

INTERNATIONAL SURVIVAL AND STRATEGIC RENEWAL THROUGH DISRUPTING PATH DEPENDENCE¹

Gabrielle Damo Rossato²

Dinorá Eliete Floriani³

Mohamed Amal⁴

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present article is to analyze how firms can strategically renew themselves and disrupt their path dependence to survive in international markets, despite the influence of path dependence. Using a qualitative methodology, this study has adopted a single-case design, based on semi-structured interviews with employees involved in the path of an emerging market firm. Through a historic and process-driven analysis it was possible to use realtime and retrospective data. The paper leads to the start of debates about path dependence transition. It also presents the relationship between international survival, strategic renewal and path dependence disruption.

Keywords: Path dependence. Disruption. Strategic renewal. Emerging market. International survival.

A SOBREVIVÊNCIA INTERNACIONAL E A RENOVAÇÃO ESTRATÉGICA POR MEIO DO ROMPIMENTO DA DEPENDÊNCIA DE TRAJETÓRIA

O objetivo do presente artigo é analisar como as empresas podem se renovar estrategicamente e romper sua dependência de trajetória para sobreviver em mercados internacionais, apesar da influência da dependência de trajetória. Utilizando uma metodologia qualitativa, este estudo adotou um caso único, com base em entrevistas semiestruturadas com funcionários que possuem envolvimento com a trajetória de uma empresa de mercado emergente. Por meio de

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² Universidade do Vale do Itajaí – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Administração; Itajaí – SC (Brasil); <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7698-0795>; gabriellerossato@gmail.com.

³ Universidade do Vale do Itajaí – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Administração; Itajaí – SC (Brasil); <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7898-284X>; dinora@univali.br.

⁴ Universidade do Vale do Itajaí – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Administração; Itajaí – SC (Brasil); <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7851-267X>; amal@univali.br.

uma análise histórica e orientada por processos, foi possível utilizar dados em tempo real e retrospectivos. O artigo leva ao início dos debates sobre a transição da dependência de trajetória. Também apresenta a relação entre sobrevivência internacional, renovação estratégica e o rompimento da dependência de trajetória.

Palavras-chave: Dependência de trajetória. Rompimento. Renovação estratégica. Mercado emergente. Sobrevivência internacional.

SUPERVIVENCIA INTERNACIONAL Y RENOVACIÓN ESTRATÉGICA A TRAVÉS DE LA DISRUPCIÓN DE LA DEPENDENCIA DEL CAMINO

El objetivo del presente artículo es analizar cómo las empresas pueden renovarse estratégicamente y romper su dependencia de trayectoria para sobrevivir en los mercados internacionales, a pesar de la influencia de la dependencia de trayectoria. Utilizando una metodología cualitativa, este estudio ha adoptado un caso único, basado en entrevistas semiestructuradas con empleados que están involucrados con la trayectoria de una empresa de mercado emergente. A través de un análisis histórico y basado en procesos fue posible utilizar datos en tiempo real y retrospectivos. El documento conduce al inicio de debates sobre la transición de la dependencia de la trayectoria. También presenta la relación entre supervivencia internacional, renovación estratégica y disrupción de la dependencia del camino.

Palabras clave: Dependencia de la trayectoria. Disrupción. Renovación estratégica. Mercado emergente. Supervivencia internacional.

INTRODUCTION

In light of constant market transformations, strategic renewal emerges as a relevant aspect for firms' international survival. Although firms suffer with the inflexibility of organizational routines and strategies caused by path dependence (SCHREYÖGG; SYDOW, 2011), a process characterized by sustained persistency and lock-in (SYDOW; SCHREYÖGG; KOCH, 2009), they need to renew themselves strategically to alter their path dependence (SCHMITT; RAISCH; VOLBERDA, 2018), in order to survive in foreign markets (RIVIERE; SUDER, 2016).

In theoretical terms, if, on the one hand, International Business (IB) literature states that the future internationalization behavior underlies the path (JOHANSON; VAHLNE, 1977; LETEN; BELDERBOS; LOOY, 2016), on the other, authors argue that firms with greater strategic flexibility are more efficient at starting strategic renewal (JAVED *et al.*, 2022), which, on its turn, entices the rejection of path dependence (VOLBERDA; BADEN-FULLER; VAN DEN BOSCH, 2001). The strategic renewal implicates in the development of new sets of capabilities to innovate and transform an organization (AMANKWAH-AMOAHA; KHAN; OSABUTEY, 2021). It can be argued that strategic renewal is driven by dynamic capabilities

(RIVIERE; SUDER, 2016; JAVED *et al.*, 2022), which reside in exploitation capabilities - involving the ability to enhance existing capabilities - and exploration capabilities, which correspond to new alternatives and new learning (PRANGE, 2012).

To overcome the commitment to an existing strategy, firms need to promote explorative and path breaking activities (FRIESL; GARREAU; HERACLEOUS, 2019), using strategic renewal to alter their path dependence (SCHMITT; RAISCH; VOLBERDA, 2018). In this case, while strategic renewal may be aligned with the organizational path, there may also be path rejection in the search for survival. Therefore, we believe that the question of long-term survival of firms in foreign markets is a topic that in large extent represents a challenge for firms' executives, as well as IB scholars. The matter regards not only survival in relation to the firm's growth (KHAN *et al.*, 2021), or how they renew themselves during crisis (AMANKWAH-AMOAH; KHAN; OSABUTEY, 2021; ISSAH *et al.*, 2023), or use digital technologies to stimulate the bifurcation of paths (BOHNSACK; KURTZ; HANELT, 2021), but also other motivations not yet identified on how firms disrupt their path dependence and transform themselves, thus attaining long-term prosperity (SCHMITT; RAISCH; VOLBERDA, 2018).

Therefore, it becomes increasingly important to analyze how firms can, despite the influence of path dependence, strategically renew themselves and disrupt their path dependence to survive in international markets. For this purpose, the subject is analyzed from within its own context: an emerging market (Brazilian) company, with almost 20 years of international operations, operating in about 20 countries. We have selected a Brazilian firm named Carmen Steffens, with a path that includes operations in different continents and that, despite having to withdrawn its operations from some countries along its trajectory, managed to strategically renew itself and survive internationally. This makes the case relevant and of scientific potential, as it enables the exploration of new theoretical insights (CUERVO-CAZURRA *et al.*, 2016), that is, the strategic renewal through path dependence disruption and its association with long-term survival in the context of an emerging market firm.

As stated in the IB literature, despite emerging market firms being able to develop capabilities to deal with the uncertainties of the original market (CUERVO-CAZURRA *et al.*, 2018), which is important to face the challenges of internationalization, these firms also suffer with technological delay and weak stocks of intangible assets (RAMAMURTI; WILLIAMSON, 2019). Thus, emerging market firms must deal with resources and capabilities restriction while having to strategically renew in order to disrupt path dependence aiming at the maintenance of long term activities in foreign markets.

We seek to contribute to the research in IB literature by discussing how firms strategic renew themselves to disrupt path dependence and ensure long-term survival. From an analysis of the internationalization process of an emerging market firm, our results reveal a path dependence transition, that is, a path dependence that occurs right after firm's internationalization. During this transition, firms are not relying exclusively on what they've learned from the domestic market, since they have already acquired experience from operations in foreign markets, but that does not mean they do not face the restrictions of their limited capabilities. Path dependence transition lasts until the firm is able to strategically renew discontinuously. Once the firm achieves discontinuous strategic renewal, it disrupts with path dependence transition and ensures international survival.

Besides the introduction, this article is organized in other four sections. In section 2, we provide a literature review of the discussion on path dependence, and strategic renewal and international survival. Section 3 describes the methodology used to assess our objectives and research question. Finally, we present our results and discussion, by suggesting several theoretical propositions and conclude with study's contributions and limitations.

1 PATH DEPENDENCE

Assuming history matters, path dependence is the influence of past events on firms' present results (DAVID, 1985; VERGNE; DURAND, 2010). Path dependence defines firm's future strategy (COLLIS, 1991); following a relatively deterministic pattern (MAHONEY, 2000). In this sense, Sydow, Schreyögg and Koch (2009) present a three-phase model of what makes an organization dependent on trajectory. The first phase is the result of a critical event leading to a critical junction. The second phase consists of a regimen of positive, self-reinforcing feedback. At this stage there are still stock options, but more restricted and the initial choice becomes difficult to change. The last phase is the lock-in, in which actions become limited, strategically inefficient. As a consequence of path dependence, organizations deal with the inflexibility of their own routines and strategies (SCHREYÖGG; SYDOW, 2011).

Furthermore, path dependence may be linked to knowledge networks that, associated to internal organization affairs, influence the development of firms (BELSO-MARTINEZ; DIEZ-VIAL, 2018). Future internationalization behavior is, thus, the result of the travelled path (JOHANSON; VAHLNE, 1977), in which capacities that exist on both individual and organizational levels influence the construction of knowledge from a cumulative process, depending on the path (LETEN; BELDERBOS; LOOY, 2016). Deng, Delios and Peng (2020)

state that not only internationalization is influenced by path dependence, it is in fact rooted within context (comprising social and institutional relations) as well as practice.

Despite path dependence, firms must face the challenges that come up in the business environment, which may demand changes and the consequent disruption of path dependence. Accordingly, Bohnsack, Kurtz and Hanelt (2021) state the integration of digital technology into business models may help breaking path dependence. Digital technologies allow firms to develop, offer, and adapt new value proposals, increasing their flexibility and triggering the bifurcation of paths (BOHNSACK; KURTZ; HANELT, 2021).

Under the lenses of organizational change, Stache and Sydow (2022) state an external shock opens an opportunity for change. This, however, is not enough. In order to occur path dependence disruption it is necessary to promote a recombination of knowledge, which in turn triggers self reinforcement mechanisms that work against the current organizational trajectory (through convincing to participate) and, at last, transparency among the ones involved in the change (STACHE; SYDOW, 2022).

The internationalization strategy can also be related to path creation. Garud, Kumaraswamy and Karnøe (2010) argue that the past may represent a restrictive force on the present, where future visions shape what emerges from the past. Kwee, Van Den Bosch and Volberda (2011), on the other hand, agree with both path dependence and path creation. The authors discuss strategic renewal by addressing exploitation and exploration actions. Within this context, they advocate that while strategic renewal exploitation actions relate to path dependence, strategic renewal exploration actions are related to path creation.

Dasí, Iborra and Safón (2015) corroborate that the firm's exploration – exploitation orientation can affect its internationalization strategy, being considered an organizational antecedent. According to the authors, the firm's exploration orientation has a positive effect on internationalization, i.e., companies seek to seize opportunities, evading organizational myopia that ignores the long run, new areas, or failures committed.

Drawing from these core ideas, we consider that path dependence may influence the antecedents of strategic renewal. These include location strategy, time strategy, venture mode decisions (RIVIERE; SUDER, 2016), internationalization knowledge (RIVIERE; SUDER; BASS, 2018), dynamic capabilities, and resource base (INIGO; ALBAREDA, 2019). However, in this paper we recognize that when firms operate in international markets, for the adaptation in different contexts and competitiveness, new capabilities and strategies are needed. Thus, strategic renewal can alter path dependence (SCHMITT; RAISCH; VOLBERDA, 2018).

2 STRATEGIC RENEWAL AND INTERNATIONAL SURVIVAL

Whereas Schmitt *et al.* (2016) state strategic renewal is a managerial process of modification or substitution of a firm's business model aimed at organizational survival and prosperity in the long term, Agarwal and Helfat (2009) argue there are two types of strategic renewal: discontinuous and incremental. While discontinuous renewal entices changes in various parts of the organization, including business model, technological base, organizational structure, resources and capabilities, and organizational mindset, incremental strategic renewal allows firms to deal with changes in the external environment as they occur (AGARWAL; HELFAT, 2009).

Firms that manage to renew and grow present elements of both discontinuous and incremental renewal (KHAN *et al.*, 2021). But regarding what leads to strategic renewal, the evolutionary perspective encompasses strategic renewal brought up by dynamic capabilities (RIVIERE; SUDER, 2016). Of strategic nature, dynamic capabilities lead to organizational change (ZAHRA; GEORGE, 2002).

Dynamic capabilities include the ability to exploit, that requires activities such as refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation, and execution (MARCH, 1991), and the ability to explore, that requires activities such as search, variation, risk taking, experimentation, play, flexibility, discovery, and innovation (MARCH, 1991), generating new ideas and new resources (PRANGE; VALDIER, 2011). Sousa, Li and He (2020) state those capabilities can implicate in different results in the short and long terms: whereas exploitation generates results in the short term, exploration takes longer to be achieved due to the complexity in the adoption of new techniques. When exploitation and exploration can be balanced, capabilities are called, in this case, international ambidexterity (PRANGE; VERDIER, 2011; PRANGE, 2012; VAHLNE; JONSSON, 2017), which has a positive effect in strategic renewal (JAKA; WAHYUNI; SUTYARJOKO, 2022).

As in the case of organizational ambidexterity, Kwee, Van Den Bosch and Volberda (2011) claim strategic renewal requires the exploitation of competencies, which are associated with path dependence, and the exploration of new competencies, which involve creating the path. From the changes in the external environment (TEECE, 2007), dynamic capabilities promote exploration of opportunities (KEEN; WU, 2011), strengthening the firm's competitive advantages (TEECE, 2018). Thus, exploration and exploitation capabilities are part of the strategic renewal process (CROSSAN; LANE; WHITE, 1999). Friesl, Garreau and Heracleous (2019) take the same direction, drawing on the study of a traditional market firm: path

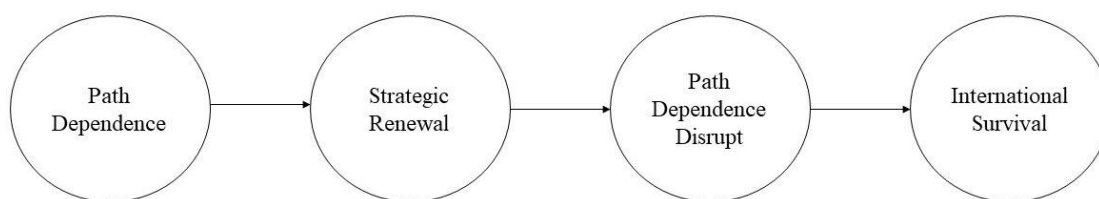
disruption on parent level may be the result of units that, although structurally separated, are integrated (proximate isomorphism), and stimulate explorative activities at the parental level, resulting in strategic renewal on the corporate level.

Strategic renewal, besides helping to create competitive advantage (GUO; JIANG; YANG, 2014), involves organizational transformation of decisions that lead to the disruption of path dependence and increase the prospect of future success (RIVIERE; SUDER; BASS, 2018). This process includes all levels of the firm, thus causing a new path to be built, resulting in the long-term survival of organizations (SCHMITT; RAISCH; VOLBERDA, 2018). The selection of appropriate modes of capability delivery promotes the renewal of capabilities and, hence, survival (CAPRON; MITCHELL, 2009). Therefore, Kwee, Van Den Bosch and Volberda (2011) argue that international ambidexterity, combined with strategic renewal, influences corporate longevity.

In addition, an important factor for international survival is the entry time, which is endogenous and depends on business capabilities (HAWK; ALMEIDA; YEUNG, 2013). Meschi, Ricard and Moore (2017) recommend firms to adopt a late, slow, and cautious sequential expansion approach, which is significantly less error-prone than the adoption of other paths for internationalization.

The future internationalization behavior of firms is created by the trajectory of past accumulated knowledge (ERIKSSON; MAJKGARD; SHARMA, 2000). In this sense, if, on the one hand, learning influences the firm's performance and its survival (LÉVESQUE; MINNITI; SHEPHERD, 2009), on the other hand, the company needs to strategically renew itself to disrupt its path dependence and achieve long term survival (SCHMITT; RAISCH; VOLBERDA, 2018). In Figure 1, we present our main theoretical framework, in which we establish the connections between path dependence, strategic renewal, path dependence disrupt, and international survival.

Figure 1 - Theoretical framework



Fonte: Prepared by the authors (2021).

Although periods of stability are necessary to establish organizational routines, firms must also implement changes (KLARNER; RAISCH, 2013). Strategic renewal efforts aim to lead the way and avoid imprisonment (EDWARDS; MOLZ, 2020). To achieve superior performance in high-speed environments, companies need to renew their strategic activities more frequently (SHIN; PÉREZ-NORDTVEDT, 2020). The strategic renewal is driven by both internal factors, such as poor financial management, resource depletion, and lack of qualified personnel, as well as external factors, as changes in consumer behavior, new sources of competition, and changes in government industrial policies (AMANKWAH-AMOA; KHAN; OSABUTEY, 2021). Thus, although international survival is associated with the knowledge accumulated throughout the company's trajectory (ERIKSSON; MAJKGARD; SHARMA, 2000), under changing conditions, strategic renewal can become fundamental, requiring the disrupt of path dependence to ensure international survival.

The strategic renewal benefits from international diversity (RIVIERE; SUDER, 2016) and it is stimulating from the exploration and exploitation capabilities developed by the firm, leading to changes in its trajectory. Observing aspects approached by literature, some studies discuss these capabilities and their implications in the short and long terms (SOUSA; LI; HE, 2020). If strategic renewal is necessary for the long-term survival of companies, international survival also depends on path dependence. Hence, since strategic renewal is a process that unfolds over time (EDWARDS; MOLZ, 2020), in this paper we adopt a processual perspective (LANGLEY *et al.*, 2013) to analyze strategic renewal movements throughout the internationalization process.

3 METHODOLOGY

Strategic renewal creates new momentum for organizations while driving firms to rethink their path and the direction of the organization. Thus, the question under this perspective is how firms can keep operating in foreign markets in the long run, with higher performance, serving more customers and operating in a larger number of foreign markets? Therefore, from this perspective, we believe that to answer such a question, there is a need to provide more in depth rational framework on how firms strategically renew themselves to disrupt path dependence, and generating more effective conditions for their international survival. In this study, we used a qualitative approach, which we consider the most suitable to address and

interpret the process of strategic renewal and path dependence disrupt (LANGLEY *et al.*, 2013). For this, we adopted a historical perspective, which “provides a way towards progress for a fuller understanding of the IB phenomena” (BUCKLEY, 2016, p.896). Finally, we have adopted the single-case study methodology (SIGGELKOW, 2007; YIN, 2017), motivated by the need to dig deeper into the field and to gain better quality access and the confidence of individuals.” (BANDEIRA-DE-MELLO *et al.*, 2016, p. 2007).

3.1 The setting and case selection

To select our case study, we have followed several criteria: a) emerging market firm - emerging markets companies suffer from instable environments (MEYER; PENG, 2016), technological delay, and weak stocks of intangible assets (RAMAMURTI; WILLIAMSON, 2019). Hence, it is important to understand the influence of context in internationalization and maintenance of overseas activities; b) strategic changes adopted along the firm’s path - considering the research efforts to analyze how and when strategic renewal disrupts path dependence and how this is related to international survival; c) operation in different countries - in an attempt to point out firm's path to enter and exit markets in order to identify moments of development of strategic renewal capabilities and disruption in the trajectory; d) a firm operating more than 10 years in the market, given the importance of collecting processes and historical data - the historical approach, by providing a longitudinal perspective, contributes with evidence to the theory, enabling a deeper study of the concept of resource accumulation, going beyond path dependence to address organizational structure issues (COLLI, 2012); and e) that the founder is still active in the firm - so as to understand the path of the firm and the experience of the founder who lead the construction of the firm.

Based on the aforementioned criteria, we have selected as subject for this study one of the largest franchisors in Brazil, founded in 1993, currently with 560 stores: Carmen Steffens. The company started working the international market in 2002 and is now present in 20 countries. By entering and exiting foreign markets along its path, the case made possible to identify the disruption of path dependence while renewing strategy, and also its international survival, that is, to explore the theoretical foundations used in the study (YIN, 2017), making room for theoretical insights (CUERVO-CAZURRA *et al.*, 2016).

Finally, Carmen Steffens contemplates an emerging market firm that has been present in five continents (America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Oceania), making possible to study a single and complex case (HOSKISSON *et al.*, 1999) from a franchise that not only went

international for emerging countries (MELO; BORINI; OGASAVARA, 2019), but also for developed countries.

3.2 Data collection

Data triangulation was used to increase the validity and reliability of the study (YIN, 2017), making it more substantial and accurate (DUBÉ; PARÉ, 2003). Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews (YIN, 2017) that allowed acquiring information from people who were involved with studied phenomenon (GIOIA; CORLEY; HAMILTON, 2013). However, to minimize attribution errors, we have not asked any specific questions regarding strategic renewal nor international survival, allowing for the subject to naturally come up. From process (LANGLEY *et al.*, 2013) and historical analysis it was possible to use both real time and retrospective data (PETTIGREW, 1990), exploring timeline aspects versus strategic renewal.

Interviewed subjects are employees who operate or are familiar with the decision making and, through their historical involvement in the organization, are aware of firm's path. We interviewed the founder and chief executive officer of the firm (CEO); the executive responsible for international expansion (InternExpan); the director of marketing and e-commerce (DirectorMrkEcom); and the firm's first international franchisee (FrancParag), who continues to be a franchisee today. Thus, it was possible to collect data from different perspectives, capturing the evolution of the firm over the different periods it went through.

The interviews were carried out between December 2018 and April 2019, recorded with the approval of the interviewees. The interview with the person responsible for the expansion of the firm had to occur by telephone due to subject's availability. The interview with the CEO was done by Skype. The interviews with the director of marketing and e-commerce and with the first international franchisee took place in person, the first in Brazil, the second in Paraguay. Table 1 summarizes interviewee profiles, data, and duration of interviews, and, with proof quotes, activities conducted by the interviewees in the case study.

Table 1 - Interviewee profiles and proof quotes

Interviewee	Current position	Data and Duration	Quotes
Founder and CEO	Founded Carmen Steffens in 1993. Was part of the opening of franchises in the domestic	May/2019 0:50	"It took me 2 and a half years to open the

	Market and after, of the internationalization of the firm. Works as CEO		factory effectively in 1993.” “After Paraguay it became a dream of ours to go to other countries.”
Responsible for international expansion	Responsible for the international expansion of Carmen Steffens since 2013.	March/2019 0:40	“Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Panamá, Aruba, and the Caribbean after my entrance.”
Director of marketing and e-commerce	In 2001 founded the firm’s marketing department; also worked in the international expansion. Is the current director of marketing and e-commerce.	December/2018 0:40	“I founded the marketing department of the firm in 2001 and after that I have worked in innumerable sectors inside the company, including retail supervision and training of new salesman that entered the group. After that I took over firm’s international marketing and all the franchise expansion until the company reached 16 countries.”
First international franchisee	In 2002 it became the first international franchisee of Carmen Steffens, opening the first store in Asunción, Paraguay. Today, it is the Franchisee in both Paraguay and Argentina.	February/2019 2:00	“I represent Carmen Steffens for almost 20 years [...] it was very small and didn’t have anything abroad.”

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2021).

Secondary data were important for the triangulation of information with primary data, as well as for the preparation of interviews, enriching questions (YIN, 2017). Information about the firm and its international performance was collected from news articles, magazines and newspapers, videos on the firm’s website, YouTube videos, and recording and transcription of a 60-minute lecture by the CEO of the firm in a Brazilian conference about entrepreneurship, in September 2018. These data were important to confirm information or clarifying any incongruence or ambiguity resulting from the interviews. Hence, it was possible to identify that much of the information obtained from news articles, magazines, and newspapers presented misapprehensions. In those cases, information was not used. It is also worth mentioning a great deal of data used in the research emerged from the interviews, which allowed a reconstruction

of firm’s international path, through a historic perspective. We also used articles published in national and international Journals to add more theoretical insights about our case study. By using the different sources of data (firm data, but also external reports and scientific articles), we were able to run a more accurate triangulation of information, which contributed to the validity of the present qualitative study (CUERVO-CAZURRA *et al.*, 2016).

Data was treated using the NVivo software, which, regardless of the source of information, enables it to be organized into a single platform. Categories of analysis were created for path dependence and strategic renewal, with subcategories for exploration and exploitation, and international survival, which we captured using references to performance, number of foreign markets, and how long the firm is operating abroad. In Table 2 we report all categories of analysis, with the corresponding definitions and references.

Table 2 - Categories of analysis and definition

Analytical categories	Definition	Authors	Examples of interview questions
Path dependence	Path dependence is related to the company's knowledge. When new learning and skills are developed, path dependence can be disrupted.	Garud, Kumaraswamy and Karnøe (2010); Leten, Belderbos and Looy (2016).	Before working at the company, what was your professional experience? Regarding the foundation of the company and the beginning of activities: comment the company's history. What was the internationalization process like?
Strategic renewal	Strategic Renewal, driven by exploration and exploitation capabilities, implies the transformation of the company's trajectory, i.e., from the disruption of path-dependence.	Volberda, Baden-Fuller and Van Den Bosch (2001); Riviere and Suder (2016); Riviere, Suder and Bass (2018); Schmitt, Raisch and Volberda (2018).	
Exploration capability	Exploration capability allows for the firm to identify and learn from changes in the international market.	March (1991); Prange and Verdier (2011); Prange (2012).	Has the company implemented any production processes? Which? How? New products have been developed due to

			internationalization? Why? Has the company implemented any new strategies due to internationalization?
Exploitation capability	Exploitation capability allows for the firm to develop new knowledge, transforming its production process, product, capabilities, or management.	March (1991); Prange and Verdier (2011); Prange (2012).	Were there improvements in the production process, product or management in the company after internationalization? Have national employees and franchisees been trained due to internationalization? Can you describe how it happened? Has a procedure been carried out to solve production problems? How? Does the company's management often share its information with national and international franchisees? Comment.
Long-term survival	Long-term survival entices performance, number of served markets and time abroad.	Authors' analysis.	

Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

3.3 Data analysis

For data analysis and interpretation, we used content analysis (GAUR; KUMAR, 2018), and drew several propositions developed inductively through case study (EISENHARDT, 1989).

We coded our material, interviews, and secondary data according to the previously established theoretical categories: path dependence; strategic renewal (with exploration and exploitation capabilities as subcategories); and international survival (in which we considered time abroad, performance, and number of international markets). This allowed for the reconstruction of the history and processes of internationalization of the firm from the rich

empirical description based on collected data. This description was fundamental for us to chronologically identify strategic renewal processes and path disruption, exploring international survival. Besides, it was possible to observe the movement of entrance and exit of international markets throughout firm’s path.

Finally, outcomes from the interviews were triangulated with secondary data and literature, as well as the different interviews that covered different sides of the trajectory, as in the case of the CEO of the firm and the first international franchisee, which followed the company's entire international path. Throughout this process, the NVivo software assisted in the analysis and interpretation of data, generating greater reliability.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our case study provided strong evidences of how the company that has entered and exited foreign markets has managed to strategically renew itself, building strength while trying to rethink its trajectory. This process of renewal strategy seems to have influenced significantly the international survival of the firm. In Table 3 we reported the most representative quotes of our analytical categories from the interviews. In the next, we present our main findings and discuss their implication for international survival.

Table 3 - Categories of analysis and evidences

Categories of analysis	Evidences
Path Dependence	<p><i>“Know how comes from Couroquimica, our tannery, totally cutting edge today.” – DirectorMrkEcom.</i></p> <p><i>“Brazil is a great nation, so when you succeed in national retail [...] the firm was already very well prepared for the international market.” – DirectorMrkEcom.</i></p> <p><i>“The Director accepted the meeting because it was with us, we came from Paraguay and wanted to know the brand.” – FrancParag.</i></p> <p><i>“Through Paraguay it became a dream of ours to go to other countries.” – CEO.</i></p> <p><i>“In 25 years of CS we must have closed 50 stores in places we shouldn’t even have opened.”</i></p>
Strategic Renewal	<p><i>“They focused on shoes and outsourced handbags [...] they were ugly. [...] I started buying abroad, from other brands [...] showed them to the Director [...] in the next collection I already saw handbags in the same stile.” – FrancParag.</i></p> <p><i>“There were people who came to Brazil, loved the brand and wanted to open. This was the step we had to eliminate from our lives.” – CEO.</i></p> <p><i>“Today when we enter a country we never hand it over to a franchisee in the beginning, we always stay at least 2 years with our own store.” – CEO.</i></p> <p><i>“Either we go in right or we don’t even go in.” – CEO.</i></p>

Exploration Capacity	<p><i>“I didn’t think only about Brazil anymore [...] everything was discussed in the committees [...] franchisees have close contact with the clients.” – FracParag.</i></p> <p><i>“Regarding CS’s products, before they were only shoes, then handbags, and now clothes too, the clients were the ones who showed an interest.” – InternExpan.</i></p> <p><i>The great evolution of the firm occurred together with internationalization. We started working markets more competitive than Brazil, having to really improve the quality of our products throughout the years, production equipment for the factory.” – InternExpan.</i></p> <p><i>“We look at what’s happening in the world.– InternExpan.</i></p>
Exploitation Capacity	<p><i>“Regarding CS’s products, before they were only shoes, then handbags, and now clothes too [...].” – InternExpan.</i></p> <p><i>“We also hired some professionals from the market [...] they came to be part of our team after internationalization.” – InternExpan.</i></p> <p><i>“We invested a lot in technology, our factory is totally flexible.” – CEO.</i></p>
International Survival	<p><i>“ Before, a person would get in for enthusiasm and capital. Now, if they don’t prove they fit the profile, that they are committed and will run the business, they’re not in. This was our mistake in Portugal.” – CEO.</i></p> <p><i>“In Spain we had the store in Madrid, in a much more ‘concept than business’ street, we want to have stores where we can bring concept and make business too.” – CEO.</i></p>

Source: Prepared by the authors (2021).

4.1 Path, dependence, and learning

The importance of the individual capabilities built by the founder of the company, as well as his organizational experience at Couroquímica, the entrepreneur's leather company, is evident in the case of Carmen Steffens. The individual and organizational capabilities influenced the construction and development of the brand, emphasizing a cumulative path dependence process (LETEN; BELDERBOS; LOOY, 2016). The brand's Director of Marketing and E-commerce ascribes the company's knowledge to Couroquímica, which was also important in providing material and financial resources for the initial brand development.

In the domestic market path, the case reveals how the entrepreneur himself has sought to learn from the market. With the opening of the first two stores in 1996, the contact with retail customers made it possible to learn again: *“I learned a lot about how the female consumer thinks, how she acts... and that was a major factor in making the company’s right decisions.”* (CEO, 2018 – SEC).

Two years later, with the increasing demand of the industrial unit, the company envisioned a path through franchises. In the following year, the number of franchised stores in Brazil totaled 8 and, four years later, 60. Thus, resources and capabilities were developed as the path was built, defining the company's franchising strategy.

Carmen Steffens's internationalization started in 2002, after a group of entrepreneurs in Asuncion (Paraguay) manifested their interesse to open the first franchise in the country. Our data shows the process of internationalization of this company can be explained by several factors. First, the very context of emerging economy, which provides evidences of how the development of uncertainty management capabilities (CUERVO-CAZURRA *et al.*, 2018) to deal with unstable environment represents a country of origin advantage to enter into other foreign emerging markets such as Paraguay. In 2002 the country suffered from a deep economic crisis and fragile democracy (BANDEIRA, 2002).

The second factor to explain the strategic commitment of the firm with internationalization is related to path dependence in the domestic market. Carmen Steffens sought to learn from its international experience, choosing to enter the international market through franchises, replicating the Brazilian operational model. In addition, we also found strong evidence that such process has been influenced by firm's actions linked to relational process in Brazil (DENG; DELIOS; PENG, 2020). This means that in the national market the company maintained a close relationship with brand's franchisees, which included promoting meetings for knowledge exchange. Following the same path, the company sought to build its international trajectory based on the close relationship between franchisor and franchisee.

This relationship can be seen in a change that occurred shortly after the beginning of firm's internationalization. Focusing on shoes, Carmen Steffens bags were outsourced and did not match its shoe design, leading the franchisee to buy bags from other brands. On a trip to the United States, the franchisee bought some bags from other brands and showed them to the CEO: *"In the following collection, I came across bags in that style."* (FrancParag).

Finally, as the case shows, the company needed to change its image, insofar focused on the Brazilian market exclusively, and redesign its path, from a domestic oriented brand approach, to the internationalization of the brand: *"We started with one shoe collection and about 3 months later we changed our image. For Carmen Steffens it was also all-new, the brand moved away from focusing only on Brazil to a slightly more international brand."* (FrancParag).

The internationalization process was a critical event in which the company had to make decisions about the direction of its operations. The international expansion of the brand became part of Carmen Steffens' strategy of growth, which until then was exclusively focused on the domestic market.

Carmen Steffens then changed its outsourcing strategy and started to draw a new path, turning its attention to the foreign market and new products. Its future vision shaped what

emerged from the past (GARUD; KUMARASWAMY; KARNØE, 2010), changing its global perspective, leading to the expansion from shoes market only to handbags as well. The case reveals that even in face of changes imposed by the international market, the dynamic capabilities and the very basics of the company's resources were influenced by its path dependence (INIGO; ALBAREDA, 2019) of the domestic market model of growth.

However, the knowledge obtained from its first experience in the foreign market was accumulated and it shaped the future path of the company's evolution (ERIKSSON; MAJKGARD; SHARMA, 2000), by gradually building the ability to adapt to market changes (dynamic capabilities).

As a result of international experience and market knowledge the company started a more rapid process of market diversification by opening stores in different countries. In 2004, Carmen Steffens opened a store in Portugal; in 2006, in the United States and in Argentina; and in 2007 it launched more stores in Portugal, Australia, and Uruguay. Until 2014, the company was able to enter into different countries, like Spain, Angola, Bolivia, France, South Africa, Mozambique, Saudi Arabia, Los Angeles and Orlando in the United States, Peru, Tunisia and Jordan. Nonetheless, the opening of franchises in these countries highlights once again Carmen Steffens' dependence on the path created from its first experience in the Paraguayan market. Location strategies, entry time, and even venture mode decisions (RIVIERE; SUDER, 2016) were conditions in its path dependence. This means that the company has opened international franchises in different continents mostly driven by a proactive behavior of the own interest of franchisees entrepreneurs on Carmen Steffen's brand, as was the case, for instance, in Paraguay. This means that from 2002 to 2014, the firm's internationalization was mostly driven by the proactiveness of their clients abroad, and less by exploring the firms' advantages to strategically commit to international markets. This process, in our understanding, has created a path dependence, a kind of a transition path, while not very much based on domestic markets, but still constrained by the limited capabilities the firm possesses to upgrade its international expansion.

Notwithstanding, the case reveals that from 2014 onwards the company disrupted with the path it was following. It expanded predominantly to the American continent. Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Panama, Aruba, and the Caribbean were some of the destinations of the firm after 2014. We can infer that the entry in different continents had paved the road for a strategy focused on a single region. The company then sought a gradual internationalization (JOHANSON; VAHLNE, 1977), conquering closer markets. *"Our focus is the south hemisphere*

due to the weather and soft weather in the northern hemisphere would be like Florida, Georgia, Arizona, Texas, California" (CEO, 2018 – SEC).

However, before drawing this new path, the firm withdrew its operations from some international markets (see Table 4). The inadequate location of the stores was one of the main reasons pointed out by the company's CEO for withdrawing from operations. Another reason was the franchisee's mismanagement: *"We opened up the stores with the wrong people"* (CEO).

The unsuccessful experience in the markets the company has abandoned has led Carmen Steffens to rethink the selection of franchisees. The path that the company had been following since the internationalization to Paraguay, in which the interest of franchisees determined the opening of stores, was rejected after the critical situation experienced by the company with the closing of stores abroad. Hence, the company's path regarding franchisee selection was redesigned, becoming stricter: *"Previously, people got excited and had capital. Now, if they do not prove that they have the required profile, that they are committed to the business and that they will make the business work, they do not enter."* (CEO).

Moreover, Carmen Steffens defined the franchise strategy while still in the domestic market. With the positive experience in Brazil, they made the decision of following through with the same model in the international market, in a self-reinforcing process.

After its first international experience in Paraguay the company started operating in several countries using the same franchise strategy. At this point the firm experienced a lock-in, for its actions were limited to its inefficient strategy (SYDOW; SCHREYÖGG; KOCH, 2009), evident in each international market exit. Although the main reasons for international operations withdraw having been associated with the lack of franchisees' capacity and inadequate location (Table 4), business model strategic decision was the source of obstacles faced by Carmen Steffens abroad. That way, from international operation failure, the firm managed to disrupt its path and started to operate by opening its own stores – to be franchised later: *"Usually, when we enter a country, we keep the store for two years to understand it and to invest in winning customers."* (CEO, 2018 – SEC).

In short, the case showed path dependence at different times. Thus, we identified three types of paths dependence: domestic path dependence; Paraguay path dependence; and regional path dependence (see Table 4).

Table 4 - Characteristics of types of path dependence

Countries	Entry Period	Countries	Exit Period	Reason to leave the country	Path Dependence
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Brazil	1993	-	-	-	Domestic Path Dependence: given by the construction of company's capabilities and knowledge in the domestic market.
Paraguay	2002	-	-	-	Path Dependence Transition: occurred right after the company's internationalization.
Portugal, United States, Argentina, Australia, and Uruguay	2004-2007	Portugal	2008	Portugal: due to the 2008 crisis that hit the country associated with the lack of capacity of franchisees and the inadequate point of the store.	Path Dependence Transition.
Spain, Angola, Bolivia, France, South Africa, Mozambique, Saudi Arabia, Peru, Tunisia, and Jordan	2009-2014	Spain, Australia, South Africa, Mozambique, Tunisia, Jordan and Saudi Arabia	2010-2014	Spain: inadequate location; Australia: not the right city; South Africa: inadequate location; Mozambique: high taxes; Tunisia: mismanagement of the franchisee; Jordan: mismanagement of the franchisee; Saudi Arabia: problem with the franchisee.	Path Dependence Transition.
Guatemala, Costa Rica, Chile, Caribbean, Aruba, Puerto Rico, Panama, Colombia and Mexico	2014-2019	-	-	-	Regional Path Dependence: begins to form after expansion of the company to geographically close countries.

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2021).

In the domestic market, regarding company's resources and capabilities, path dependence was altered after internationalization. It is also possible to identify path dependence

during the expansion of internationalization. The Paraguayan model was replicated in different countries, even in geographically distant countries. Without a gradual internationalization strategy, the company began opening franchises in countries that had individuals showing interest in becoming a franchisee, like in the case of Paraguay. Thus, the closing of stores abroad marked a disruption of company's path dependence.

4.2 Strategic renewal and international survival

Carmen Steffens has been renewing its strategy along the way. After the internationalization move to Paraguay, it began to learn not only from the domestic market, but also from foreign markets. After the feedback on the handbags not having a good reception by Paraguayan customers, an external factor related to consumer behavior (AMANKWAH-AMOA; KHAN; OSABUTEY, 2021), the company stopped outsourcing them and started developing the products by its own. Market changes led Carmen Steffens to integrate, build and reconfigure its internal and external competences, changing the manufacturing of one of its products. The dynamic capabilities that drove the company to an incremental strategic renewal (AGARWAL; HELFAT, 2009), have led Carmen Steffens to alter, but not disrupt its path dependence. Through its exploration and exploitation capabilities, together with the organization's resources (TEECE, 2018), the company internalized the manufacturing of handbags, adapting the firm to changes in the external environment.

This was possible due to the company's capability of noticing the market needs through its network (exploration capability) and developing new products internally (exploitation capability). These capabilities were part of Carmen Steffens' renewal process, where organizational learning was critical (CROSSAN; LANE; WHITE, 1999).

Since the beginning of the internationalization process, the firm on this case study has been learning and building its path based on the importance of listening to its franchisees, who are in direct contact with clients and the market. CEO's skills, reflected in the company, are recognized by the Paraguayan Franchisee, who perceives the company's ability to renew itself through what was learned from franchisees: *"He listens to what every person has to say, listens to everyone, then he gets the best ideas of each one, interprets them and changes them."* (FrancParag).

Foreign market operation and its growth happened through new franchises, partnerships that emerged from company's participation in fairs and the direct contact with people interested in the brand. However, the company's path was not built only by success. Exits from

international markets configured critical events that led the company to change international operation. Currently, before transferring its stores to franchisees, the company runs the stores for two years in order to learn about the local market, win customers, and support the initial costs of the business. Failing to achieve international survival in some markets, the firm has strategically renewed, using its exploration and exploitation capabilities, to disrupt path dependence.

The company realized its weak points and, besides having changed its entry mode into foreign markets and selecting appropriate modes of capabilities supply (CAPRON; MITCHELL, 2009), changed franchisees' selection criteria: *"There were people who came to Brazil, liked our brand and wanted to open a store. This was a phase we had to eliminate from our life."* (CEO).

Our case study shows that the path the company was taking to enter international markets based on people interested in the brand and who had the capital to open stores was rejected. In addition, the speed of internationalization that led the company to operate at inappropriate spots no longer occurs, as the company has learned to be more cautious. This also reveals the importance of entry time in the international survival of a company (HAWK; ALMEIDA; YEUNG, 2013), where the adoption of late, slow and cautious sequential expansion is less error-prone (MESCHI; RICARD; MOORE, 2017).

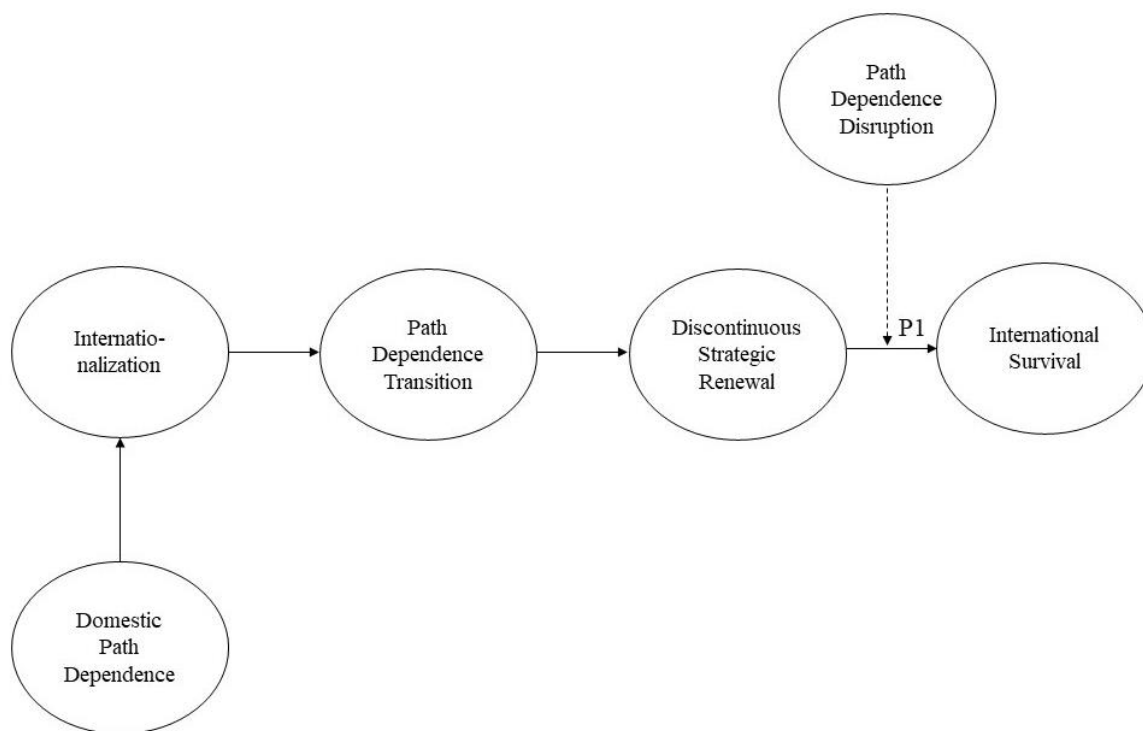
Thus, this case study reveals that the strategy of location, time, venture mode decisions (RIVIERE; SUDER, 2016), internationalization knowledge (RIVIERE; SUDER; BASS, 2018), dynamic capabilities and resource base (INIGO; ALBAREDA, 2019) were at the mercy of path dependence transition, that is, the dependence that occurs right after the firm's internationalization, and which lasts until the moment when the firm renews itself strategically, and disrupts with its path dependence. Despite our data showing strategic renewal is a process that takes place over time (EDWARDS; MOLZ, 2020), from what the firm has learned, the case also reveals it was necessary to strategically renew in a discontinuous manner (AGARWAL; HELFAT, 2009) to disrupt path dependence (SCHMITT; RAISCH; VOLBERDA, 2018), particularly path dependence transition, marked by firm's limited capacities, still dependent on home market (emerging market). Nonetheless, we can infer just the exogenous shock, caused by exits from international markets, would not be sufficient for firms to strategically renew; for that, it would require a recombination of knowledge. (STACHE; SYDOW, 2022). Thus, the discontinuous strategic renewal was driven by the critical events and by the capabilities of exploration (new international learning) and exploitation (development of knowledge).

Driven by dynamic capabilities (RIVIERE; SUDER, 2016), in our case study, strategic renewal included the ability to explore and exploit (JAKA; WAHYUNI; SUTYARJOKO, 2022). Exploration capability can be identified as the ability to innovate, be flexible and learn from operating markets and to perceive the market's dynamic movements. The capability of exploitation relates to the ability of transferring and incorporating new forms of action, selection of franchisees, and expansion time (as in waiting for a perfect spot for the store). Bohnsack, Kurtz and Hanelt (2021) affirm the integration of digital technology in business models may help to break path dependence. Although innovation is part of exploration capability, our case study reveals that a discontinuous strategic renewal (AGARWAL; HELFAT, 2009) led to the disruption of path dependence, which opened the way for a new international strategy, focused on expanding to a single region. Thus, despite the knowledge accumulated through company's path (ERIKSSON; MAJKGARD; SHARMA, 2000), it was necessary to renew itself strategically to disrupt with dependence and survive internationally. Hence, we propose:

Proposition 1. The international survival of companies is positively associated with discontinuous strategic renewal, which implies the disruption of path dependence.

Despite the firm having implemented an incremental strategic renewal regarding bags manufacture, discontinuous strategic renewal was necessary in order to disrupt the transition path dependence that had formed after the process of internationalization. Discontinuous strategic renewal brought changes to the business model and organizational mentality (AGARWAL; HELFAT, 2009), that is, the firm changed its entrance manner during new expansions and the form through which it selected franchisees, as well as its location choices. Incremental strategic renewal was boosted not only by exploration and exploitation capabilities, but also by the critical event of international market exits. We summarize the emerging framework from our analysis of this case study in Figure 2.

Figure 2 - Conceptual framework and Proposition



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2021).

The emerging framework reveals that the internationalization process was influenced by domestic path dependence, revealing company's capacity constraints. However, after internationalization, the company had access to a new network and knowledge, which generated a path dependence transition. In turn, strategic renewal came to be influenced by path dependence transition. To strategically renew itself discontinuously, it was then necessary to disrupt with path dependence, which led to company's international survival (Proposition 1).

5 FINAL REMARKS

Given the ever-changing IB environment, this study provides a rationale to explain how firms, when under the influence of path dependence, manage to strategically renew themselves and disrupt their path dependence to survive in international markets. Based on a processual and historical approach, the analysis of our case study identified disruption of path dependence in association with the discontinuous strategic renewal. We have also found strong evidence about the relations and connections between international survival and discontinuous strategic renewal.

Our study contributes to the IB literature by answering a research question on how firms strategic renew themselves to disrupt path dependence in order to attain long term prosperity.

Regarding path dependence in the internationalization process, our results had pointed to the existence of path dependence transition, a kind of path dependence that emerging market firms can reach soon after internationalization, influencing these firms until the moment they manage to renew in a discontinuous manner. Our study also contributes to the strategic renewal literature by providing new insights over how firms develop ambidextrous learning capabilities and deal with strategic renewal, adapting their business models to respond to external challenges (AMANKWAH-AMOA; KHAN; OSABUTEY, 2021). Finally, our case study shows discontinuous strategic renewal, driven by critical events and by exploration and exploitation capabilities, will implicate in the disruption of path dependence transition, bringing long term international survival.

During a crisis, strategic renewal is essential for organizational success (JAKA; WAHYUNI; SUTYARJOKO, 2022). However, with the accelerated changes in foreign environments, managers are constantly confronted with dynamic environments, which demand exploring new opportunities and exploiting performance (MORETTI; ALVES; BOMTEMPO, 2020). Hence, considering the implications for managerial practices, path dependence should be considered by managers, who need to get rid of obsolete knowledge and strengthen their exploration and exploitation capabilities in favor of strategic renewal, which, being important for international survival, should be part of firm's strategy.

Moreover, our results suggest that, especially for franchise firms, as in the case studied, managers need to carefully consider the internationalization process and the choices of their international franchisees and destination countries if they seek survival: entering and exiting foreign markets entails large costs for firms.

We recognize that despite the contribution of the study, some limitations need to be pointed out. First, our study offers the analysis of a single case, therefore, a larger sample would increase the generalization of the results and provide a better understanding of the subject under study. Second, future studies are necessary to obtain a complete understanding of international survival and its association with strategic renewal and, consequently, with the disrupt of path dependence. Third, future studies are necessary to obtain a complete understanding of path dependence transition, to investigate how this dependence influences the international expansion of companies in different contexts.

Finally, our case highlights the role of the entrepreneur in the internationalization of the firm, which is seen by the IB literature as a form of compensating the lack of resources and capabilities of the country of origin in the case of emerging market firms (CUERVO-

CAZURRA; NARULA, 2015). Hence, IB field studies could distinguish between firms form emerging and developed markets.

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