integrate *exploration* and *exploitation* within their international marketing practices. In Company A, for example, a standardization strategy was widely used, enabling the firm to maximize operational efficiency while exploring adjacent markets such as Mercosur and Latin America.

In Case 2, the approach was more exploratory, with a focus on emerging Asian markets. This firm invested in incremental innovations to adapt its products to the needs of those markets. According to Stei et al. (2024), this integration of *exploration* and *exploitation* enables firms to expand international operations without compromising internal efficiency.

In Case 3, *exploration* was more intense, focusing on developing products that are highly adaptable to European markets. This firm was able to integrate *exploration* and *exploitation* practices effectively by developing new products for niche markets while maintaining internal operational efficiency (Roth et al., 2024).

By contrast, in Case 4, adaptation was key to success. The firm focused on product customization to meet local requirements, especially in European markets, where quality and sustainability are decisive factors for success. The ability to balance innovation with internal resource optimization was fundamental to ensuring long-term competitiveness (Silva et al., 2023).

The findings of this study partially corroborate the literature on OA and international marketing, particularly regarding the coexistence of *exploration* and *exploitation* practices in exporting firms from developing countries. As proposed by March (1991), balancing the exploration of new opportunities with the exploitation of existing resources is essential for organizational adaptability. In the present study, this balance manifested differently between firms at early and advanced stages of internationalization.

Firms in early stages showed a greater propensity toward *exploration*, evidenced by product and strategy adaptation to the specific requirements of foreign

markets, as suggested by Cadogan (2012), who highlights the importance of international marketing orientation for innovation. Conversely, more established firms predominantly adopted *exploitation* strategies, focusing on standardization and operational efficiency, consistent with Zou and Cavusgil's (2002) arguments regarding the pursuit of economies of scale and consistency in global brand image.

It was also observed that in volatile contexts—such as Asian and Latin American markets—even mature firms resort to *exploration* elements to mitigate risks and adapt quickly, reinforcing the concept of contextual ambidexterity (Birkinshaw & Gibson, 2004), in which the ability to alternate between *exploration* and *exploitation* depends on environmental and cultural factors.

By linking empirical data with theoretical foundations, this study contributes to deepening the understanding of ambidexterity in emerging contexts, responding to Lavie et al.'s (2010) call for further research on how ambidexterity is operationalized in environments beyond core economies.

To consolidate the findings and provide a comparative view of the four firms analyzed, Table 4 was developed, synthesizing the relative degrees of *exploration* and *exploitation* observed across the cases, as well as their practical manifestations in international marketing strategies. The table highlights the main actions adopted by the firms regarding innovation, adaptation, standardization, channel management, and competitive positioning in foreign markets. The categorization of degrees is based on the intensity and intentionality with which each firm implements *exploration* practices (such as entering new markets, developing new products, and actively pursuing innovation) and *exploitation* practices (such as improving processes, standardizing operations, and leveraging existing assets). This synthesis shows how distinct strategic profiles lead to different configurations of organizational ambidexterity. Case 3, for example, is closer to contextual ambidexterity as defined by Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004), whereas Case 1 demonstrates a pattern more aligned with cyclical ambidexterity (Burgelman, 2002). The results support the idea that the balance between *exploration* and *exploitation* is dynamic and depends on a firm's international maturity, its dynamic capabilities (Tece, 2007), and its embeddedness in VUCA contexts.

Tabela 4. Comparison across cases regarding the degree of *exploration* and *exploitation* and implications for international marketing strategies.

Firm	Degree of <i>exploration</i>	Degree of <i>exploitation</i>	Implications for international marketing
A	High	Medium	Focus on entering new Latin American markets; strong adaptation of packaging and communication; localized digital strategies.
B	Medium	High	Standardization of product lines; leveraging existing logistics structure; maintenance of traditional channels.
C	High	High	Simultaneous expansion into new markets and restructuring of internal processes; digital integration with external partners.
D	Low	High	Strengthening the domestic base for subsequent internationalization; use of an established brand and focus on efficiency.

This comparative analysis underscores the importance of organizational ambidexterity for exporting firms from Mato Grosso. The effective integration of *exploration* and *exploitation* enables firms to innovate and expand their international operations sustainably while maintaining competitiveness and internal efficiency.

The empirical evidence reinforces the relevance of OA theories in the context of international marketing among Brazilian exporting firms. The coexistence of *exploration* and *exploitation* practices indicates that the firms analyzed align with a contextual ambidexterity approach, as defined by Gibson and Birkinshaw (2004), by integrating innovation and efficiency through strategic decisions and flexible structures. In addition, shifts in focus between international expansion and internal process improvement across strategic cycles also signal elements of cyclical ambidexterity (Burgelman, 2002). Such evidence suggests that ambidexterity does not emerge solely from structural design, but also constitutes an adaptive response to unstable contexts, directly resonating with the dynamic capabilities logic (Teece et al., 1997), particularly when confronting VUCA environments (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014).

Triangulation with secondary data made it possible to contextualize the empirical findings in relation to the macroeconomic performance of Mato Grosso's exporting sector. For example, the adaptation movements reported by Companies A and C coincide with increased exports to Southeast Asia between 2022 and 2023, according to FIEMT (2023) data, corroborating the use of *exploration* strategies in fast-growing markets.

In terms of international marketing, the findings indicate a pragmatic hybridism between standardization and adaptation, aligning with Vrontis et al.'s (2009) contributions, which suggest that firms with greater international maturity tend to develop capabilities to manage this balance. The data also challenge more rigid approaches such as Levitt's (1983), by revealing the ongoing need for cultural and regulatory adjustments, consistent with Cavusgil and Zou (1994).

This empirical articulation among ambidexterity, dynamic capabilities, and international strategies broadens understanding of how firms from emerging markets build competitive advantage under conditions of high uncertainty. The evidence suggests that the integration between theory and practice occurs in a non-linear and contingent manner, mediated by factors such as the decision-makers' profiles, the sector of operation, and the stage of internationalization.

CONCLUSION

This article aimed to investigate how organizational ambidexterity—through the integration of *exploration* and *exploitation*—influences the international marketing strategies adopted by exporting firms from Mato Grosso. To this end, the study employed a qualitative multiple-case study approach, including in-depth interviews with strategic managers from four firms in the sector. Thematic content analysis enabled the identification of patterns and specificities in how these organizations address the challenges of internationalization in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments, as characterized by Bennett and Lemoine (2014).

The empirical findings indicate that OA is not merely a deliberate strategic choice, but an adaptive imperative in international markets marked by rapid change, regulatory requirements, and cultural differences. Firms with a greater ability to combine *exploitation*—through process efficiency, consolidation of existing markets, and the standardization of practices—with *exploration*—by investing in new markets, products, and channels—achieved better outcomes in terms of flexibility, innovation, and international sustainability. These results corroborate March's (1991) propositions, as well as Tushman and O'Reilly's (1996) contributions on structural ambidexterity and Gibson and Birkinshaw's (2004) arguments regarding contextual ambidexterity.

The study also highlighted the importance of dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2007) as enablers of ambidexterity. Firms with more flexible governance structures and greater sensing and reconfiguration capacity demonstrated greater success in adapting to local requirements without losing operational efficiency. The articulation between dynamic capabilities and ambidexterity proved especially relevant in international marketing standardization and adaptation decisions (Zou & Cavusgil, 2002), such as pricing, communication, and brand positioning.

In addition, the results indicate that how firms interpret the VUCA environment directly affects the intensity with which they adopt ambidextrous strategies. Firms that perceive higher levels of uncertainty and ambiguity tend to invest more in *exploration*, whereas those that interpret the environment as volatile yet understandable prioritize *exploitation* with incremental adjustments. This relationship suggests that the organizational reading of the external context influences not only marketing decisions but also the internal structuring of innovation and efficiency practices.

The main scientific contribution of this study lies in articulating organizational ambidexterity, dynamic capabilities, and international marketing strategies from the perspective of medium- and large-sized exporting firms in an emerging region. By incorporating multiple forms of ambidexterity (structural, contextual, and cyclical), the study broadens understanding of how organizations operate in unstable global markets, contributing to the international business, marketing, and strategy literature. In addition, the comparative

framework presented allows visualization of differences in the intensity of *exploration* and *exploitation* across the cases analyzed, and their impacts on critical dimensions of international marketing.

From a managerial standpoint, the findings suggest that firms seeking to sustain international competitiveness should invest in building dynamic capabilities and adopting mechanisms that foster ambidexterity. This includes creating dedicated units for innovation, promoting ambidextrous organizational cultures, and using strategic cycles to alternate priorities between efficiency and innovation, as advocated by Burgelman (2002). For managers of exporting firms, especially in emerging markets, these insights provide practical guidance for designing more resilient and adaptive internationalization strategies.

As limitations, the sample size restricts the generalizability of the results to other firms and sectors. In addition, the focus on the specific regional context of Mato Grosso and on the agribusiness sector may not reflect *exploration* and *exploitation* practices adopted by firms in other sectors or regions. The absence of quantitative data may also limit understanding of the impact of the strategies adopted. As suggestions for future research, studies could expand the sample and include firms from different sectors and regions to test the generalizability of the findings. Investigating the quantitative impact of *exploration* and *exploitation* strategies would also be relevant to measure how these practices directly affect firm performance, both in terms of competitiveness and export growth.

Another possibility would be to adopt a longitudinal approach, following firms over time to assess how they adjust their ambidextrous strategies in response to changes in the global market, such as economic crises and technological advances. In addition, exploring how organizational culture and leadership affect the integration of these practices may also provide valuable insights for the field of organizational ambidexterity.

Finally, the impact of emerging technologies—such as big data and artificial intelligence—on firms' capacity to integrate *exploration* and *exploitation*, as well as the barriers faced in implementing ambidextrous management, are promising topics for future studies. Such research may offer new perspectives on how firms can continue innovating and optimizing their operations in increasingly dynamic and competitive international markets.

REFERENCES

- Bardin, L. (2011). *Análise de conteúdo*. Edições 70.
- Bennett, N., & Lemoine, G. J. (2014). What VUCA really means for you. *Harvard Business Review*, 92(1/2), 27-30.
- Birkinshaw, J., & Gibson, C. (2004). Building ambidexterity into an organization. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 45(4), 47-55.
- Burgelman, R. A. (2002). Strategy as vector and the inertia of coevolutionary lock-in. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47(2), 325-357. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3094808>
- Cadogan, J. W. (2012). International marketing, strategic orientations and business success: Reflections on the path ahead. *International Marketing Review*, 29(4), 340-348. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02651331211242656>
- Cavusgil, S. T., & Zou, S. (1994). Marketing strategy-performance relationship: An investigation of the empirical link in export market ventures. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1252247>
- Douglas, S. P., & Wind, Y. (1987). The myth of globalization. *Columbia Journal of World Business*, 22(4), 19-29.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532-550. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1989.4308385>
- Eze, F. J., Inyang, I. B., & James, E. E. (2024). Standardization versus adaptation of marketing mix in international markets: A systematic literature review. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 22(2), 1192-1212. <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.22.2.1470>
- Federação das Indústrias do Estado de Mato Grosso (FIEMT). (2023). *Comex Mato Grosso*, 3(12). Recuperado de https://cms.fiemt.ind.br/arquivos/fiemt/files/FIEMT_BOLETIM_COMEX_VOL03_N12_2023.pdf
- Fernández-Pérez de la Lastra, S., & Sánchez-Garvey, G. (2024). Organizational ambidexterity: A reconceptualization and research agenda for the VUCA international context. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 32(2), e12565. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12565>
- Figueiredo, M., Azzoni, C., & Guilhoto, J. (2024). Agronegócio de Mato Grosso: Uma análise insumo-produto. *Revista de Política Agrícola*, 32(4), 121. Recuperado de <https://seer.sede.embrapa.br/index.php/RPA/article/view/1948>
- Gibson, C. B., & Birkinshaw, J. (2004). The antecedents, consequences, and mediating role of organizational ambidexterity. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47(2), 209-226. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20159573>
- Glaser, B. G., Strauss, A. L., & Strutzel, E. (1968). The discovery of grounded theory; strategies for qualitative research. *Nursing Research*, 17(4), 364. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00006199-196807000-00014>
- Goldberg, W. D., Hutson, W. E., & Wicher, C. H. (2011). *U.S. Patent No. 7,957,996*. U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.
- Guerra, R. M. A., & Souza, I. L. C. (2022). Dimensions of ambidexterity and organizational performance of Brazilian exporting companies. *Internext*, 17(3), 364-381. <https://doi.org/10.18568/internext.v17i3.668>
- Hariyana, N., & Syahputra, H. (2022). Marketing mix standardization and adaptation activity: Case study. In *Proceedings of International Conference on Economics Business and Government Challenges* (Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 337-342).
- Hultman, M., & Oghazi, P. (2024). On the (in) effectiveness of standardized versus adapted international promotion strategies: Evidence from entrepreneurial firms. *Journal of Business Research*, 170, 114351. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2023.114351>
- Jain, S. C. (1989). Standardization of international marketing strategy: some research hypotheses. *Journal of Marketing*, 53(1), 70-79. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1251525>

- Khan, Z. A., Khan, S. H., & Mahmud, U. (2016). International marketing strategies; Standardization, adaptation, and contingency approach. *Management and Administrative Sciences Review*, 5(6), 296-301.
- Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Lavie, D., Stettner, U., & Tushman, M. L. (2010). Exploration and exploitation within and across organizations. *Academy of Management Annals*, 4(1), 109-155. <https://doi.org/10.5465/19416521003691287>
- Levitt, T. (1983). The globalization of markets. *Harvard Business Review*, 61(3), 92-102.
- Lubis, M., & Muniapan, B. (2024). International market development strategies for enhancing global expansion in the export industry. *Involvement International Journal of Business*, 1(1), 14-28.
- March, J. G. (1991). Exploration and exploitation in organizational learning. *Organization Science*, 2(1), 71-87. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2.1.71>
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass / John Wiley & Sons.
- Ministério da Economia (2024). *Relatório de porte*. Ministério da Economia. Recuperado de https://balanca.economia.gov.br/balanca/outras/porte/relatorio_porte.html#totais-por-porte-e-regi%C3%B5es
- Ministério do Desenvolvimento, Indústria, Comércio e Serviços (MDIC) (2024). COMEX STAT. *Comex Vis*. Recuperado de <https://comexstat.mdic.gov.br/pt/comex-vis/5/52>
- Neamțu, I., & Neamțu, A. C. (2013). Analysis, selection and ranking of foreign markets: A comprehensive approach. *Annals of Constantin Brancusi University of Targu-Jiu: Economy Series*, (6).
- Ng, S. P., & Ahmed, P. K. (2024). The role of dynamic capabilities in the development of organisational ambidexterity and its effect on timely responsiveness in emerging market high-tech firms. *R&D Management*, 55(2), 577-597. <https://doi.org/10.1111/radm.12712>
- Popadiuk, S. (2010). O processo de *exploration-exploitation* do conhecimento em empresas brasileiras. *Revista de Administração Contemporânea*, 14(1), 63-84. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.2466.5761>
- Rashkova, Y., Moi, L., Marku, E., & Cabiddu, F. (2023). Online integrated marketing communication strategies of international brands: Standardization vs. adaptation approaches. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 30(7), 810-833. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2023.2177710>
- Rengkung, L. R. (2022). Exploration and exploitation: Driving organizational capability and organizational change toward competitive advantage. *Management Theory and Studies for Rural Business and Infrastructure Development*, 44(1), 39-51. <https://doi.org/10.15544/mts.2022.05>
- Rosin, F., Forget, P., Lamouri, S., & Pellerin, R. (2022). Enhancing the decision-making process through industry 4.0 technologies. *Sustainability*, 14(1), 461. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14010461>
- Roth, L., Corsi, S., & Hughes, M. (2024). Ambidexterity within a multinational context: How organisations can leverage explorative and exploitative reverse innovation. *R&D Management*, 54(3), 628-643. <https://doi.org/10.1111/radm.12668>
- Schoemaker, P. J. H., Heaton, S., & Teece, D. J. (2018). Innovation, dynamic capabilities, and leadership. *California Management Review*, 61(1), 15-42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0008125618790246>
- Shi, Y., Van Toorn, C., & McEwan, M. (2024). Exploration–exploitation: How business analytics powers organisational ambidexterity for environmental sustainability. *Information Systems Journal*, 34(3), 894-930. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12456>
- Silva, R. R., Larieira, C. L. C., de Souza Meirelles, F., & dos Reis, A. M. P. (2023). Organizational ambidexterity: A path to digital transformation in small and medium enterprises. *Cognitionis Scientific Journal*, 6(2), 480-504. <https://doi.org/10.38087/2595.8801.207>

Song, J. (2021). Global standardization and local adaptation of marketing: A critical review of the literature. *Journal of Business Administration Research*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.30564/jbar.v4i2.2887>

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Sage.

Stej, G., Rossmann, A., & Szász, L. (2024). Leveraging organizational knowledge to develop agility and improve performance: The role of ambidexterity. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 44(8), 1446-1466. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOPM-04-2023-0274>

Teece, D. J. (2007). Explicating dynamic capabilities: The nature and microfoundations of (sustainable) enterprise performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28(13), 1319-1350. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.640>

Teece, D. J., Pisano, G., & Shuen, A. (1997). Dynamic capabilities and strategic management. *Strategic Management Journal*, 18(7), 509-533. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-0266\(199708\)18:7<509::AID-SMJ882>3.0.CO;2-Z](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(199708)18:7<509::AID-SMJ882>3.0.CO;2-Z)

Tushman, M. L., & O'Reilly, C. A. (1996). Ambidextrous organizations: Managing evolutionary and revolutionary change. *California Management Review*, 38(4), 8-30. <https://doi.org/10.2307/41165852>

Vrontis, D., Thrassou, A., & Lamprianou, I. (2009). International marketing adaptation versus standardisation of multinational companies. *International Marketing Review*, 26(4/5), 477-500. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02651330910971995>

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Zou, S., & Cavusgil, S. T. (2002). The GMS: A broad conceptualization of global marketing strategy and its effect on firm performance. *Journal of Marketing*, 66(4), 40-56. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.66.4.40.18519>

How to cite this article:

Silva, G. S. L., & Rocha, T. V. (2026). Organizational ambidexterity in international marketing: A study of exporting firms from Mato Grosso. *Internext*, 21(1), e835, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.18568/internext.835>