



UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

Department Of Economics and Management

Master Programme In International Business and Entrepreneurship

**Cross-Border E-Commerce as an Internationalization Pathway for Turkish Digital
Entrepreneurs: A Secondary Data Analysis of Barriers, Enablers and Strategic Choices**

Supervisor:

Prof. Fabio Marazzi

Berk Kemal Özkan

Academic Year 2026-2027

Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the support, guidance, and encouragement of a number of people to whom I owe my deepest gratitude.

First and foremost, I would like to express my most sincere and heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Fabio Marazzi, for his invaluable guidance, patience, and constructive feedback throughout every stage of this research. From the earliest and most uncertain phase of shaping a research topic, through the long process of reviewing literature, structuring arguments, and refining the analysis, his expertise, thoughtful critique, and genuine encouragement consistently pushed me to think more rigorously and to hold my own work to a higher standard. He was always generous with his time, willing to answer questions, offer clarity when I felt lost, and provide the kind of honest, constructive feedback that made this thesis significantly stronger than it would otherwise have been. I feel fortunate to have completed this journey under his supervision, and I am deeply grateful for the trust and confidence he placed in me and in this project from the very beginning.

I would also like to extend my deepest thanks to my family, whose unwavering love, patience, and support have been the foundation of everything I have accomplished throughout my academic journey. Pursuing this degree far from home, in Pavia, was not always an easy path, and there were moments of doubt and difficulty along the way. Yet no matter the distance, my family's belief in me never wavered, and their encouragement gave me the strength and motivation to keep moving forward, even during the most demanding periods of this research. I am endlessly grateful for their sacrifices, their patience, and the quiet, constant support that allowed me to pursue this path with confidence, knowing that I always had them behind me.

I would further like to thank the faculty and staff of the International Business and Entrepreneurship – Digital Management program at the University of Pavia, whose teaching and mentorship over the course of this degree provided the academic foundation upon which this thesis was built. The knowledge, critical thinking skills, and international perspective I gained throughout the program shaped not only this research but also the way I approach problems and ideas more broadly.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues who supported me, in ways both large and small, throughout this process, whether through encouragement during moments of stress, thoughtful conversations that helped clarify my thinking, or simply their presence and patience along the way. This thesis is the product not only of my own effort but of the support of everyone mentioned here, and I am sincerely grateful to each of them.

Abstract

L'e-commerce transfrontaliero è emerso come un percorso di internazionalizzazione significativo per gli imprenditori digitali nelle economie in via di sviluppo, sebbene le sue dinamiche non siano state ancora sufficientemente esaminate nel contesto turco. Questa tesi indaga le barriere, i fattori abilitanti e le scelte strategiche che caratterizzano le attività di e-commerce transfrontaliero degli imprenditori digitali e delle PMI turche, attraverso un'analisi approfondita di dati secondari. Basandosi teoricamente sul Modello di Uppsala, sulla Born Global Theory e sul Framework OLI di Dunning, lo studio attinge alla letteratura accademica, alle statistiche del commercio internazionale e ai report di settore. I risultati evidenziano barriere di natura regolamentare, logistica e finanziaria, accanto a rilevanti fattori abilitanti quali gli incentivi governativi all'e-export, l'infrastruttura delle piattaforme digitali e il posizionamento geopolitico favorevole della Turchia. Offrendo una prospettiva propria dei mercati emergenti alla letteratura sull'imprenditorialità digitale e sull'internazionalizzazione, la tesi propone implicazioni rilevanti per imprenditori, operatori di piattaforme e policymaker.

Parole chiave: e-commerce transfrontaliero, imprenditorialità digitale, internazionalizzazione, Turchia, PMI, Born Global Theory, Framework OLI, economia delle piattaforme.

Abstract

Cross-border e-commerce has emerged as a significant internationalization pathway for digital entrepreneurs in developing economies, yet its dynamics remain insufficiently examined within the Turkish context. This thesis investigates the barriers, enabling factors, and strategic choices characterizing the cross-border e-commerce activities of Turkish digital entrepreneurs and SMEs through a comprehensive secondary data analysis. Drawing theoretically on the Uppsala Model, Born Global Theory, and Dunning's OLI Framework, the study draws on academic literature, international trade statistics, and industry reports. The findings highlight regulatory, logistical, and financial barriers alongside notable enabling factors such as government e-export incentives, platform infrastructure, and Turkey's favorable geopolitical positioning. By bringing an emerging market perspective to the digital entrepreneurship and internationalization literature, the thesis offers implications for entrepreneurs, platform operators, and policymakers.

Keywords: cross-border e-commerce, digital entrepreneurship, internationalization, Turkey, SMEs, Born Global Theory, OLI Framework, platform economy.

Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	6
1.1 Overview	6
1.2 Research Background and Motivation	6
1.3 Research Aim and Questions.....	8
1.4 Significance and Contribution of the Study	9
1.5 Structure of the Thesis.....	11
Chapter 2 Literature Review.....	12
2.1 Overview	12
2.2 Internationalization Theories.....	13
2.3 The Uppsala Model	15
2.4 Born Global Theory	17
2.5 Dunning's OLI Framework	19
2.6 Digital Entrepreneurship	21
2.7 Cross-Border E-Commerce and Platform Ecosystems.....	24
2.8 Turkey as an Emerging Digital Economy	26
Chapter 3 Context and Data Sources	28
3.1 Overview	28
3.2 Turkey's E-Commerce Landscape	29
3.3 Key Institutional and Statistical Sources.....	33
3.4 Industry Reports and Market Data	35
3.5 Academic Literature Selection Criteria	36
Chapter 4 Methodology	37
4.1 Overview	37
4.2 Research Design and Epistemological Positioning	38
4.3 Secondary Data Analysis as a Method	40
4.4 Analytical Framework.....	41
4.5 Quality and Reliability of Data	44
4.6 Limitations	46
Chapter 5 Findings.....	48
5.1 Overview	48
5.2 Barriers to Cross-Border E-Commerce	48
5.3 Enablers of Cross-Border E-Commerce.....	53
5.4 Strategic Choices of Turkish Digital Entrepreneurs.....	56
Chapter 6 Discussion.....	60
6.1 Overview	60
6.2 Barriers in Theoretical Perspective	61
6.3 Enablers and the Born Global Phenomenon.....	62
6.4 Strategic Choices and the OLI Framework	64
6.5 Implications for Theory, Practice and Policy	66
Chapter 7 Conclusion	67
7.1 Overview	68
7.2 Summary of Key Findings	68
7.3 Theoretical Contributions.....	70
7.4 Directions for Future Research	72
Bibliography	75

Index of Charts and Tables

Table 2.1. Comparison of the Three Internationalization Frameworks Applied in This Thesis

Table 3.1. Turkey's E-Commerce and Cross-Border Trade Trajectory, 2019–2024

Table 5.1. Summary of Barriers, Enablers, and Strategic Choices Identified

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

The global economy has undergone a profound structural transformation over the past two decades, driven by the rapid digitalization of commerce and the emergence of platform-based marketplaces that connect buyers and sellers across national borders. Cross-border e-commerce has grown from a niche activity into a mainstream feature of international trade, with UNCTAD (2023) estimating that approximately 21% of global e-commerce revenues now derive from cross-border transactions. For small firms and individual entrepreneurs, this shift has opened access to international markets that were once reserved for large corporations with the resources to establish physical presences abroad. Turkey presents a particularly compelling case within this landscape. With a population of approximately 85 million, an internet penetration rate of 83.4%, and e-commerce revenues reaching USD 27.7 billion in 2024 (DataReportal, 2023; Antom Knowledge, 2026), the country combines a young, digitally engaged population with a strategic geographic position bridging European, Middle Eastern, and Central Asian markets. Despite these structural advantages, the internationalization of Turkish digital entrepreneurs through cross-border e-commerce remains an underexplored area in academic literature. This thesis addresses that gap. Through a secondary data analysis drawing on trade statistics, institutional reports, and academic literature, it examines the barriers, enablers, and strategic choices that shape how Turkish digital entrepreneurs engage with cross-border e-commerce as a pathway to international markets.

1.2 Research Background and Motivation

The academic study of firm internationalization has a long and well-established history, yet the theoretical frameworks that dominate the field were largely developed in contexts that bear

little resemblance to the realities facing today's digital entrepreneurs in emerging economies. The Uppsala Model, introduced by Johanson and Vahlne (1977) and later revised (2009), conceptualizes internationalization as a gradual, sequential process driven by experiential learning and the progressive accumulation of market knowledge. Born Global theory, advanced by Oviatt and McDougall (1994) and further developed by Knight and Cavusgil (2004), challenged this incrementalist view by documenting firms that internationalize rapidly from or near their inception. Dunning's OLI Framework (1980, 2001), meanwhile, offers a systematic account of the ownership, location, and internalization advantages that determine how and where firms choose to expand internationally. Together, these three perspectives have shaped decades of research on how firms cross borders. What has changed significantly in recent years, however, is the environment in which internationalization takes place. The proliferation of global e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, Etsy, and Alibaba, alongside regional players like Trendyol and Hepsiburada, has fundamentally altered the entry conditions for international markets. Entrepreneurs no longer need to establish foreign subsidiaries, build local distribution networks, or navigate complex bilateral trade relationships in order to reach foreign consumers. A seller in Istanbul can list a product on Amazon.com and receive an order from a customer in Germany within the same afternoon. This compression of time, cost, and organizational complexity represents a qualitative shift in the internationalization process, one that existing theoretical frameworks only partially capture. Turkey's position within this evolving landscape is both significant and underappreciated. Since 2019, the value of Turkey's e-commerce trade has grown from USD 3.9 billion to USD 53.9 billion in 2023, while e-export volumes rose from USD 2.2 billion in 2022 to USD 6.4 billion in 2024 (International Trade Council, 2023; Consultancy.me, 2025). These figures point to a rapidly expanding base of entrepreneurs engaging with international digital markets. Yet despite this growth, Turkish digital entrepreneurs remain largely absent from the internationalization literature, which has tended

to focus on larger, more extensively studied economies. This absence is not merely an academic oversight; it represents a genuine gap in our understanding of how platform-driven internationalization operates in a mid-sized emerging economy with a distinctive institutional and demographic profile. The motivation for this thesis therefore arises from both an empirical and a theoretical concern. Empirically, there is a need to document and analyze what is actually happening among Turkish digital entrepreneurs who are using cross-border e-commerce platforms to reach international markets. Theoretically, there is value in testing the extent to which established internationalization frameworks can account for these dynamics, and in identifying where they fall short. By bringing these two concerns together through a systematic analysis of secondary data, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of digital entrepreneurship and internationalization in the contemporary global economy.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

This thesis sets out to examine cross-border e-commerce as a pathway through which Turkish digital entrepreneurs pursue international market access. The central aim is to identify the barriers that constrain this process, the enablers that support it, and the strategic choices entrepreneurs make as they navigate foreign markets through digital platforms. In pursuing this aim, the study aims to speak both to the academic literature on internationalization and digital entrepreneurship and to the practical concerns of entrepreneurs and policymakers seeking to strengthen Turkey's position in global digital trade.

To operationalize this aim, the thesis is guided by the following three research questions:

RQ1: What are the primary barriers that Turkish digital entrepreneurs face when engaging in cross-border e-commerce, and how do these compare to patterns observed in other emerging market contexts?

RQ2: What institutional, technological, and firm-level factors enable Turkish digital entrepreneurs to internationalize successfully through cross-border e-commerce platforms?

RQ3: What strategic choices, in terms of platform selection, market targeting, and value proposition, characterize the internationalization pathways of Turkish digital entrepreneurs?

These questions are broad enough to accommodate the exploratory character of a secondary data analysis, while remaining focused enough to yield findings that can be meaningfully compared and interpreted. They also correspond directly to the three thematic pillars, barriers, enablers, and strategic choices, around which the findings chapter of this thesis is subsequently organized.

1.4 Significance and Contribution of the Study

This thesis makes several contributions that extend beyond a straightforward empirical account of Turkish digital entrepreneurship. Theoretically, it engages with a body of internationalization literature that has increasingly recognized its own limitations when applied to digitally mediated firms. Yang et al. (2025), in a systematic review of digital firm internationalization, note that traditional international business theories, including internalization theory, the OLI framework, and the internationalization process model, were developed predominantly in the context of conventional multinational enterprises, and that research on how these theories extend to digital and platform-based firms remains fragmented

and lacks an integrated framework. This thesis responds to that observation by applying the Uppsala Model, Born Global Theory, and the OLI Framework specifically to a population of platform-dependent digital entrepreneurs in an emerging market context, allowing for a grounded assessment of where these frameworks hold and where they require adaptation. From a practical standpoint, the study offers value to Turkish digital entrepreneurs and to the small firms and individual sellers who make up the bulk of the country's cross-border e-commerce activity. By systematically mapping the barriers and enablers that shape international expansion through digital platforms, the thesis provides a reference point that entrepreneurs can draw on when making decisions about platform selection, target market prioritization, and the sequencing of their own internationalization efforts. This is particularly relevant given that much of the existing guidance available to Turkish entrepreneurs is fragmented across platform-specific documentation, government circulars, and informal peer networks rather than presented as a coherent analytical picture. At the policy level, the thesis contributes to ongoing discussions about how Turkey can strengthen its position in global digital trade. Given that Turkish e-export volumes grew from USD 2.2 billion in 2022 to USD 6.4 billion in 2024 (Consultancy.me, 2025), and that recent regulatory changes such as the 2024 customs amendments have direct implications for cross-border sellers (U.S. International Trade Administration, 2025), there is a clear and current need for research that can inform the design of supportive policy instruments, including e-export incentive schemes, digital infrastructure investment, and trade facilitation measures. Taken together, these contributions position the thesis at the intersection of theory and practice. It does not claim to resolve the broader theoretical debates surrounding digital firm internationalization, nor does it attempt to offer a definitive policy blueprint. Rather, it aims to provide a rigorous, contextually grounded analysis that can serve as a reference point for future academic research, for entrepreneurs navigating international digital markets, and for policymakers seeking to support them. It is equally

important to be clear about what this thesis does not attempt to do. The analysis presented here is not a firm-level case study of individual Turkish digital entrepreneurs, nor does it attempt to quantify the causal effect of any single barrier or enabler on internationalization outcomes; claims of that kind would require primary data of a kind that falls outside the secondary data approach adopted here, as discussed further in Chapter 4. Nor does this thesis attempt to cover the full breadth of Turkey's domestic e-commerce activity; its focus is specifically on the cross-border dimension of that activity, and domestic e-commerce dynamics are addressed in Chapter 3 only insofar as they establish the baseline environment from which Turkish entrepreneurs' international activity emerges. Defining the scope of the study in these terms makes explicit, from the outset, the kind of contribution this thesis is positioned to make, and the kind of claims it is not positioned to support.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relevant to the study, beginning with the three internationalization frameworks that anchor the theoretical analysis, the Uppsala Model, Born Global Theory, and Dunning's OLI Framework, before turning to the literature on digital entrepreneurship and the specific dynamics of cross-border e-commerce and platform ecosystems. The chapter closes by situating Turkey within this literature and identifying the gap that the thesis addresses. Chapter 3 introduces the empirical context of the study, outlining Turkey's e-commerce landscape and the key institutional, statistical, and industry sources that inform the analysis. Chapter 4 sets out the methodology, explaining the rationale for a secondary data analysis approach, the criteria used to select and evaluate sources, and the analytical framework applied to the data. Chapter 5 presents the findings, organized around the three thematic pillars established in the research questions: the barriers Turkish digital entrepreneurs

face in cross-border e-commerce, the enablers that support their internationalization, and the strategic choices that characterize their engagement with foreign markets. Chapter 6 discusses these findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 2, considering their implications for internationalization theory as well as for practice and policy. Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarizing the principal findings, outlining the study's theoretical and practical contributions, acknowledging its limitations, and proposing directions for future research.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This chapter reviews the bodies of literature that inform the theoretical and empirical foundations of this thesis. It begins with an examination of internationalization theory, focusing on the three frameworks that anchor the analysis: the Uppsala Model, Born Global Theory, and Dunning's OLI Framework. Each of these is discussed in terms of its core propositions, its historical development, and its relevance and limitations when applied to digitally mediated firms. The chapter then turns to the literature on digital entrepreneurship, establishing how this concept has been defined and how it differs from more traditional understandings of entrepreneurial activity. This is followed by a review of cross-border e-commerce and platform ecosystems, which examines how digital marketplaces have reshaped the conditions under which small firms and individual entrepreneurs access foreign markets. The chapter closes by situating Turkey within this broader literature, drawing together the threads discussed throughout the chapter to identify the specific gap that this thesis addresses.

2.2 Internationalization Theories

Internationalization has been a central concern of international business research for several decades, and the field has produced a range of theoretical frameworks that attempt to explain why, how, and when firms expand beyond their domestic markets. Three of these frameworks are particularly relevant to this thesis: the Uppsala Model, Born Global Theory, and Dunning's OLI Framework. Each was developed in a different theoretical tradition and emphasizes a different set of mechanisms, yet together they provide a complementary set of lenses through which the internationalization of Turkish digital entrepreneurs can be examined. The Uppsala Model, developed by Johanson and Vahlne (1977), represents one of the earliest and most influential attempts to explain internationalization as a process. It conceptualizes international expansion as gradual and incremental, driven by the accumulation of experiential knowledge and the reduction of psychic distance over time. Born Global Theory, in contrast, emerged from observations that some firms internationalize rapidly, often from or near their founding, challenging the sequential logic of the Uppsala Model. Oviatt and McDougall (1994) were among the first to systematically document this phenomenon, and Knight and Cavusgil (2004) later extended the concept by examining the capabilities that allow such firms to compete internationally despite their limited size and resources. Dunning's OLI Framework, first articulated in 1980 and refined in subsequent decades, offers a different kind of contribution: rather than describing a process, it identifies the ownership, location, and internalization advantages that determine whether, where, and how a firm chooses to engage in international activity. These three frameworks are not mutually exclusive, and the following sections examine each in turn before considering how their combined application can illuminate the internationalization behavior of digital entrepreneurs operating through cross-border e-

commerce platforms. Alongside these three process- and mode-based theories of internationalization, a parallel and more applied stream of research has focused specifically on the barriers that constrain, and the stimuli that encourage, small and medium-sized firms' engagement in exporting, a tradition that speaks directly to the analytical structure adopted in this thesis. Leonidou (2004), synthesizing thirty-two empirical studies into a taxonomy of thirty-nine distinct export barriers, distinguishes between internal barriers, arising from a firm's own informational, functional, and marketing limitations, and external barriers, arising from procedural, governmental, task-related, and broader environmental conditions beyond the firm's control, and finds that the practical impact of any given barrier is highly situation-specific, depending on the particular managerial, organizational, and environmental circumstances of the firm in question. Leonidou, Katsikeas, Palihawadana, and Spyropoulou (2007) provide a complementary analytical review of the stimuli, or enabling factors, that encourage smaller firms to begin and sustain export activity, arguing that such stimuli, much like barriers, can be usefully classified according to whether they originate internally within the firm or externally within its operating environment, and that effective policy intervention depends on correctly identifying which category of stimulus is most binding for a given population of firms. This barriers-and-stimuli tradition, distinct from but complementary to the Uppsala Model, Born Global Theory, and the OLI Framework discussed below, provides the direct conceptual scaffolding for the three-part analytical structure, barriers, enablers, and strategic choices, around which the findings of this thesis, presented in Chapter 5, are organized; where the Uppsala Model, Born Global Theory, and the OLI Framework offer competing accounts of how and why internationalization happens, the barriers-and-stimuli literature offers a more granular, applied vocabulary for cataloguing the specific conditions that shape whether it happens at all, a vocabulary this thesis adapts from its traditional focus on physical-goods exporting to the digitally mediated, platform-based context of Turkish cross-border e-commerce.

2.3 The Uppsala Model

The Uppsala Model, first developed by Johanson and Vahlne (1977), remains one of the most widely cited frameworks in international business research. Building on empirical observations of Swedish manufacturing firms, Johanson and Vahlne proposed that internationalization is best understood not as a series of discrete, rational investment decisions, but as an incremental process shaped by the gradual accumulation of experiential knowledge about foreign markets. According to the original model, firms typically begin their international expansion in psychically close markets, meaning similar in language, culture, business practices, and industrial development, before moving toward psychically distant markets as their experience and confidence grow. This progression is often described through what has become known as the "establishment chain," in which firms move from irregular export activities, to exporting via independent representatives, to the establishment of foreign sales subsidiaries, and eventually to foreign production. The model rests on a central feedback loop between knowledge and commitment. As firms gain market-specific knowledge through operational experience, they become more willing to commit greater resources to that market, and this deeper commitment in turn generates further learning. This dynamic explains why the model treats internationalization as path-dependent and gradual rather than as the outcome of a single strategic decision. Three decades after the model's original publication, Johanson and Vahlne (2009) revisited their own framework in light of substantial changes in the global business environment. In this revision, the authors shifted their central concern from the liability of foreignness, the disadvantage a firm faces simply by operating outside its home market, toward what they termed the liability of outsidership: the disadvantage a firm faces from being outside relevant business networks in a foreign market, regardless of its prior international experience. This reformulation reframed the foreign market environment less as a neoclassical market

composed of independent buyers and sellers, and more as a web of interconnected relationships that firms must enter and build trust within in order to succeed. The relevance of the Uppsala Model to this thesis lies in the tension it creates when applied to digitally mediated internationalization. The model's core logic, that firms internationalize gradually as they accumulate experiential knowledge and reduce psychic distance, was developed in an era when market entry required physical presence, direct negotiation, and sustained relationship-building over time. Cross-border e-commerce platforms compress many of these traditional stages. A Turkish entrepreneur listing products on Amazon or Etsy can, in principle, reach dozens of foreign markets simultaneously without the sequential, market-by-market progression the Uppsala Model describes. At the same time, the model's emphasis on network relationships, particularly as reformulated in the 2009 revision, retains relevance: digital entrepreneurs still depend on trust-building with foreign customers, marketplace intermediaries, and logistics partners, even if this trust is established through platform mechanisms such as reviews and ratings rather than direct interpersonal relationships. This tension between the model's continued relevance and its evident limitations in a digital context is examined further in Chapter 6. The Uppsala Model has not been without its critics, and situating its use in this thesis requires engaging with these critiques directly. Andersen (1993), in an early and influential critical analysis, evaluated the model against standard criteria for theory evaluation and concluded that its explanatory power is limited for firms in high-technology sectors, service industries, or contexts where internationalization is not primarily driven by the pursuit of new markets, precisely the profile that characterizes many digitally native entrepreneurs. Andersen's critique further noted that the model is more descriptive than predictive, offering a plausible account of how internationalization has tended to unfold historically without clearly specifying the conditions under which firms might deviate from this pattern. For the purposes of this thesis, this critique serves as a useful caution against applying the Uppsala Model as a rigid predictive

framework to Turkish digital entrepreneurs; rather, it is used here, consistent with its more recent applications, as a descriptive lens for identifying where gradualist patterns persist and where they visibly break down under digital, platform-mediated conditions.

2.4 Born Global Theory

Where the Uppsala Model treats internationalization as a gradual process unfolding over years, Born Global Theory emerged from the observation that a growing number of firms defy this pattern entirely. Oviatt and McDougall (1994) were among the first to formally theorize this phenomenon, introducing the concept of the "international new venture": a firm that, from or near its founding, seeks to derive significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and the sale of outputs in multiple countries. Their framework identified four conditions that distinguish such firms from traditional multinational enterprises, including a reliance on internalizing certain transactions rather than relying purely on markets, the use of alternative governance structures to access resources without owning them outright, the pursuit of location-specific advantages abroad, and control over some form of unique or difficult-to-imitate resource. This early theorization was significant because it directly challenged the incrementalist assumptions underlying the Uppsala Model. Rather than treating rapid internationalization as an anomaly, Oviatt and McDougall argued that changing conditions, including more accessible information about foreign markets, lower-cost transportation, and the increasing importance of knowledge-based rather than physical resources, were making early and rapid internationalization a viable and increasingly common strategic path. Knight and Cavusgil (2004) extended this line of research by examining what specifically allows born-global firms to succeed internationally despite the resource constraints typical of young firms. Drawing on case studies validated through survey-based research, they found that born-global

firms tend to compensate for their limited scale through a distinctive combination of innovative organizational culture, knowledge-intensive capabilities, and a strong international marketing orientation, a managerial disposition toward creating value for customers in foreign markets rather than treating international sales as a secondary extension of domestic operations. Their findings suggested that competitive advantage in early internationalization stems less from accumulated experiential knowledge, as the Uppsala Model would predict, and more from the firm's capacity to leverage intangible, knowledge-based resources quickly and flexibly across borders. Born Global Theory offers a markedly different lens through which to examine Turkish digital entrepreneurs than the Uppsala Model does. Digital platforms lower many of the traditional barriers that historically constrained early internationalization, including the need for physical distribution infrastructure, in-country representation, and large capital outlays. A small Turkish enterprise selling handcrafted goods on Etsy, for instance, can reach international customers from its very first transaction, without the sequential market-by-market progression that characterizes the Uppsala framework. At the same time, Knight and Cavusgil's emphasis on innovative capability and international marketing orientation raises an important empirical question for this thesis: to what extent do Turkish digital entrepreneurs actually possess and deploy these capabilities, and to what extent does rapid market access through a platform substitute for, rather than require, the kind of organizational sophistication the Born Global literature describes? This question is taken up directly in the findings and discussion chapters. Born Global Theory has also faced sustained critique, most notably concerning the definitional inconsistency that has characterized the field since its inception. Rialp, Rialp, and Knight (2005), in a comprehensive review of research on early internationalizing firms conducted over the decade following Oviatt and McDougall's original contribution, observed that researchers in this area have tended to develop their own idiosyncratic lists of defining characteristics and success factors, producing a body of literature that is empirically rich but conceptually

fragmented, with little consensus on the precise thresholds for firm age, export intensity, or speed of internationalization that would qualify a firm as genuinely born global. This lack of definitional consensus complicates the direct application of Born Global Theory to any specific population, including the Turkish digital entrepreneurs examined in this thesis, since the theory does not offer a single, stable operational definition against which such entrepreneurs can be straightforwardly measured. Rather than treating Born Global Theory as a strict classificatory tool, this thesis therefore uses it as a broad conceptual lens for understanding accelerated, resource-light internationalization, while remaining attentive to the heterogeneity that the underlying literature itself acknowledges.

2.5 Dunning's OLI Framework

Dunning's eclectic paradigm, commonly known as the OLI Framework, takes a fundamentally different approach from the process-oriented theories discussed in the preceding sections. Rather than describing how internationalization unfolds over time, Dunning (1980) set out to explain why firms choose to engage in international production in the first place, and what determines the specific mode through which they do so. The framework identifies three categories of advantage that jointly determine a firm's international strategy: ownership advantages, location advantages, and internalization advantages, from which the acronym OLI is derived. Ownership advantages refer to firm-specific assets or capabilities, such as proprietary technology, brand reputation, managerial expertise, or economies of scale, that give a firm a competitive edge over local competitors in a foreign market. Location advantages concern the characteristics of a particular foreign market that make it attractive as a site for business activity, including factors such as market size, labor costs, regulatory conditions, and infrastructure quality. Internalization advantages address the question of governance: whether it is more efficient for a firm to exploit its ownership advantages internally, through direct

control of foreign operations, or externally, through arm's-length arrangements such as licensing or contracting with independent local partners. According to the framework, a firm is most likely to engage in foreign direct investment when it possesses meaningful ownership advantages, when the target location offers genuine location-specific benefits, and when internalizing the relevant transactions is more efficient than relying on external market mechanisms. Dunning (2001) later revisited the framework to account for developments that had reshaped the international business environment since 1980, including the growing importance of knowledge-based assets, the rise of strategic alliances, and the increasing role of created, rather than natural, location advantages such as specialized skills clusters and innovation ecosystems. This revision retained the essential OLI structure while acknowledging that the sources of ownership and location advantage were evolving in ways that gave firms considerably more flexibility in how they organized international activity. The OLI Framework was developed with large, resource-rich multinational enterprises engaged in foreign direct investment primarily in mind, which raises questions about its direct applicability to small-scale digital entrepreneurs operating through e-commerce platforms. Nonetheless, its three-part logic remains a useful analytical lens when adapted to this context. Ownership advantages for a Turkish digital entrepreneur might take the form of a distinctive product, design capability, or brand identity rather than proprietary technology or scale. Location advantages take on a different meaning as well: rather than describing where a firm chooses to physically locate production, they can be understood in terms of the comparative advantages Turkey itself offers its entrepreneurs, including relatively low production costs, a skilled crafts and manufacturing base in certain sectors, and proximity to major consumer markets in Europe and the Middle East. Internalization, meanwhile, maps onto a genuinely central strategic question for digital entrepreneurs: whether to sell directly through a company-owned website, thereby retaining control over the customer relationship and data, or to internalize fewer functions by relying on

third-party marketplaces such as Amazon or Trendyol International, which offer market access and logistical support in exchange for reduced control and the payment of platform fees. This reframing of internalization as a choice between platform dependency and direct-to-consumer control forms an important analytical thread in the findings chapter of this thesis. The OLI Framework has attracted its own body of critical commentary, much of it concerning the internal coherence of its three categories of advantage. Itaki (1991), in one of the most frequently cited critiques of Dunning's eclectic paradigm, argued that the ownership advantage component is, in a formal sense, theoretically redundant once location and internalization advantages are properly specified, and further contended that ownership and location advantages are not, in practice, as analytically separable as the framework implies, since a firm's ownership-specific assets are often difficult to evaluate independently of the locational context in which they are deployed. Itaki also raised concerns about the conceptual ambiguity of the location advantage category itself, noting that it has been used inconsistently across the literature to capture a wide range of country-level factors. These critiques matter for this thesis because the OLI-based analysis in Section 2.5 similarly treats a Turkish digital entrepreneur's product distinctiveness, Turkey's comparative production advantages, and the platform-versus-direct-sales decision as separable analytical categories, when in practice these dimensions are likely to be closely intertwined, a point revisited when the framework is applied to the empirical findings in Chapter 6.

2.6 Digital Entrepreneurship

Digital entrepreneurship has emerged as a distinct field of inquiry within entrepreneurship research over the past two decades, though scholars have not fully converged on a single definition. One of the earliest and most widely cited definitions comes from Hull, Hung, Hair, Perotti, and DeMartino (2007), who characterized digital entrepreneurship as a subcategory of

entrepreneurship in which some or all of what would traditionally be physical within an organization has been digitized. This definition is useful precisely because of its flexibility: it treats digitization as a matter of degree rather than an all-or-nothing category, allowing for a spectrum ranging from firms that use digital tools to support an otherwise conventional business, to firms whose entire value proposition, product, and delivery mechanism exist purely in digital form. Nambisan (2017) advanced this line of thinking by situating digital entrepreneurship at the intersection of digital technology and entrepreneurship, arguing that digital technologies have fundamentally altered two long-standing assumptions in entrepreneurship theory. First, entrepreneurial processes and outcomes have become less bounded, meaning that the scope, scale, and form of a venture are no longer fixed at founding but can evolve fluidly as digital tools are incorporated. Second, the locus of entrepreneurial agency has become less predefined, since digital platforms allow a wider and more diffuse range of actors, including users, developers, and complementary service providers, to participate in value creation in ways that blur the traditional boundary between the entrepreneur and the surrounding ecosystem. Building on this ecosystem-oriented perspective, Sussan and Acs (2017) proposed the concept of the digital entrepreneurial ecosystem, integrating literature on digital ecosystems with the more established entrepreneurial ecosystem literature. Their framework identifies digital infrastructure, digital platforms, and the interaction between users and agents as core structural elements that shape how digital ventures form and scale. This ecosystem perspective is particularly relevant to entrepreneurs operating through cross-border e-commerce platforms, since such entrepreneurs rarely act in isolation. Their ability to reach foreign markets depends heavily on the infrastructure, governance rules, and user base of the platforms they operate within, whether Amazon, Etsy, or a domestic marketplace such as Trendyol. Digital entrepreneurship also differs from traditional entrepreneurship in the resource requirements it imposes on new ventures. Hull et al. (2007) observed that entering a market

through digital means typically requires fewer resources and less time than establishing a traditional business, since there is comparatively little need to build extensive physical infrastructure before beginning to trade. For an entrepreneur in Turkey seeking to reach customers abroad, this means that the traditional barriers associated with international expansion, including the need for warehousing, in-country staff, or physical retail presence, can be substantially reduced, even if they are not eliminated entirely, since fulfillment, customs compliance, and payment processing still require some operational capacity. Taken together, these three perspectives frame digital entrepreneurship not simply as entrepreneurship that happens to use digital tools, but as a qualitatively distinct form of venture creation shaped by lower resource thresholds, more fluid organizational boundaries, and a structural dependence on the platforms and digital infrastructure through which value is created and delivered. This framing is directly relevant to the population of Turkish digital entrepreneurs examined in this thesis, whose engagement with cross-border e-commerce is inseparable from the platform ecosystems that make such engagement possible in the first place. It is worth noting that the relationship between digital transformation and internationalization is not uniformly positive in the literature, a point that tempers the generally optimistic framing offered by Hull et al. (2007), Nambisan (2017), and Sussan and Acs (2017). Feliciano-Cestero, Ameen, Kotabe, Paul, and Signoret (2023), in a systematic literature review spanning two decades of research on digital transformation and firm internationalization, find that digital transformation can both facilitate and, in certain circumstances, threaten a firm's international expansion, with effects that operate differently at the individual, firm, and macro levels and that depend on both the human, or soft, components of digital transformation, such as knowledge and leadership, and its non-human, or technological, components. This finding is a useful corrective for the present thesis: the ease of market access that digital platforms provide, discussed throughout this chapter, should not be read as an unambiguous or automatic advantage. A Turkish entrepreneur who digitizes their

sales channel without a corresponding investment in the knowledge, language capability, and managerial capacity to operate across multiple foreign markets may find that digital tools expose the business to new competitive and reputational risks as readily as they open new revenue opportunities, a tension that is examined empirically in Chapter 5 and revisited in the discussion of digital entrepreneurship theory in Chapter 6.

2.7 Cross-Border E-Commerce and Platform Ecosystems

Cross-border e-commerce does not take place in an open, frictionless marketplace but is channeled almost entirely through digital platforms, and understanding these platforms as economic structures is essential to understanding how entrepreneurs actually engage in international trade. Hagiu and Wright (2015) offer an influential definition of what they term multi-sided platforms: intermediaries that enable direct interactions between two or more distinct groups of participants, such as buyers and sellers, while each side remains affiliated with the platform rather than transacting through it as a mere reseller. This distinction matters because it clarifies the particular economic role that platforms such as Amazon, Etsy, or Trendyol play. Rather than purchasing inventory and reselling it, as a traditional retailer would, these platforms facilitate transactions between independent sellers and buyers, earning revenue through fees, commissions, or advertising rather than through markup on goods sold. This structural feature has significant implications for how small entrepreneurs access foreign markets. Because platforms bear the cost of building the underlying marketplace infrastructure, including payment processing, search and discovery algorithms, and dispute resolution systems, individual sellers can access this infrastructure without having to construct it themselves. Qi, Chan, Hu, and Li (2020) examined the motivations that lead firms to select cross-border e-commerce platforms as a foreign market entry mode and found that such platforms are particularly attractive to smaller firms precisely because they substantially lower the transaction costs and capital requirements that would otherwise be associated with entering an unfamiliar

foreign market. Rather than negotiating distribution agreements with foreign intermediaries or establishing a physical retail presence, a firm can list its products on an existing platform and immediately gain access to that platform's established base of international buyers. This dynamic is reflected in broader empirical research on the relationship between cross-border e-commerce and SME internationalization. Wen, Liu, and Zhou (2023), studying a large panel of small and medium-sized Chinese enterprises, found that participation in cross-border e-commerce significantly increased firms' overseas business income and contributed to measurable gains in total factor productivity as firms expanded into foreign markets. Importantly, the authors identify an information mechanism underlying this effect: cross-border e-commerce platforms provide firms with access to market information, including data on foreign consumer demand and pricing, that would otherwise be costly or difficult for a small firm to obtain independently. This finding is significant for the present thesis because it suggests that platforms function not merely as sales channels, but as sources of market knowledge that can partially substitute for the experiential, incrementally acquired knowledge that the Uppsala Model treats as a prerequisite for successful internationalization. At the same time, this dependence on platform infrastructure introduces a structural vulnerability that does not have a clear parallel in traditional internationalization theory. When a firm internalizes fewer functions and relies more heavily on a platform for market access, payment processing, and even customer relationships, it also cedes a degree of strategic control. Platform algorithms determine product visibility, platform fee structures affect margins, and changes to platform policy can materially affect a seller's ability to reach customers, all largely outside the entrepreneur's control. This tension between the accessibility that platforms provide and the dependency they create is a recurring theme in the literature on digital entrepreneurship and forms an important analytical thread for understanding the strategic choices examined later in this thesis, particularly the decision facing many entrepreneurs between depending on third-

party marketplaces and investing in more independent, direct-to-consumer digital sales channels.

2.8 Turkey as an Emerging Digital Economy

Turkey's digital economy has expanded rapidly over the past decade, creating the structural conditions within which the cross-border e-commerce activity examined in this thesis takes place. The country combines a large population with high internet penetration: as of 2023, Turkey had more than 71 million internet users and an internet penetration rate of 83.4% (DataReportal, 2023), figures that have continued to grow, with e-commerce revenue reaching USD 27.7 billion in 2024 (Antom Knowledge, 2026). Since 2019, the value of Turkey's overall e-commerce trade has grown from USD 3.9 billion to USD 53.9 billion in 2023, while e-export volumes specifically rose from USD 2.2 billion in 2022 to USD 6.4 billion in 2024 (International Trade Council, 2023; Consultancy.me, 2025). These figures place Turkey among the more dynamic digital economies in its region, and recent regulatory developments, including customs amendments affecting cross-border shipments that took effect in 2024, indicate that Turkish policymakers are actively engaged in shaping how this growth unfolds (U.S. International Trade Administration, 2025). Academic research on the internationalization behavior of Turkish firms has a longer history than research specifically focused on digital or cross-border e-commerce channels. Karabulut (2013), in an empirical study of 267 SMEs in Istanbul, found that Turkish small and medium-sized enterprises tend to internationalize gradually, largely consistent with the incremental pattern described by the Uppsala Model, with most firms relying on exporting rather than foreign direct investment and few pursuing long-term international strategic planning. This finding is notable for the present thesis because it suggests that, at least prior to the widespread adoption of digital platforms, Turkish SMEs conformed reasonably closely to traditional internationalization theory. More recent research

suggests that this pattern may be shifting as digital channels become more central to how Turkish firms reach foreign markets. Divrik and Baykal (2024), studying the Turkish textile and clothing industry, found that organizational learning and digitalization played an important role in enabling internationalization among SMEs in a sector that has historically relied on traditional export relationships. Similarly, Orman and Teker (2024) examined the impact of cross-border e-commerce specifically on the growth of Turkish SMEs and found that global marketplace platforms such as Amazon and Alibaba meaningfully reduce market entry barriers, while digital payment systems and improvements in small-package logistics have supported growing SME participation in international trade, a trend the authors note accelerated following the COVID-19 pandemic. Taken together, the literature reviewed in this chapter reveals both a well-developed theoretical foundation and a significant empirical gap. The Uppsala Model, Born Global Theory, and Dunning's OLI Framework each offer established, if imperfectly fitting, lenses through which to interpret firm internationalization, and a growing body of research on digital entrepreneurship and platform ecosystems provides the conceptual tools needed to understand how digital intermediaries reshape market access. At the same time, direct empirical research on Turkish digital entrepreneurs engaging in cross-border e-commerce remains limited in volume and scope. Existing studies, such as those by Orman and Teker (2024) and Divrik and Baykal (2024), point toward the growing relevance of digital platforms for Turkish SME internationalization but do not offer a systematic, theoretically grounded account of the specific barriers, enablers, and strategic choices that characterize this process. It is this gap that the present thesis seeks to address, drawing together the theoretical frameworks and contextual evidence reviewed in this chapter into a structured secondary data analysis.

Table 2.1. Comparison of the Three Internationalization Frameworks Applied in This Thesis

Dimension	Uppsala Model	Born Global Theory	OLI Framework
-----------	---------------	--------------------	---------------

Core logic	Gradual, experiential learning	Rapid, resource-light internationalization	Ownership, Location, Internalization advantages
Key mechanism	Reduction of psychic distance over time	Innovative capability substitutes for experience	Governance choice between market and hierarchy
Primary critique used	Andersen (1993) limited explanatory power for tech/service firms	Rialp, Rialp & Knight (2005) definitional inconsistency	Itaki (1991) redundancy of ownership advantage
Relevance to Turkish digital entrepreneurs	Explains persistence of domestic-first, regionally proximate selling	Explains platform-enabled simultaneous market entry	Explains platform-dependency vs. direct-to-consumer choice

Chapter 3 Context and Data Sources

3.1 Overview

This chapter establishes the empirical context for the analysis that follows and outlines the data landscape upon which this thesis draws. Before presenting the methodology in Chapter 4, it is necessary to situate the study within Turkey's specific e-commerce environment and to introduce the range of sources that inform the subsequent findings. The chapter begins by describing Turkey's e-commerce landscape in more depth than the introductory overview provided in Chapter 1, focusing on the platforms, regulatory bodies, and market structures most relevant to digital entrepreneurs. It then introduces the key institutional and statistical sources used throughout the thesis, followed by a review of the industry reports that supplement these official statistics with more granular, sector-specific data. The chapter concludes by outlining

the criteria used to select the academic literature that underpins the theoretical and empirical analysis, establishing the transparency and rigor expected of a study built entirely on secondary data.

3.2 Turkey's E-Commerce Landscape

Turkey's domestic e-commerce market is characterized by a high degree of concentration around a small number of dominant platforms, a structural feature that has direct implications for how digital entrepreneurs access both domestic and international customers. Trendyol, founded in 2010 and acquired by the Alibaba Group in 2018, holds the largest share of the market, generating an estimated USD 10.8 billion in gross merchandise value in 2024 and commanding a market share generally estimated between 35% and 45% (Lengow, 2026). Beyond its core marketplace function, Trendyol has expanded into a broader ecosystem encompassing its own logistics network, a payment platform, and international operations, with international revenue now accounting for close to one-fifth of its total business (Lengow, 2026). Hepsiburada, the second-largest domestic platform, has historically held a market share in the range of 16% to 20%, and underwent a significant ownership change in January 2025 when the Kazakhstan-based digital ecosystem Kaspi.kz acquired a controlling 65.4% stake, bringing integrated payment and buy-now-pay-later capabilities into the platform (Lengow, 2026). Beyond these two dominant domestic players, the Turkish market includes a number of smaller domestic marketplaces, such as N11 and GittiGidiyor, alongside international entrants including Amazon Turkey and AliExpress, both of which have faced ongoing challenges related to localization and increasingly strict customs enforcement (Mordor Intelligence, 2026). This market structure is relevant to the present thesis because it means that Turkish digital entrepreneurs seeking to sell domestically, and often those seeking to build initial experience before expanding internationally, must typically operate within the constraints and fee

structures set by one or two dominant intermediaries, reinforcing the platform dependency dynamics discussed in Chapter 2. The regulatory architecture governing Turkish e-commerce is anchored in Law No. 6563 on the Regulation of Electronic Commerce, originally adopted in 2014 and substantially amended in 2022, with the amendments entering into force on 1 January 2023 (Mondaq, 2022). A central feature of this legal framework is the Electronic Commerce Information System (ETBİS), an information system operated by the Ministry of Trade that requires e-commerce service providers and intermediary service providers to register, and through which the ministry collects transaction data and produces official statistics on the sector (Mondaq, 2022). This registration requirement provides a useful, if partial, indicator of entrepreneurial participation in Turkish e-commerce over time: the number of registered e-commerce businesses grew from 256,861 in 2020 to 484,347 in 2021, an increase of 88% in a single year, coinciding with the acceleration of digital adoption during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mondaq, 2022). Beyond ETBİS, Turkish digital entrepreneurs operating in cross-border e-commerce are subject to an intersecting set of regulatory bodies, including the Ministry of Trade for e-commerce supervision, the Personal Data Protection Authority for data compliance, and the Central Bank of Turkey for payment services oversight. While the majority of this thesis focuses on cross-border, rather than domestic, e-commerce activity, this domestic regulatory and platform environment forms the baseline institutional context from which Turkish entrepreneurs typically launch their international expansion efforts, whether by extending an existing domestic seller account to international markets or by building an international presence from the outset. Beyond its platform and regulatory structure, Turkey's cross-border e-commerce activity is also shaped by the product categories in which Turkish entrepreneurs hold a comparative advantage. Textiles, apparel, and leather goods remain among the most prominent export categories, reflecting Turkey's long-established manufacturing base in these sectors, alongside a growing presence in home décor, jewelry, and handcrafted goods on

platforms such as Etsy, where buyers specifically value artisanal and small-batch production (Mordor Intelligence, 2026). This sectoral concentration is relevant to the OLI-based analysis introduced in Chapter 2, since it suggests that the ownership advantages available to many Turkish digital entrepreneurs are rooted less in proprietary technology and more in craftsmanship, design, and manufacturing cost advantages carried over from Turkey's traditional export industries. Logistics represents a further structural factor shaping how Turkish entrepreneurs engage in cross-border e-commerce. Sellers shipping physical goods internationally typically choose between the state postal operator, PTT, which offers lower-cost but comparatively slow delivery, and private cross-border logistics providers, which offer faster delivery to major Western markets at a materially higher per-package cost. This cost-speed trade-off represents a concrete, recurring strategic decision for individual entrepreneurs and is examined further as part of the strategic choices analyzed in Chapter 5. To help offset these costs, the Turkish Ministry of Trade operates an e-İhracat (e-export) tax rebate program that reimburses a substantial share, reported at between 50 and 75 percent, of qualifying international marketplace fees, logistics costs, and digital advertising expenditure for small and medium-sized exporters, a policy instrument that is discussed further as an enabler of cross-border e-commerce in Chapter 5 (Mordor Intelligence, 2026). The trajectory of Turkish e-commerce growth documented in Chapter 1 was significantly shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, a period whose effects are worth examining specifically given how directly they bear on the cross-border activity this thesis addresses. Bilik (2023), drawing on TÜİK data, reports that the value of Turkey's e-commerce sales abroad rose from USD 1.9 billion in 2019 to USD 2.8 billion in 2020 and USD 3.8 billion in 2021, a trajectory that closely tracks the pandemic period and its immediate aftermath and that reflects both a surge in domestic online shopping, with TÜİK figures showing that 70.7 percent of individuals purchased goods online in the first quarter of 2021 alone, alongside an internet usage rate that rose from 79 percent in 2020 to 82.6

percent in 2021, and a corresponding acceleration in the number of Turkish sellers extending that activity across borders. This pattern is consistent with the broader account offered by Orman and Teker (2024) in Section 2.8, who similarly identify the pandemic as an inflection point after which SME participation in Turkish cross-border e-commerce accelerated markedly. Geographically, this activity remains heavily concentrated: Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir account for the large majority of Turkey's e-commerce and cross-border retail activity, with Istanbul serving as the primary logistics and distribution hub given its concentration of tech-oriented consumers and fulfillment infrastructure, Ankara benefiting from a rapidly growing middle class increasingly active in cross-border shopping, and Izmir drawing on its Aegean coastal position to provide efficient access to international shipping routes (Ken Research, 2025). This geographic concentration has direct implications for the population of digital entrepreneurs examined in this thesis, since it suggests that access to the platform, logistics, and, plausibly, informal peer-network infrastructure that supports cross-border selling is not evenly distributed across Turkey but is disproportionately available to entrepreneurs based in or near these three metropolitan centers.

Table 3.1. Turkey's E-Commerce and Cross-Border Trade Trajectory, 2019–2024

Year	E-Commerce Trade Value (USD)	Cross-Border E-Commerce Sales Abroad (USD)	Internet Penetration
2019	—	1.9 billion	—
2020	3.9 billion	2.8 billion	79%
2021	—	3.8 billion	82.6%
2022	— (e-export: 2.2 billion)	—	—
2023	53.9 billion	—	—
2024	27.7 billion (revenue)	— (e-export: 6.4 billion)	83.4%

Note. Dashes indicate that the underlying source did not report that specific metric for that year. Sources: International Trade Council (2023); Consultancy.me (2025); Bilik (2023); DataReportal (2023); Antom Knowledge (2026).

3.3 Key Institutional and Statistical Sources

Because this thesis relies entirely on secondary data, the credibility of its findings depends substantially on the credibility of the institutions from which that data is drawn. This section introduces the primary institutional and statistical sources used throughout the study, each selected for its official standing, methodological transparency, and relevance to the research questions. At the international level, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) provides global estimates on the scale and structure of e-commerce, including cross-border transaction volumes, drawing on data contributed by national statistical offices and international partner organizations (UNCTAD, 2023). The International Trade Centre (ITC), a joint agency of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, maintains Trade Map, a publicly accessible database covering the annual trade flows of more than 220 countries across more than 5,300 product categories, with particular attention to trade opportunities

relevant to micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises in developing economies (International Trade Centre, n.d.). The World Bank's World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) platform, developed jointly with UNCTAD, the World Trade Organization, and the International Trade Centre, offers detailed, product-level trade statistics, including exports, imports, tariffs, and trade balances disaggregated by partner country, and is used in this thesis to contextualize Turkey's broader position in international trade (World Bank, n.d.). At the national level, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), established in 1926 and headquartered in Ankara, serves as Turkey's official statistical authority and the coordinating body for the national statistical system, producing data on foreign trade, enterprise characteristics, and economic indicators in accordance with international reporting standards (Turkish Statistical Institute, n.d.). TÜİK's external trade statistics, compiled from customs declarations and coordinated with the Ministry of Trade, provide the most granular available data on the composition and destination of Turkish exports, including the categories most relevant to digitally traded goods. Complementing TÜİK, the Ministry of Trade's Electronic Commerce Information System (ETBİS), established under Law No. 6563 on the Regulation of Electronic Commerce, functions as a mandatory registration and reporting system for e-commerce service providers operating in Turkey, and is the source of official figures on the number of active e-commerce businesses in the country (Mondaq, 2022). Each of these institutional sources has a distinct scope and level of granularity. UNCTAD and the World Bank are most useful for situating Turkey within global and comparative trade patterns; the ITC's Trade Map offers product- and market-specific detail relevant to understanding which categories of goods Turkish entrepreneurs are best positioned to export; and TÜİK and ETBİS provide the most direct, nationally specific evidence of e-commerce activity within Turkey itself. Used together, these sources allow the analysis in later chapters to move between macro-level context and more granular, Turkey-specific detail, a triangulation that is particularly important given the study's reliance on secondary rather than primary data.

3.4 Industry Reports and Market Data

While official statistical sources provide the methodological backbone of this thesis, they are necessarily slower to update and often lag behind the fast-moving dynamics of platform-based commerce. To complement this institutional data, the study also draws on industry reports and market intelligence produced by private research firms, payment technology providers, and specialized trade publications. These sources are used selectively, and always in a role that is descriptive and contextual rather than load-bearing for the study's core theoretical claims. Several types of industry sources are used throughout this thesis. Market research and consultancy reports, such as those produced by Mordor Intelligence and Lengow, provide current estimates of platform market share, gross merchandise value, and competitive positioning among Turkey's leading e-commerce marketplaces, data that is not typically available through official government statistics at the same level of commercial detail (Mordor Intelligence, 2026; Lengow, 2026). Payment technology providers, such as Antom, publish periodic reports on consumer payment behavior, digital wallet adoption, and e-commerce revenue trends, drawing on proprietary transaction data alongside publicly available statistics (Antom Knowledge, 2026). Trade-focused publications, including the International Trade Council and sector-specific consultancy outlets, offer analysis of e-export trends and policy developments that often precede their formal treatment in academic literature (International Trade Council, 2023; Consultancy.me, 2025). Finally, government trade promotion bodies, such as the United States International Trade Administration, publish country commercial guides intended to inform foreign businesses of local market conditions and regulatory requirements, offering a practitioner-oriented perspective that usefully supplements the more academic and statistical sources used elsewhere in the thesis (U.S. International Trade Administration, 2025). The use of these sources requires a degree of methodological caution that is addressed more

fully in Chapter 4. Unlike TÜİK or UNCTAD, industry reports are typically produced by commercial entities with their own market interests, are not always methodologically transparent about data collection procedures, and in some cases aggregate estimates from multiple unverified sources. For this reason, industry data is used in this thesis primarily to corroborate patterns already indicated by official statistics, to provide more current figures where official data lags, and to add contextual and market-level detail that official sources do not capture, rather than as the sole basis for any substantive claim.

3.5 Academic Literature Selection Criteria

The academic literature underpinning this thesis was identified and evaluated according to a set of explicit criteria, consistent with established guidance on conducting rigorous literature-based research in management studies. Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003) argue that traditional narrative literature reviews are often criticized for lacking methodological transparency, and that even studies not structured as full systematic reviews benefit from making their selection criteria explicit rather than leaving the process of source identification implicit. This thesis follows that principle by outlining, below, the criteria applied when selecting the academic sources used in Chapter 2 and throughout the empirical chapters that follow. Sources were identified primarily through Google Scholar and the academic databases accessible through the University of Pavia library system, using combinations of search terms drawn from the three thematic pillars of the thesis, including terms such as "internationalization," "digital entrepreneurship," "cross-border e-commerce," "Uppsala Model," "Born Global," "OLI framework," and "Turkish SMEs." Searches were supplemented with backward citation tracking, in which the reference lists of key papers were reviewed to identify earlier foundational work, and forward citation tracking, in which more recent papers citing these foundational works were reviewed to capture how the literature had subsequently

developed. Three criteria guided the inclusion of sources. First, priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus or Web of Science, ensuring a baseline level of academic quality control. Second, foundational theoretical works, such as the original Uppsala Model and OLI Framework papers, were included regardless of publication date, since their historical and conceptual centrality to the field justifies their inclusion independent of recency. Third, for empirical and contextual literature, particularly work addressing digital entrepreneurship, platform ecosystems, or the Turkish market specifically, preference was given to more recent publications, generally within the last decade, in order to reflect the rapidly evolving nature of digital commerce and to avoid relying on findings that may no longer describe current platform dynamics. Sources were excluded where they could not be verified through an official publisher record, a recognized academic database, or a confirmed digital object identifier. Non-peer-reviewed sources, including blog posts, unverified working papers, and promotional content published by commercial platforms, were not treated as academic literature, though a small number of such sources are used elsewhere in this thesis, as noted in Section 3.4, strictly to supplement contextual and market-level detail rather than to support theoretical claims. This distinction between academic and non-academic sources is maintained consistently throughout the thesis and is reflected in how each source is introduced and cited in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Overview

This chapter sets out the methodological approach adopted in this thesis and provides the justification for that approach in relation to the research questions established in Chapter 1. Because the study is built entirely on secondary data rather than data collected directly from

Turkish digital entrepreneurs, this chapter carries particular weight: it must demonstrate not only what was done, but why a secondary data approach is appropriate for the questions this thesis asks, and how the resulting analysis can be considered rigorous despite the absence of primary fieldwork. The chapter begins by outlining the research design and the epistemological positioning that underlies it, clarifying the assumptions this study makes about the nature of the evidence it draws on and the kind of knowledge claims it is capable of supporting. It then turns to a more focused discussion of secondary data analysis as a research method, situating this thesis within the broader methodological literature on how such analysis is conducted and evaluated. The analytical framework applied to organize and interpret the collected data is then presented, followed by a discussion of how the quality and reliability of the various data sources introduced in Chapter 3 were assessed. The chapter closes with an honest account of the limitations inherent to this methodological approach, limitations that are revisited in the concluding chapter of the thesis. Taken together, these sections are intended to give the reader a transparent account of how the findings presented in Chapter 5 were arrived at, and to allow the methodological choices made in this thesis to be evaluated on their own terms rather than taken for granted.

4.2 Research Design and Epistemological Positioning

Every research project rests on a set of underlying assumptions about the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge, whether or not these assumptions are made explicit. Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2023) distinguish between ontological assumptions, concerning the nature of reality itself, epistemological assumptions, concerning what counts as acceptable and valid knowledge within a field of study, and axiological assumptions, concerning the role the researcher's own values play in the research process. These assumptions, taken together, constitute what Saunders et al. describe as a research philosophy, and this philosophy shapes not only the choice of method but also how findings are ultimately interpreted. This thesis

adopts a pragmatist epistemological position. Pragmatism, as articulated within the research philosophy literature, holds that the most important determinant of a suitable research philosophy is the research question itself, rather than an a priori commitment to a single philosophical position such as positivism or interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2023). This position is particularly well suited to the present study, which draws on two quite different types of evidence: quantitative statistical data from sources such as TÜİK, UNCTAD, and the World Bank, which lend themselves to a more objectivist, positivist reading, and qualitative academic literature and institutional reports, which require interpretive synthesis in order to identify recurring themes, tensions, and patterns of argument. A strictly positivist stance would struggle to accommodate the interpretive work involved in synthesizing qualitative literature, while a strictly interpretivist stance would understate the role that verifiable, quantifiable trade statistics play in grounding the analysis. Pragmatism allows both types of evidence to be used according to their respective strengths, without requiring the artificial imposition of a single philosophical lens onto data that were not originally generated with that lens in mind. This epistemological positioning has direct implications for how the study approaches its central concepts. Barriers, enablers, and strategic choices, the three thematic pillars introduced in Chapter 1, are treated in this thesis neither as objectively measurable variables to be tested through hypothesis-driven statistical analysis, nor as purely socially constructed categories to be explored through open-ended qualitative inquiry. Instead, they are treated as analytically useful categories, derived from the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 2, that can be populated and examined using whatever combination of statistical evidence and documented qualitative accounts is available and appropriate for a given aspect of the phenomenon under study. This pragmatic approach to evidence is what makes a secondary data analysis, discussed in more detail in the following section, a coherent and defensible research strategy for the questions this thesis seeks to answer.

4.3 Secondary Data Analysis as a Method

Secondary data analysis refers to the use of data that was originally collected by someone other than the researcher, or collected for a purpose other than the specific research question currently being addressed (Hox & Boeijs, 2005). This distinguishes it from primary data collection, in which the researcher designs and administers the instrument, whether a survey, an interview, or an experiment, specifically to answer their own research questions. In the case of this thesis, all of the evidence examined, whether academic literature, government statistics, or industry reports, was produced independently of this research project and is being reassembled and reinterpreted here for a new analytical purpose. Johnston (2014) argues that secondary data analysis, while sometimes regarded as a less rigorous alternative to primary research, is in fact a legitimate and increasingly valuable empirical method in its own right, provided that it is conducted as a systematic exercise with clear procedural and evaluative steps, rather than as an unstructured or opportunistic gathering of whatever information happens to be available. This distinction matters for the present thesis: the value of the analysis presented in Chapter 5 depends not simply on having collected a large volume of secondary sources, but on having applied a consistent and transparent process for selecting, evaluating, and synthesizing those sources, a process outlined in Sections 3.5 and 4.4 of this thesis. The choice of a secondary data approach for this thesis was driven by several considerations specific to the research questions it addresses. First, the phenomenon under study, cross-border e-commerce activity among Turkish digital entrepreneurs, is already documented, at least partially, across a range of existing statistical, institutional, and academic sources, making a substantial body of relevant evidence available without the need for original data collection. Second, given the exploratory and mapping-oriented nature of the three research questions, which ask what barriers, enablers, and strategic choices characterize this population rather than testing a specific causal

hypothesis, a broad synthesis of existing evidence is arguably better suited to answering these questions than a narrower primary study, which would likely be constrained to a small, non-representative sample of entrepreneurs. Third, practical constraints related to the scope and timeline of a master's thesis make a secondary data approach considerably more feasible than a large-scale primary data collection effort capable of achieving meaningful representativeness across Turkey's diverse population of digital entrepreneurs. At the same time, this thesis acknowledges the trade-offs inherent in this methodological choice. Because the data were not collected with this thesis's specific research questions in mind, some relevant information, particularly detailed, firm-level evidence on the lived decision-making processes of individual entrepreneurs, is simply not available through secondary sources and cannot be recovered through more careful analysis of existing data. This limitation, and its implications for the scope of the conclusions this thesis can draw, is addressed directly in Section 4.6 and revisited in the concluding chapter.

4.4 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework applied in this thesis combines a deductive thematic structure, derived from the three research questions established in Chapter 1, with an inductive process of theme identification within each of those broad categories. This hybrid approach reflects a common practice in qualitative synthesis, where a small number of overarching categories are defined in advance based on the research questions and existing theory, while the specific content and sub-themes within each category are allowed to emerge from close engagement with the data itself, rather than being fully predetermined. The three overarching categories used to organize the analysis, barriers, enablers, and strategic choices, correspond directly to the research questions introduced in Section 1.3 and are informed by the theoretical frameworks reviewed in Chapter 2. Within each of these three categories, the analytical process broadly

follows the phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), adapted here for use with documentary and statistical secondary sources rather than interview transcripts, the context in which thematic analysis is most commonly applied. This adapted process involved, first, a familiarization phase in which the full range of collected sources, academic literature, institutional statistics, and industry reports, was read and reviewed in relation to the research questions. Second, an initial coding phase in which specific pieces of evidence, whether a statistic, a documented regulatory change, or a finding reported in an academic study, were tagged according to which of the three overarching categories they most directly informed. Third, a theme development phase in which the coded evidence within each category was reviewed for recurring patterns, allowing more specific sub-themes to be identified, such as regulatory barriers, logistical barriers, or platform-related barriers within the broader barriers category. Finally, a review and refinement phase in which these sub-themes were checked against the full body of evidence to ensure they were adequately supported and were not contradicted by other sources. Quantitative and statistical evidence is integrated into this framework in a complementary rather than parallel fashion. Rather than being subjected to a separate statistical analysis, figures drawn from sources such as TÜİK, UNCTAD, or the World Bank are used descriptively to corroborate, quantify, or provide context for the qualitative themes identified through the process described above. For instance, a theme identified in the academic literature concerning the growing importance of e-export incentive programs as an enabler of internationalization is substantiated and given empirical weight by the statistical trajectory of Turkey's e-export volumes documented in Chapter 3. This integration of qualitative thematic synthesis with corroborating quantitative evidence reflects the pragmatist epistemological position outlined in Section 4.2, allowing each type of evidence to contribute to the analysis according to its own strengths. Finally, once the three thematic categories have been populated and their internal sub-themes identified, the analytical framework returns to the

theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 2, specifically the Uppsala Model, Born Global Theory, and Dunning's OLI Framework, to interpret what the resulting pattern of barriers, enablers, and strategic choices suggests about the applicability and limitations of these frameworks when applied to digitally-mediated internationalization. This final interpretive step is carried out in Chapter 6, following the presentation of findings in Chapter 5. The integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence described above is best understood as a form of methodological triangulation, a concept formalized by Jick (1979), who argued that combining qualitative and quantitative methods within a single study allows each to compensate for the specific weaknesses of the other, since quantitative data offers precision and generalizable pattern-detection while qualitative data offers contextual richness and interpretive depth that purely numerical evidence cannot supply. Jick further distinguished between triangulation used for convergence, where qualitative and quantitative evidence are expected to confirm the same underlying finding, and triangulation used for complementarity, where each type of evidence illuminates a different facet of a phenomenon that the other cannot capture on its own. This thesis draws primarily on the complementary logic of triangulation rather than the convergent logic: the statistical evidence reviewed in Chapter 3, on Turkey's e-export volumes, internet penetration, and platform market shares, is not treated as a test of whether the qualitative themes identified in the literature are true, but as a distinct layer of evidence that establishes the scale and trajectory of a phenomenon whose underlying mechanisms, why a particular barrier matters, or how a particular enabler functions in practice, are more fully captured by the qualitative literature. Used in this way, triangulation across source types serves the same underlying purpose as the pragmatist epistemological stance outlined in Section 4.2: allowing each form of evidence to contribute according to its comparative strength rather than forcing a single evidentiary standard onto data that were never designed to meet it.

4.5 Quality and Reliability of Data

Given that this thesis relies entirely on data produced by others, the credibility of its findings depends directly on a rigorous and transparent assessment of the quality of the sources used. This thesis applies the four-criteria appraisal framework developed by Scott (1990) for evaluating documentary sources in social research: authenticity, concerning whether a document is genuine and of verifiable origin; credibility, concerning whether the evidence presented is free from significant error, distortion, or self-interested bias; representativeness, concerning whether the evidence is typical of its kind or whether its atypicality is at least known and can be accounted for; and meaning, concerning whether the content of a document can be clearly and correctly interpreted by the researcher. Applying these criteria across the three broad categories of sources used in this thesis, introduced in Chapter 3, produces a differentiated picture of data quality. Academic, peer-reviewed literature scores highly on authenticity and credibility, since publication in indexed journals implies a process of independent expert review intended specifically to catch errors, unsupported claims, and undisclosed bias. Representativeness is more variable within this category and depends on the specific study design of each source; where relevant, this thesis notes the scope and sample of the underlying studies, such as Karabulut's (2013) sample of 267 SMEs in Istanbul, rather than treating individual studies as automatically generalizable to the whole population of Turkish digital entrepreneurs. Official statistical and institutional sources, including TÜİK, UNCTAD, the World Bank, and Turkey's Ministry of Trade, generally score highly on authenticity, given their status as recognized national and international statistical authorities operating under established methodological standards, and on representativeness, since national statistical bodies aim explicitly for comprehensive or well-sampled coverage of the populations and transactions they report on. Credibility is generally high but not unconditional; official statistics can be affected by definitional inconsistencies across institutions, reporting lags, or, in some economic

contexts, incentives to present favorable figures, and this thesis notes such caveats where they are material to the interpretation of a given statistic, as with the customs and e-export figures discussed in Chapter 3. Industry reports and commercial market intelligence, as discussed in Section 3.4, present the greatest challenge under Scott's framework, particularly with respect to credibility. These sources are frequently produced by firms with a commercial interest in presenting the market they cover in a particular light, and their underlying data collection methodologies are not always disclosed in sufficient detail to allow independent verification. For this reason, and consistent with the approach outlined in Section 3.4, industry sources are used in this thesis primarily to corroborate patterns already indicated by more authoritative statistical or academic sources, or to supply current market-level detail, such as platform market share, for which no official statistical equivalent exists, rather than as standalone evidence for substantive claims. Applying Scott's fourth criterion, meaning, across all source types, this thesis has taken care to interpret figures and findings in light of the specific definitions and methodologies each source discloses, for instance distinguishing between e-commerce trade figures, which capture the value of the underlying goods transaction, and e-export figures more narrowly defined by the Ministry of Trade, since conflating differently defined statistics is a common source of misinterpretation in secondary data analysis. Beyond questions of source quality, reliance on secondary data also raises modest but real ethical considerations that merit acknowledgment. Chief among these is the obligation to represent the findings of others accurately and in the context in which they were originally presented, rather than selectively extracting figures or conclusions in ways that distort their original meaning. This thesis has sought to meet that obligation throughout by citing sources transparently, by distinguishing consistently between the specific claims made by academic, institutional, and industry sources, and by avoiding the aggregation of statistics that are not methodologically comparable. While secondary data analysis does not raise the same participant-facing ethical concerns, such as

informed consent or confidentiality, that arise in primary research involving human subjects, the obligation to represent existing evidence honestly remains a live ethical commitment throughout this thesis.

4.6 Limitations

No methodological approach is without limitations, and a secondary data analysis carries a particular set of constraints that should be stated plainly before the findings of this thesis are presented. Acknowledging these limitations here is intended not to undermine confidence in the analysis that follows, but to define clearly the boundaries within which its conclusions should be interpreted. The most fundamental limitation follows directly from the nature of secondary data itself. As Hox and Boeije (2005) note, secondary data was, by definition, not collected with this thesis's specific research questions in mind, which means that certain forms of evidence relevant to a full understanding of Turkish digital entrepreneurs' internationalization behavior are simply unavailable through the sources this thesis draws on. In particular, no dataset used in this thesis captures the direct, first-person perspective of individual Turkish entrepreneurs describing their own motivations, decision-making processes, or lived experience of specific barriers. The findings presented in Chapter 5 are therefore necessarily inferred from patterns documented across statistical, institutional, and academic sources, rather than drawn from the direct testimony of the population under study. This represents a meaningful gap relative to what a primary, interview-based study could achieve, and is identified in Chapter 7 as a clear direction for future research. A second limitation concerns the pace at which the empirical context of this thesis changes relative to the pace at which much of the relevant academic literature is produced and published. Cross-border e-commerce, platform market structures, and Turkish e-commerce regulation have all evolved rapidly in recent years, as documented in Chapter 3, and peer-reviewed academic research, subject as it is to lengthy review and

publication timelines, can lag behind these developments by several years. This thesis addresses this gap partially by supplementing academic literature with more current institutional statistics and industry reports, as outlined in Sections 3.3 and 3.4, but this trade-off between academic rigor and currency is a real and unavoidable limitation of studying a fast-moving digital phenomenon through predominantly secondary sources. A third limitation relates to language and source availability. The academic literature search underlying Chapter 2 was conducted primarily in English, meaning that Turkish-language academic research, policy documents, or industry commentary that has not been published or translated into English may not be reflected in this thesis, even where such sources could offer valuable additional context specific to the Turkish case. Similarly, some of the most current market data on Turkish e-commerce, discussed in Chapter 3, originates from commercial industry sources rather than peer-reviewed or official statistical outlets, and, as discussed in Section 4.5, such sources carry their own limitations regarding methodological transparency and potential commercial bias. Finally, as an inherently exploratory, secondary-data-based study, this thesis is not positioned to establish causal relationships between the barriers, enablers, and strategic choices it identifies and specific internationalization outcomes for individual firms. The analysis presented in the chapters that follow describes and interprets patterns evident across the available evidence; it does not, and cannot, statistically test the strength or direction of causal relationships in the way a study built on primary, firm-level data might. These limitations are revisited directly in Section 7.4, alongside their implications for how the conclusions of this thesis should be used and extended by future research.

Chapter 5 Findings

5.1 Overview

This chapter presents the empirical findings of this thesis, drawing together the evidence assembled from the academic literature, institutional statistics, and industry reports introduced in the preceding chapters. Consistent with the analytical framework outlined in Section 4.4, the findings are organized around the three thematic pillars that correspond directly to the research questions established in Chapter 1: the barriers that constrain the cross-border e-commerce activities of Turkish digital entrepreneurs, the enablers that support their internationalization, and the strategic choices that characterize how they navigate foreign markets through digital platforms. Section 5.2 examines the barriers Turkish digital entrepreneurs encounter, addressing regulatory and customs complexity, logistical constraints, currency volatility, digital trust and payment friction, and language and cultural factors. Section 5.3 turns to the enablers that facilitate internationalization, including government incentive programs, platform infrastructure, Turkey's geopolitical positioning, and demographic factors. Section 5.4 then examines the strategic choices entrepreneurs make in response to this combination of barriers and enablers, focusing on platform selection, market targeting, and channel strategy. Each section synthesizes evidence across source types rather than treating academic, statistical, and industry evidence as separate strands, consistent with the pragmatist epistemological position and integrated analytical approach set out in Chapter 4. The findings presented here are interpreted in relation to the theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 2 in the discussion that follows in Chapter 6.

5.2 Barriers to Cross-Border E-Commerce

Turkish digital entrepreneurs seeking to sell into foreign markets encounter a cluster of interrelated barriers that emerge consistently across the academic, statistical, and industry sources examined in this thesis, and while these barriers are presented in turn below for clarity, they are not independent of one another; a regulatory change can alter the economics of a logistics decision, and currency volatility can compound the difficulty of building consumer trust at a distance. Perhaps the most immediately tangible barrier is the regulatory environment governing cross-border shipments, both in Turkey and in the destination markets entrepreneurs seek to serve. Amendments to Turkey's Customs Law that took effect in August 2024 introduced a EUR 30 de minimis threshold for international e-commerce shipments, with packages exceeding this value subject to import duties of 30 percent for goods of European Union origin and 60 percent for goods originating outside the EU (U.S. International Trade Administration, 2025), a threshold that directly affects pricing strategy and the viability of certain product categories for small sellers; this regulatory volatility is not confined to Turkey's own customs regime but is mirrored in the destination markets themselves, as illustrated by Etsy's own seller guidance, which notes that as of July 2026 both VAT and customs duties began applying to all goods shipped from outside the European Union into the EU, with a customs duty of three euros per item applying even to purchases below the previous €150 threshold, and separately that most packages shipped into the United States became subject to new tariffs as of August 2025 (Etsy Help, 2026), meaning a Turkish seller must now track and absorb regulatory changes originating from at least three separate jurisdictions, Turkey, the European Union, and the United States, simultaneously. This sits alongside a domestic regulatory framework that has itself been in a state of relative flux, with Law No. 6563 on the Regulation of Electronic Commerce having been substantially amended as recently as 2022, with the changes entering into force in January 2023 (Mondaq, 2022), meaning entrepreneurs must track platform-specific rules, a domestic e-commerce and customs framework that has been revised twice within the

past decade, and the customs and consumer protection regimes of every foreign jurisdiction they ship to, a layering of regulatory regimes that is disproportionately burdensome for small, resource-constrained sellers relative to large, professionally staffed exporters. Closely related to this regulatory complexity is a logistical constraint discussed in Section 3.2, and one that is illustrated concretely in an industry account of a Turkish print-on-demand entrepreneur selling apparel through Etsy: sourcing textiles from a local workshop in Izmir and shipping via the state postal operator, PTT, offered a transit time of two to three weeks, while private cross-border logistics providers such as ShipEntegra or Navlungo delivered within three to five days but at a cost of approximately twelve to fifteen US dollars per package, a cost structure under which, once product cost, shipping, and Etsy's own selling fees were accounted for, the entrepreneur in this account was found to be losing money on individual sales despite steady order volume (Listybox, 2026). This account is illustrative rather than statistically representative, but it demonstrates concretely how the cost-speed trade-off in Turkish cross-border logistics can erode or eliminate margins for a seller who has not fully modeled shipping costs into pricing, a risk compounded by Etsy's own fee structure, which combines a fixed per-listing fee with a percentage-based transaction fee and a further percentage-based payment processing fee, fees that industry guidance warns can meaningfully erode margins for Turkish sellers pricing in lira, particularly at smaller order values where fixed-fee components represent a larger share of the total transaction (Global Fee Calculator, 2026). Orman and Teker (2024) note that improvements in small-package logistics and digital payment systems have, on balance, supported growing SME participation in Turkish cross-border e-commerce, particularly since the acceleration of digital adoption during the COVID-19 pandemic, though this improvement should be read as a relative easing of a still-significant constraint rather than its elimination, as the individual seller account above suggests. A further, largely exogenous barrier is the sustained depreciation of the Turkish lira, which Thorbecke and Sengonul (2023)

document fell by more than 200 percent between January 2012 and October 2022, with their nonlinear analysis finding that the effects of currency movements on Turkish trade are asymmetric and depend heavily on firms' reliance on imported inputs, since firms that must import components in order to produce goods for export are simultaneously helped by depreciation, through improved price competitiveness abroad, and hurt by it, through rising input costs. Ari (2023), employing an autoregressive distributed lag approach over a longer historical window from 1990 to 2020, similarly finds that the exchange rate is significantly related to Turkish exports in both the short and long run, while noting that exchange rate volatility itself, as distinct from the direction of currency movement, acts as a further source of uncertainty for exporting firms; for Turkish digital entrepreneurs, this volatility complicates decisions about how to price products in foreign currency terms, how frequently to adjust those prices, and how to manage the mismatch between costs incurred in depreciating lira and revenue earned in relatively stable foreign currencies. Consumer trust represents a further significant barrier, one that is well documented in the broader cross-border e-commerce literature even where Turkey-specific research remains limited. Dong (2026), in a systematic review and bibliometric analysis of 773 publications on cross-border e-commerce trust published between 2000 and 2024, identifies technological, relational, and institutional mechanisms as the three principal channels through which sellers build consumer trust across borders; for a small, independent Turkish seller operating through a marketplace, technological and institutional trust mechanisms are largely inherited from the platform itself, leaving relational trust building, communication, responsiveness, and reputation accumulated through reviews, as one of the few levers an individual entrepreneur can directly influence, a dynamic visible in practice on Etsy, where individual Turkish shop pages typically display only a handful of sales and a small number of accumulated ratings during their first months of operation, reflecting the slow, review-by-review process through which an unknown seller must accumulate the reputation

signals that platform-inherited trust mechanisms alone do not provide. Zhang and Pertheban (2023) similarly identify website credibility, merchant reputation, payment security, logistics reliability, and the legal and regulatory environment of the host country as principal determinants of buyer trust, and note that cultural differences and language barriers between buyers and sellers from different countries can further shape the level of trust a consumer extends to a foreign merchant, leaving a new Turkish seller without an established reputation to overcome a trust deficit that established competitors do not face to the same degree. This connects directly to the final recurring barrier, language and cultural distance, a theme that echoes the concept of psychic distance discussed in relation to the Uppsala Model in Section 2.3. Dong's (2026) review draws on Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework to show that consumers from different cultural backgrounds respond differently to the same trust-building strategies, with consumers in high uncertainty-avoidance cultures placing disproportionate weight on formal security assurances while more collectivist consumers rely more heavily on social proof, meaning a Turkish entrepreneur marketing across multiple foreign markets simultaneously must navigate a shifting set of cultural preferences rather than a single, stable set of buyer expectations; beneath these deeper cultural dynamics lies the more immediate practical barrier of language itself, since product listings, customer communications, and marketing copy must typically be produced in English or the language of the target market, imposing real costs in time, translation, or the risk of miscommunication over product specifications and after-sales issues, a cost that industry guidance aimed at Turkish Etsy sellers treats as significant enough to have generated a specific commercial response, in the form of tools marketed specifically to help Turkish sellers generate English-language product listings without requiring fluent English themselves (Listybox, 2026). This interconnection among barriers, regulatory, logistical, financial, and reputational, is revisited in Chapter 6 in relation to the theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 2.

5.3 Enablers of Cross-Border E-Commerce

Set against the barriers examined in Section 5.2, a distinct set of enabling conditions helps explain why Turkish digital entrepreneurs have nonetheless been able to build a growing base of cross-border e-commerce activity, as documented by the trade statistics reviewed in Chapter 3, and as with the barriers, these enablers interact with one another rather than operating in isolation. The Turkish Ministry of Trade operates an e-İhracat tax rebate program, formally established through a Presidential Decree on E-Export Supports published in the Official Gazette on 25 August 2022 (Tevetoglu Legal, 2022), that reimburses a substantial share, reported at between 50 and 75 percent, of qualifying international marketplace fees, logistics costs, and digital advertising expenditure for small and medium-sized exporters (Mordor Intelligence, 2026); the concrete scale of this support is illustrated in industry guidance describing a representative scenario in which an SME purchasing market-entry research reports for the German and American markets, at a combined consultancy cost of 220,000 Turkish lira, would have half of that expenditure reimbursed by the program, with support rates rising to 70 percent for reports on certain prioritized target markets and with individual e-export development projects eligible for reimbursement of up to 75 percent of qualifying expenses, capped at 15,000,000 lira per project (Export Partners, 2025; Tevetoglu Legal, 2022). The significance of this program lies in subsidizing precisely the cost categories, marketplace commissions, paid advertising, logistics, and market research, that a resource-constrained seller would otherwise find most prohibitive, and its structure suggests that Turkish policy has adapted, to some degree, to the realities of platform-based rather than traditional export activity. A second enabler is structural rather than governmental: the existence of platform infrastructure, both global and domestic, that individual entrepreneurs can access without having to build their own. As discussed in Section 2.7, Hagiu and Wright (2015) characterize such platforms as

intermediaries that bear the fixed costs of building marketplace infrastructure, payment processing, search and discovery systems, and dispute resolution mechanisms, allowing individual sellers to access this infrastructure at comparatively low marginal cost; for Turkish entrepreneurs this role is filled both by global marketplaces such as Amazon and Etsy and by the rapidly expanding international operations of Trendyol, which by the end of 2024 was operating in sixteen international markets and had set a target of reaching twelve million international customers by the end of 2025 (Business Review, 2025). The concrete scale of this expansion is instructive: within its first year of operation across seven Central and Eastern European markets launched in early 2024, Trendyol reported reaching 2.2 million active shoppers in the region, with Romania alone accounting for 1.5 million active shoppers and more than sixteen million items sold (Business Review, 2025), while in the Gulf region the platform reported acquiring more than 3.7 million customers and supporting over 250,000 merchants through a marketplace model that, according to the company, generates 85 percent of its regional revenue (IndexBox, 2025). This rapid international build-out, including the opening of dedicated logistics hubs such as a fifty-thousand-square-meter fulfillment center near Bucharest and regional warehousing in the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, suggests that a domestically headquartered platform is itself becoming a substantial channel through which Turkish sellers can reach foreign buyers with a degree of local-language, local-currency, and local-logistics support that a purely foreign-owned platform may not offer to the same extent. This enabling effect is not merely anecdotal: Wen, Liu, and Zhou (2023), studying a large panel of Chinese SMEs, found that cross-border e-commerce participation significantly increased firms' overseas business income partly because platforms provide access to foreign market information that a small firm could not economically gather on its own, while Qi, Chan, Hu, and Li (2020) found that the transaction cost and capital savings such platforms offer are particularly attractive to smaller firms, allowing platform infrastructure to function as a genuine

substitute for the market-specific experiential knowledge that the Uppsala Model treats as a prerequisite for successful internationalization. A third enabler concerns Turkey's structural position within the international trading system, particularly its Customs Union with the European Union, in place since 1995; a comprehensive World Bank evaluation of the arrangement found that Turkish exports to the EU have been meaningfully higher under the Customs Union than they would have been under a standard free trade agreement, estimating exports would have been up to 7.2 percent lower absent the arrangement (World Bank, 2014), translating into a genuine cost advantage for entrepreneurs selling into European markets specifically, though this advantage is asymmetric and geographically bounded, since the Customs Union obliges Turkey to align with the EU's external tariff regime without an independent say in the EU's own trade negotiations with third countries, occasionally disadvantaging Turkish exporters relative to competitors from countries with direct bilateral agreements with the EU; the enabling effect of Turkey's trade positioning is therefore strongest for entrepreneurs targeting European markets, while sellers targeting the Middle East, Central Asia, or North America rely instead on Turkey's separate network of bilateral agreements and broader geographic proximity, a pattern visible in Trendyol's own international strategy, which has pursued Gulf and Central Asian expansion alongside its European build-out rather than treating the two as substitutes. The final enabler is demographic and infrastructural rather than institutional: Turkey combines a large population with high internet penetration, more than 71 million internet users and a penetration rate of 83.4 percent as of 2023 (DataReportal, 2023), alongside e-commerce revenues that reached USD 27.7 billion in 2024 (Antom Knowledge, 2026), a combination that has produced a large domestic e-commerce market within which entrepreneurs can gain initial commercial experience before extending that activity internationally, and that lowers the practical barrier to the entrepreneur-facing side of platform participation itself, listing products, managing multiple marketplace accounts, and

communicating with foreign buyers. This demographic condition does not by itself guarantee successful internationalization, but it establishes a necessary underlying capacity without which the government incentives and platform infrastructure discussed above would have a substantially smaller population of entrepreneurs positioned to take advantage of them, a foundation that shapes the strategic choices examined in the following section.

5.4 Strategic Choices of Turkish Digital Entrepreneurs

The barriers and enablers examined in the preceding two sections do not simply happen to Turkish digital entrepreneurs; they are conditions within which entrepreneurs make active strategic choices, and three such choices recur across the evidence reviewed in this thesis. The first concerns platform selection, which can usefully be understood through the internalization dimension of Dunning's OLI Framework discussed in Section 2.5: the choice between selling directly through a company-owned website, retaining full control over the customer relationship and buyer data, or internalizing fewer functions by relying on a third-party marketplace, which supplies market access and logistical support in exchange for reduced control and the payment of platform fees. The evidence reviewed throughout this thesis suggests this choice tilts decisively toward the marketplace option for most Turkish digital entrepreneurs, since building an independent international sales channel requires the entrepreneur to solve, largely alone, precisely the problems that a marketplace solves collectively for its sellers, payment processing, the trust mechanisms discussed in Section 5.2, and search visibility to buyers who have never heard of the entrepreneur's brand, consistent with Hagiú and Wright's (2015) characterization of platforms as intermediaries that bear these fixed costs on behalf of participating sellers; the illustrative Etsy seller account discussed in Section 5.2 reflects this logic directly, since even an entrepreneur losing money on individual transactions continued operating through the marketplace rather than building an independent storefront, precisely

because the marketplace, not the individual seller, supplied the foreign buyer traffic that made any sales possible in the first place. At the same time this choice carries its own strategic cost, discussed in Section 2.7, since platform algorithms determine visibility and platform fees, illustrated concretely by Etsy's combined listing, transaction, and payment processing fees discussed in Section 5.2, compress margins already narrowed by currency volatility, meaning platform selection functions as an ongoing trade-off between accessibility and control rather than a one-time decision. The second strategic choice concerns which foreign markets an entrepreneur prioritizes, shaped by the interaction of two enablers discussed in Section 5.3: the Customs Union creates a concrete cost advantage for entrepreneurs selling into EU markets specifically (World Bank, 2014), while the concept of psychic distance introduced in Section 2.3 suggests that markets closer to Turkey culturally, linguistically, and commercially present a lower barrier to entry regardless of tariff status; in practice, Turkish entrepreneurs' market targeting appears to reflect a combination of both logics, a pattern that mirrors, at a much larger scale, Trendyol's own international expansion strategy of pursuing European markets, where Customs Union tariff advantages apply, and Gulf and Central Asian markets, where cultural and linguistic proximity is comparatively higher, simultaneously rather than sequentially (Business Review, 2025; IndexBox, 2025). This simultaneous prioritization of multiple, differently advantaged regions departs from the strict sequential logic of the original Uppsala Model, discussed in Section 2.3, precisely because platform infrastructure allows an entrepreneur, or an entrepreneur-facing platform such as Trendyol, to list products in several markets at once rather than entering them one after another. The third strategic choice concerns how Turkish entrepreneurs position their products for foreign buyers, closely tied to the sectoral concentration discussed in Section 3.2: because the ownership advantages available to most Turkish digital entrepreneurs are rooted in craftsmanship, design, and manufacturing cost advantages carried over from Turkey's traditional export industries, textiles, leather goods,

jewelry, and handcrafted products, rather than in proprietary technology, the value proposition Turkish sellers present to foreign buyers tends to emphasize authenticity and craftsmanship rather than technological differentiation, a positioning particularly well suited to platforms such as Etsy where buyers specifically value artisanal and small-batch production, and one that interacts directly with the digital trust barrier discussed in Section 5.2, since a compelling, authentically communicated product narrative becomes one of the few levers through which an individual seller can differentiate a listing when institutional and technological trust signals are largely inherited from the platform itself. Finally, the evidence reviewed throughout this thesis points toward a broader pattern that cuts across these three choices: a tendency, at least among more established Turkish digital entrepreneurs, to diversify across multiple platforms rather than depend on a single one, consistent with the platform dependency risk discussed in Section 2.7; industry data on this point, which requires the methodological caution discussed in Section 4.5, is nonetheless suggestive of the scale of this effect, with marketplace software provider Mirakl reporting that sellers active on two or more marketplaces generate substantially higher gross merchandise value than sellers relying on a single channel (Mirakl, 2026), a pattern consistent with a strategy of combining a global marketplace such as Amazon or Etsy with Trendyol's increasingly international-facing operations to capture the accessibility benefits of platform-based selling while partially mitigating dependency risk, albeit at the cost of the operational complexity that managing multiple marketplace accounts, each with its own fee structure, listing requirements, and customer service expectations, imposes on entrepreneurs already operating with limited resources. The prevalence of this trade-off, and the conditions under which it represents a rational strategic response to the barriers and enablers discussed in this chapter, is considered further in the discussion that follows in Chapter 6.

Table 5.1. Summary of Barriers, Enablers, and Strategic Choices Identified

Category	Theme	Key Source(s)
Barrier	Regulatory and customs complexity	U.S. ITA (2025); Mondaq (2022)
Barrier	Logistical trade-off (cost vs. speed)	Listybox (2026); Orman & Teker (2024)
Barrier	Currency volatility	Thorbecke & Sengonul (2023); Ari (2023)
Barrier	Digital trust and payment friction	Dong (2026); Zhang & Pertheban (2023)
Barrier	Language and cultural distance	Dong (2026)
Enabler	Government e-İhracat incentives	Mordor Intelligence (2026); Tevetoglu Legal (2022)
Enabler	Platform infrastructure	Hagiu & Wright (2015); Business Review (2025)
Enabler	EU Customs Union positioning	World Bank (2014)
Enabler	Demographic/digital readiness	DataReportal (2023)
Strategic Choice	Platform selection (internalization)	Section 2.5; Hagiu & Wright (2015)
Strategic Choice	Market targeting	Section 2.3; World Bank (2014)
Strategic Choice	Product/value positioning	Section 3.2
Strategic Choice	Multi-channel diversification	Mirakl (2026)

Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1 Overview

This chapter interprets the findings presented in Chapter 5, the barriers, enablers, and strategic choices that characterize Turkish digital entrepreneurs' engagement with cross-border e-commerce, in relation to the theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 2. Rather than treating the Uppsala Model, Born Global Theory, and Dunning's OLI Framework as competing explanations to be adjudicated in favor of a single winner, this chapter examines where each framework's core logic is supported by the evidence, where it is challenged or requires adaptation, and what these points of tension reveal about the nature of internationalization in a digitally mediated, platform-dependent context. Section 6.2 revisits the barriers identified in Section 5.2 through the lens of the Uppsala Model and the applied barriers literature introduced in Section 2.2, arguing that the structural and financial character of the barriers Turkish entrepreneurs face sits uneasily with the experiential-learning logic at the core of the Uppsala tradition. Section 6.3 examines the enablers identified in Section 5.3 against Born Global Theory, arguing that while the evidence broadly supports the possibility of rapid, resource-light internationalization that Born Global theorists first documented, the specific mechanism observed among Turkish digital entrepreneurs, platform-provided infrastructure substituting for firm-level capability, extends the theory in ways its original formulation did not anticipate. Section 6.4 turns to the strategic choices identified in Section 5.4 and examines them through Dunning's OLI Framework, drawing directly on Itaki's (1991) critique introduced in Section 2.5 to show how the Turkish case illustrates, rather than merely echoes, that critique's central claim about the inseparability of ownership and location advantages. Section 6.5 concludes the chapter by drawing together the theoretical, practical, and policy implications of this analysis.

6.2 Barriers in Theoretical Perspective

The barriers identified in Section 5.2, regulatory and customs complexity, logistical trade-offs, currency volatility, digital trust deficits, and language and cultural distance, sit in a genuinely uneasy relationship with the Uppsala Model's central explanatory mechanism. The Uppsala Model, as discussed in Section 2.3, attributes the difficulty of entering a foreign market primarily to a lack of experiential market knowledge and to psychic distance, the cultural, linguistic, and commercial dissimilarity between home and host markets, both of which are expected to diminish as a firm accumulates operating experience in a given market. Yet the evidence reviewed in Chapter 5 suggests that most of the barriers Turkish digital entrepreneurs actually face are not primarily reducible to a lack of accumulated market knowledge in this sense. Currency volatility, discussed by Thorbecke and Sengonul (2023) and Ari (2023), affects a Turkish entrepreneur's pricing decisions regardless of how much experience that entrepreneur has accumulated in a given foreign market, since it originates in Turkey's own macroeconomic conditions rather than in the entrepreneur's unfamiliarity with the destination market. Similarly, the customs and regulatory complexity discussed in Section 5.2 arises from formal legal thresholds, the EUR 30 de minimis threshold and the associated duty rates documented by the U.S. International Trade Administration (2025), that apply uniformly to a given market irrespective of an individual seller's prior experience there. This pattern lends empirical weight to Andersen's (1993) critique of the Uppsala Model, introduced in Section 2.3, that the model's explanatory power is limited for firms operating in contexts where internationalization is not primarily driven by market-knowledge accumulation, precisely the profile that characterizes platform-based digital entrepreneurs. Where the Uppsala Model's logic does retain some purchase is in the language and cultural distance barrier and in the digital trust barrier discussed by Dong (2026) and Zhang and Pertheban (2023), both of which are more plausibly understood as manifestations of psychic distance in a modernized, platform-mediated form, consumer

cultural expectations and language rather than legal or macroeconomic conditions. The applied barriers literature introduced in Section 2.2 offers a more precise vocabulary for this pattern than the Uppsala Model alone: mapped onto Leonidou's (2004) taxonomy of internal and external export barriers, the regulatory, currency, and logistical barriers identified in Chapter 5 correspond most closely to what Leonidou classifies as external, governmental, procedural, and environmental barriers, largely outside the firm's control, while the digital trust and language barriers correspond more closely to internal, informational and marketing barriers, over which the entrepreneur retains some direct influence. This distinction matters theoretically because it suggests that the barriers most amenable to mitigation through the kind of experiential learning the Uppsala Model emphasizes are precisely the barriers that occupy the smallest share of the total barrier landscape identified in this thesis, while the barriers that dominate that landscape, external, structural, and largely exogenous to the firm, are barriers no amount of accumulated market experience can fully resolve. One qualification to Leonidou's taxonomy is also worth noting: the platform algorithm and policy risk discussed in Section 2.7 and revisited in Section 5.4 does not map cleanly onto any of Leonidou's original categories, since it did not exist in the traditional export context from which that taxonomy was derived, suggesting that a fully adequate barriers taxonomy for digitally mediated internationalization would need to add a distinct platform-governance category alongside Leonidou's informational, functional, marketing, procedural, governmental, task, and environmental barriers.

6.3 Enablers and the Born Global Phenomenon

The enablers identified in Section 5.3, government incentive programs, platform infrastructure, Turkey's Customs Union positioning, and demographic and digital readiness, sit considerably more comfortably alongside Born Global Theory than the barriers discussed above sit alongside the Uppsala Model, though the fit is not perfect and the points of divergence are

themselves theoretically instructive. Born Global Theory, as discussed in Section 2.4, was developed by Oviatt and McDougall (1994) to explain firms that internationalize rapidly, often from or near their founding, rather than through the sequential, experience-driven process the Uppsala Model describes, and the evidence reviewed in Chapter 5 is broadly consistent with this pattern: a Turkish entrepreneur listing products on Trendyol's international storefronts or on Etsy can, in principle, reach markets across Europe, the Gulf, and Central Asia simultaneously, as illustrated by Trendyol's own expansion documented by Business Review (2025) and IndexBox (2025), without the sequential market-by-market progression the Uppsala Model would predict. Where the Turkish case diverges from the original Born Global formulation is in the specific mechanism through which rapid internationalization is achieved. Knight and Cavusgil (2004) attributed the success of born-global firms to a distinctive combination of innovative organizational culture, knowledge-intensive capability, and international marketing orientation residing within the firm itself. The evidence examined in this thesis suggests that, for most Turkish digital entrepreneurs, rapid market access is achieved not primarily through firm-level capability of this kind but through platform-provided infrastructure that substitutes for it: the trust mechanisms discussed by Dong (2026), the market information access documented by Wen, Liu, and Zhou (2023), and the transaction cost reductions identified by Qi, Chan, Hu, and Li (2020) are supplied by the platform rather than built independently by the entrepreneur. This is a meaningful extension of Born Global theory rather than a simple confirmation of it: the theory's core claim, that firms can internationalize rapidly without following the Uppsala Model's gradual sequence, holds, but the causal mechanism it originally proposed, internal firm capability, is substantially externalized to platform infrastructure in the Turkish digital context, a possibility the original Born Global literature, formulated before the platform economy reached its current scale, did not fully anticipate. This externalization also helps explain a definitional puzzle that follows directly

from Rialp, Rialp, and Knight's (2005) critique discussed in Section 2.4: many of the Turkish entrepreneurs whose activity is documented in the industry and statistical sources reviewed in this thesis do not cleanly fit the born-global profile of firms that export intensively from or near their founding, since a substantial share appear to begin as domestic sellers on platforms such as Trendyol or Hepsiburada before extending that activity across borders once sufficient reputation, product-market fit, or operational confidence has been established, a pattern that is neither purely gradual in the Uppsala sense nor purely born-global in the classical sense, but a hybrid in which the platform itself compresses what would traditionally have been a multi-year domestic-to-international transition into a matter of a few clicks once the underlying commercial groundwork is in place. Finally, the government incentive programs discussed in Section 5.3 correspond closely to what Leonidou, Katsikeas, Palihawadana, and Spyropoulou (2007) classify as external, government-related export stimuli, and the concrete scale of Turkey's e-İhracat program, reimbursing up to 75 percent of qualifying expenses according to Tevetoglu Legal (2022) and Export Partners (2025), suggests that policy-driven stimuli of the kind Leonidou et al. examined in a pre-digital context remain a significant force even, or perhaps especially, in a platform-mediated one, since such programs can be calibrated to offset precisely the marketplace fees and advertising costs that platform-based internationalization specifically entails.

6.4 Strategic Choices and the OLI Framework

The strategic choices identified in Section 5.4, platform selection, market targeting, and product positioning, were already interpreted in relation to Dunning's OLI Framework as they were presented in Chapter 5; this section extends that interpretation by engaging directly with Itaki's (1991) critique of the framework, introduced in Section 2.5, and showing that the Turkish case does not merely illustrate this critique in the abstract but demonstrates it with unusual

clarity. Itaki argued that the OLI Framework's ownership and location categories are not, in practice, as analytically separable as the framework implies, since a firm's ownership-specific assets are often difficult to evaluate independently of the locational context in which they are developed and deployed. The product positioning strategy discussed in Section 5.4, in which Turkish entrepreneurs emphasize craftsmanship, authenticity, and traditional manufacturing techniques in categories such as textiles, leather goods, and jewelry, makes this inseparability concrete rather than merely theoretical: the ownership advantage a Turkish seller brings to an Etsy listing, distinctive craftsmanship, is not a firm-specific asset that exists independently of Turkey as a location, but is itself constituted by Turkey's location-specific manufacturing traditions and cost structure, discussed in Section 3.2. A Turkish entrepreneur cannot meaningfully claim the ownership advantage of, for instance, hand-finished leather goods, without that claim being simultaneously a claim about Turkey's location-specific advantage in leather manufacturing; the two categories collapse into one another in exactly the way Itaki's critique predicts, and in a way that a firm relying on a more genuinely portable ownership advantage, a patented technology, for instance, would not experience to the same degree. The internalization dimension of the framework fares somewhat better empirically, since the choice between marketplace dependence and direct-to-consumer selling, discussed in Section 5.4, does map onto a real and observable strategic decision; however, even here the evidence complicates the framework's traditionally binary formulation. Dunning's original framework treats internalization as a single governance choice, in-house control versus external market transaction, made in relation to a specific foreign operation. The multi-platform diversification pattern documented through Mirakl's (2026) industry data, discussed in Section 5.4, suggests a more layered strategic reality: Turkish entrepreneurs appear to accept low internalization at the level of any single platform relationship, retaining the accessibility benefits that Hagiu and Wright (2015) attribute to platform intermediation, while simultaneously pursuing a form of

portfolio-level risk management, diversifying across Amazon, Etsy, and Trendyol simultaneously, that is not itself a governance choice in Dunning's original sense but functions similarly to one, spreading platform-dependency risk across multiple external relationships rather than internalizing control over any single one of them. This suggests that a framework developed to explain discrete, largely one-time foreign direct investment decisions requires meaningful adaptation, rather than simple application, when extended to the continuously adjustable, low-commitment strategic choices that characterize platform-based digital entrepreneurship, where an entrepreneur can add or drop a sales channel with a fraction of the cost and irreversibility that would accompany a comparable decision in Dunning's original manufacturing-based context.

6.5 Implications for Theory, Practice and Policy

Taken together, the discussion in Sections 6.2 through 6.4 suggests a clear theoretical implication: no single framework examined in this thesis offers a complete account of how Turkish digital entrepreneurs internationalize through cross-border e-commerce, and each framework's partial fit is itself informative rather than merely a limitation to be noted and set aside. The Uppsala Model's experiential-learning mechanism explains comparatively little of the barrier landscape documented in Chapter 5, but its underlying concept of psychic distance retains explanatory relevance for the specifically cultural and linguistic barriers discussed in Section 6.2. Born Global Theory correctly anticipates the possibility of rapid, non-sequential internationalization, but its causal mechanism must be substantially revised, from internal firm capability toward externalized platform infrastructure, to fit the Turkish case. The OLI Framework's internalization dimension offers real analytical traction on platform-versus-direct-sales decisions, but its ownership and location categories collapse into each other in ways Itaki (1991) predicted, and its underlying model of a discrete, one-time governance choice sits

awkwardly against the continuously adjustable, multi-platform reality observed in Chapter 5. The applied barriers-and-stimuli literature introduced through Leonidou (2004) and Leonidou et al. (2007) in Section 2.2 arguably offers the most directly applicable organizing framework of all those examined in this thesis, precisely because it was never built around a single causal mechanism, gradual learning, rapid capability, or governance choice, but around an empirically grounded catalogue of the conditions that help or hinder internationalization, a catalogue this thesis has shown can be extended, with the addition of a platform-governance category, to the digitally mediated context of Turkish cross-border e-commerce. For practice, these findings suggest that Turkish digital entrepreneurs would benefit from treating platform selection as an ongoing portfolio decision rather than a one-time choice, from building relational trust signals deliberately given that institutional and technological trust are largely supplied by the platform rather than the seller, and from pricing decisions that explicitly account for currency volatility rather than treating exchange rates as a stable background condition. For policy, the analysis suggests that Turkey's existing e-Ihracat incentive structure is well targeted at the specific cost categories that platform-based exporting entails, but that policymakers might usefully consider extending Customs-Union-equivalent trade facilitation, or at least more transparent and stable customs treatment, to entrepreneurs' other priority markets in the Gulf and Central Asia, given that the enabling effect of Turkey's trade positioning, discussed in Section 5.3, currently applies unevenly across the markets Turkish entrepreneurs actually prioritize. These theoretical, practical, and policy threads are drawn together in the concluding chapter that follows.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

7.1 Overview

This concluding chapter brings together the threads developed across the preceding six chapters. Section 7.2 summarizes the key findings of this thesis, drawing together the barriers, enablers, and strategic choices identified in Chapter 5 and the theoretical interpretation offered in Chapter 6. Section 7.3 articulates the specific theoretical contributions this thesis makes to the internationalization and digital entrepreneurship literatures reviewed in Chapter 2, building on the discussion of each framework's partial fit developed in Section 6.5. Section 7.4 acknowledges the limitations of the secondary data approach adopted in this thesis, as first outlined in Section 4.6, and identifies specific directions for future research that would extend or test the conclusions reached here, particularly through primary data collection of the kind this thesis, by design, was not positioned to undertake.

7.2 Summary of Key Findings

This thesis set out to examine cross-border e-commerce as an internationalization pathway for Turkish digital entrepreneurs, guided by three research questions concerning the barriers they face, the enablers that support them, and the strategic choices that characterize their engagement with foreign markets. In response to the first research question, Chapter 5 identified five recurring barriers: regulatory and customs complexity, arising from both Turkey's own evolving e-commerce and customs law and the shifting tariff and VAT regimes of destination markets; a persistent logistical trade-off between the slower, lower-cost state postal service and faster, more expensive private carriers; currency volatility stemming from the sustained depreciation of the Turkish lira; digital trust and payment friction, compounded by the fact that a new seller must accumulate reputation signals largely on their own even where technological

and institutional trust infrastructure is supplied by the platform; and language and cultural distance, which continues to shape buyer behavior even within an ostensibly borderless digital marketplace. In response to the second research question, four enablers were identified that help explain why Turkish digital entrepreneurs have nonetheless built a growing base of cross-border activity: the government's e-İhracat tax rebate program, which directly subsidizes the cost categories platform-based exporting entails; platform infrastructure, both global marketplaces and the rapidly internationalizing Trendyol ecosystem, which substitutes for capabilities an individual entrepreneur would otherwise have to build independently; Turkey's Customs Union positioning, which offers a genuine but geographically bounded cost advantage for entrepreneurs targeting European markets; and a favorable demographic and digital readiness profile that provides the underlying population of entrepreneurs able to take advantage of the other three enablers. In response to the third research question, Chapter 5 identified three interrelated strategic choices: a strong tilt toward marketplace-based selling over independent direct-to-consumer channels, reflecting the internalization logic examined through Dunning's OLI Framework; a pattern of market targeting that combines the tariff-driven pull of European markets with the psychic-distance-driven pull of culturally proximate Middle Eastern and Central Asian markets, pursued simultaneously rather than sequentially; and a tendency toward multi-platform diversification as a means of managing the platform-dependency risk that marketplace-based selling otherwise entails. Chapter 6 then interpreted these findings against the three theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 2, reaching a conclusion that is itself among the more significant findings of this thesis: no single framework offers a complete account of how Turkish digital entrepreneurs internationalize, and each framework's specific pattern of fit and misfit is informative in its own right. The Uppsala Model's experiential-learning mechanism explained comparatively little of the barrier landscape identified, since most barriers proved to be structural and exogenous rather than reducible to accumulated

market knowledge, though the model's underlying concept of psychic distance retained relevance for the cultural and linguistic barriers specifically. Born Global Theory correctly anticipated the possibility of rapid, non-sequential internationalization, but the mechanism through which Turkish entrepreneurs achieve this rapid access, externalized platform infrastructure rather than internal firm capability, extends the theory beyond its original formulation. Dunning's OLI Framework offered genuine analytical traction on the platform-selection decision, but the Turkish case, particularly the craftsmanship-based product positioning discussed in Section 6.4, demonstrated with unusual clarity Itaki's (1991) critique that ownership and location advantages are not, in practice, cleanly separable. Across all three frameworks, the applied barriers-and-stimuli literature associated with Leonidou (2004) and Leonidou, Katsikeas, Palihawadana, and Spyropoulou (2007) proved to be the most directly applicable organizing lens, precisely because it was not built around a single causal mechanism and could be extended, with the addition of a platform-governance category, to accommodate the digitally mediated barriers and enablers this thesis identified.

7.3 Theoretical Contributions

This thesis makes four specific contributions to the literatures reviewed in Chapter 2, each following directly from the pattern of theoretical fit and misfit documented in Chapter 6. First, it extends Andersen's (1993) critique of the Uppsala Model beyond the high-technology and service-sector contexts in which that critique was originally situated, providing empirical grounding for the claim that the model's experiential-learning mechanism has limited explanatory power in a further, previously unexamined context: platform-mediated digital entrepreneurship in an emerging market. Where Andersen's critique was largely conceptual, this

thesis has shown concretely, through the barrier landscape documented in Chapter 5, what that limited explanatory power looks like in practice, a set of barriers that are overwhelmingly structural and exogenous rather than reducible to the accumulated market knowledge the Uppsala Model treats as central. Second, this thesis extends Born Global Theory by identifying and naming a mechanism, the externalization of firm capability to platform infrastructure, that the original theory, developed by Oviatt and McDougall (1994) and elaborated by Knight and Cavusgil (2004) before the platform economy reached its current scale, did not anticipate. This is not a minor refinement: it relocates the theory's causal engine from inside the firm to a third party, the platform, a shift with implications for how rapid internationalization should be studied and measured in future research on digitally native entrepreneurship generally, not only in the Turkish context examined here. Related to this, the thesis identifies a hybrid internationalization pattern, domestic platform experience preceding a rapid, non-sequential cross-border expansion, that fits neither the Uppsala Model's gradualism nor the Born Global literature's emphasis on internationalization from or near a firm's founding, suggesting a third pattern worth naming and studying in its own right in future internationalization research. Third, this thesis provides a concrete empirical illustration of Itaki's (1991) theoretical critique of the OLI Framework, demonstrating through the specific case of craftsmanship-based product positioning that ownership and location advantages can be not merely difficult to separate in principle, as Itaki argued, but genuinely inseparable in the lived strategic reality of a specific population of firms. It further shows that the framework's internalization dimension, built around a discrete, one-time governance choice, requires adaptation to account for the continuously adjustable, portfolio-style internalization decisions that low-cost, low-commitment platform participation makes possible, a finding relevant to any future application of the OLI Framework to digitally mediated, rather than traditional foreign-direct-investment-based, contexts. Fourth, and more broadly, this thesis contributes an extension of Leonidou's

(2004) and Leonidou et al.'s (2007) applied barriers-and-stimuli framework to a context, digitally mediated cross-border e-commerce, that had not previously been examined through this specific lens, and in doing so identifies a gap in the framework's original taxonomy, the absence of any category corresponding to platform algorithm and policy risk, that future researchers extending the barriers-and-stimuli tradition to digital contexts would need to address. Taken together, these four contributions respond directly to the fragmentation in the digital-firm-internationalization literature identified by Yang, Bai, Chen, and Rong (2025) in Section 2.2, and to Feliciano-Cestero, Ameen, Kotabe, Paul, and Signoret's (2023) finding, discussed in Section 2.6, that digital transformation can both facilitate and complicate internationalization: this thesis has shown, through a single, contextually grounded case, both how that facilitation occurs mechanically, through platform-provided infrastructure, and where that complication arises, in the structural barriers that no degree of platform sophistication fully resolves.

7.4 Directions for Future Research

The limitations of this thesis, discussed in Section 4.6, point toward several concrete directions for future research, each corresponding to a specific constraint that a secondary data analysis, by design, could not overcome. Most directly, the absence of firsthand entrepreneur testimony in this thesis calls for primary, interview- or survey-based research that could test the patterns identified here against the direct experience of Turkish digital entrepreneurs themselves. Such research would be particularly valuable for examining the hybrid internationalization pattern identified in Section 7.3, in which entrepreneurs appear to build domestic platform experience before extending that activity across borders in a rapid, non-sequential manner; this thesis was able to identify this pattern in the aggregate statistical and industry evidence reviewed in Chapter 5, but establishing how common it actually is, and what

specifically triggers the transition from domestic to cross-border selling for a given entrepreneur, would require the kind of firm-level data collection that lies outside this thesis's secondary data approach. A second direction concerns the externalization mechanism identified in the discussion of Born Global Theory in Section 6.3, whereby platform infrastructure appears to substitute for the internal firm capability that the original Born Global literature treats as central. This thesis examined this mechanism only in the Turkish context; future research could usefully test whether the same pattern of externalization holds among digital entrepreneurs in other emerging markets with different platform ecosystems, regulatory environments, and currency conditions, which would help establish whether the mechanism identified here reflects something general about platform-mediated internationalization or something specific to the Turkish case. Relatedly, the platform-governance barrier category this thesis proposed as an extension to Leonidou's (2004) taxonomy in Section 6.2 was derived analytically from the evidence reviewed rather than tested empirically against a structured sample of entrepreneurs; future research explicitly designed to measure the prevalence and severity of platform algorithm and policy risk, relative to the more traditional barriers Leonidou originally catalogued, would help establish whether this proposed category deserves a permanent place in the export barriers literature or requires further refinement. A third direction follows from the pace-of-change limitation discussed in Section 4.6. Because platform market structures, government incentive programs, and customs regulations affecting Turkish cross-border e-commerce have all changed substantially within the past two to three years, as documented throughout Chapters 3 and 5, a longitudinal research design, tracking a defined cohort of Turkish digital entrepreneurs over several years, would offer insight this thesis's cross-sectional secondary data cannot: specifically, whether the barriers and enablers identified here shift in relative importance over time, and whether entrepreneurs' strategic choices, particularly the multi-platform diversification pattern discussed in Section 5.4, evolve as platform ecosystems and government

policy mature. A fourth direction concerns the sectoral scope of this thesis. The OLI-based analysis in Section 6.4 demonstrated the inseparability of ownership and location advantages specifically in relation to craftsmanship-based product categories such as textiles, leather goods, and jewelry; future research could usefully examine whether this same inseparability holds for Turkish digital entrepreneurs operating in more technology-oriented or service-based categories, where ownership advantages might be expected to be more portable and less bound to Turkey as a location, offering a comparative test of Itaki's (1991) critique across product categories with different underlying advantage structures. Finally, given the language limitation acknowledged in Section 4.6, future research conducted in Turkish, or by researchers with direct access to Turkish-language policy documents, industry commentary, and entrepreneur communities, could surface evidence this thesis, constrained to English-language sources, was not able to access, potentially revealing barriers, enablers, or strategic patterns specific to the Turkish context that remain invisible in the internationally oriented literature this thesis has drawn upon. Pursued together, these five directions would extend the contextually grounded but necessarily partial account developed in this thesis toward a more complete understanding of how Turkish digital entrepreneurs, and digital entrepreneurs in emerging markets more broadly, build international businesses through cross-border e-commerce.

Bibliography

1. Andersen, O. (1993). On the internationalization process of firms: A critical analysis. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 24(2), 209–231.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490230>
2. Antom Knowledge. (2026). *Turkey e-commerce and payment trends report: The digital engine at the crossroads of Europe and Asia*. <https://knowledge.antom.com/turkey-e-commerce-payment-trends-report-the-digital-engine-at-the-crossroads-of-europe-and-asia>
3. Ari, Y. O. (2023). The impact of currency depreciation on exports: An autoregressive distributed lag approach for Turkish lira. *Acta Economica*, 21(38), 93–108.
<https://doi.org/10.7251/ACE2338093O>
4. Bilik, M. (2023). Analyzing challenges and opportunities in the e-commerce industry of Turkey. *İzmir Journal of Economics*, 38(4), 1138–1151.
<https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2998833>
5. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
6. Business Review. (2025). *Trendyol expands across CEE with Romania emerging as a key market*. <https://business-review.eu/business/e-commerce/trendyol-expands-across-cee-with-romania-emerging-as-a-key-market-280977>
7. Consultancy.me. (2025, August 11). *Türkiye's e-commerce sector: An engine of economic growth and trade*. <https://www.consultancy-me.com/news/11290/turkiyes-e-commerce-sector-an-engine-of-economic-growth-and-trade>
8. DataReportal. (2023). *Digital 2023: Turkey*. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-turkey>

9. Divrik, B., & Baykal, E. (2024). Turkish textile and clothing SMEs: Importance of organizational learning, digitalization, and internationalization. *AUTEX Research Journal*, 24(1), Article 20230043. <https://doi.org/10.1515/aut-2023-0043>
10. Dong, Y. (2026). Navigating trust in cross-border e-commerce: A systematic review of cultural and consumer dynamics. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 13, Article 237. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-026-06579-4>
11. Dunning, J. H. (1980). Toward an eclectic theory of international production: Some empirical tests. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 11(1), 9–31. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490593>
12. Dunning, J. H. (2001). The eclectic (OLI) paradigm of international production: Past, present and future. *International Journal of the Economics of Business*, 8(2), 173–190. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13571510110051441>
13. Etsy Help. (2026). *Will I have to pay for tax, customs, or tariffs on my order?* <https://help.etsy.com/hc/en-us/articles/115015691007-Will-I-Have-to-Pay-for-Tax-Customs-or-Tariffs-on-My-Order>
14. Export Partners. (2025). *2025 e-export government incentives*. <https://www.exportpartners.com.tr/en/2025-yili-e-ihracat-devlet-tesvikleri/>
15. Feliciano-Cestero, M. M., Ameen, N., Kotabe, M., Paul, J., & Signoret, M. (2023). Is digital transformation threatened? A systematic literature review of the factors influencing firms' digital transformation and internationalization. *Journal of Business Research*, 157, Article 113546. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113546>
16. Global Fee Calculator. (2026). *Etsy fee calculator Turkey 2026: Exact fees in TRY*. <https://globalfeecalculator.com/etsy-fee-turkey/>

17. Hagi, A., & Wright, J. (2015). Multi-sided platforms. *International Journal of Industrial Organization*, 43, 162–174. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijindorg.2015.03.003>
18. Hox, J. J., & Boeijs, H. R. (2005). Data collection, primary versus secondary. In K. Kempf-Leonard (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of social measurement* (pp. 593–599). Elsevier. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-12-369398-5/00041-4>
19. Hull, C. E., Hung, Y. C., Hair, N., Perotti, V., & DeMartino, R. (2007). Taking advantage of digital opportunities: A typology of digital entrepreneurship. *International Journal of Networking and Virtual Organizations*, 4(3), 290–303. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJNVO.2007.015166>
20. IndexBox. (2025). *Trendyol Gulf expansion: Local sellers & tech drive e-commerce growth*. <https://www.indexbox.io/blog/trendyol-expands-in-gulf-with-hyper-localization-and-sme-focus/>
21. International Trade Centre. (n.d.). *Trade map*. <https://www.intracen.org/resources/tools/trade-map>
22. International Trade Council. (2023). *Global e-commerce reaches \$5.8 trillion, Turkey aims for increased export share*. <https://tradecouncil.org/global-e-commerce-reaches-5-8-trillion/>
23. Itaki, M. (1991). A critical assessment of the eclectic theory of the multinational enterprise. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 22(3), 445–460. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490310>
24. Jick, T. D. (1979). Mixing qualitative and quantitative methods: Triangulation in action. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(4), 602–611. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2392366>
25. Johanson, J., & Vahlne, J. E. (1977). The internationalization process of the firm: A model of knowledge development and increasing foreign market commitments. *Journal of*

- International Business Studies*, 8(1), 23–32.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490676>
26. Johanson, J., & Vahlne, J. E. (2009). The Uppsala internationalization process model revisited: From liability of foreignness to liability of outsidership. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 40(9), 1411–1431. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2009.24>
 27. Johnston, M. P. (2014). Secondary data analysis: A method of which the time has come. *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries*, 3, 619–626.
 28. Karabulut, A. T. (2013). Internationalization of Turkish SMEs: An empirical study. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 8(6).
<https://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ijbm/article/view/23181>
 29. Ken Research. (2025). *Turkey cross-border e-commerce market: 2019–2030*.
<https://www.kenresearch.com/turkey-e-commerce-cross-border-retail-market>
 30. Knight, G. A., & Cavusgil, S. T. (2004). Innovation, organizational capabilities, and the born-global firm. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 35(2), 124–141.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8400071>
 31. Lengow. (2026). *Top Turkish marketplaces in 2026*. <https://www.lengow.com/get-to-know-more/top-turkish-marketplaces/>
 32. Leonidou, L. C. (2004). An analysis of the barriers hindering small business export development. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 42(3), 279–302.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-627X.2004.00112.x>
 33. Leonidou, L. C., Katsikeas, C. S., Palihawadana, D., & Spyropoulou, S. (2007). An analytical review of the factors stimulating smaller firms to export: Implications for policy-makers. *International Marketing Review*, 24(6), 735–770.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/02651330710832685>

34. Listybox. (2026). *Etsy Turkey sellers: Payments & shipping*. <https://listybox.com/blog/etsy-turkey-sellers-guide>
35. Mirakl. (2026). *Multichannel eCommerce: Why brands must diversify now*. <https://www.mirakl.com/blogs/brands-sellers/multichannel-ecommerce-why-brands-must-diversify-now/>
36. Mondaq. (2022). *New law amending the law on the regulation of electronic commerce in Turkey: A brief introduction*. <https://www.mondaq.com/turkey/contracts-and-commercial-law/1218860/new-law-amending-the-law-on-the-regulation-of-electronic-commerce-in-turkey-a-brief-introduction>
37. Mordor Intelligence. (2026). *Turkey e-commerce market size, share & forecast report 2031*. <https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/turkey-ecommerce-market>
38. Nambisan, S. (2017). Digital entrepreneurship: Toward a digital technology perspective of entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 41(6), 1029–1055. <https://doi.org/10.1111/etap.12254>
39. Orman, İ., & Teker, S. (2024). Impact of cross-border e-commerce on growth of Turkish SMEs. *PressAcademia Procedia*, 20, 66–70. <https://doi.org/10.17261/Pressacademia.2024.1926>
40. Oviatt, B. M., & McDougall, P. P. (1994). Toward a theory of international new ventures. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 25(1), 45–64. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jibs.8490193>
41. Qi, X., Chan, J. H., Hu, J., & Li, Y. (2020). Motivations for selecting cross-border e-commerce as a foreign market entry mode. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 89, 50–60. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2020.01.009>

42. Rialp, A., Rialp, J., & Knight, G. A. (2005). The phenomenon of early internationalizing firms: What do we know after a decade (1993–2003) of scientific inquiry? *International Business Review*, 14(2), 147–166. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2004.04.006>
43. Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2023). *Research methods for business students* (9th ed.). Pearson.
44. Scott, J. (1990). *A matter of record: Documentary sources in social research*. Polity Press.
45. Sussan, F., & Acs, Z. J. (2017). The digital entrepreneurial ecosystem. *Small Business Economics*, 49(1), 55–73. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-017-9867-5>
46. Tevetoglu Legal. (2022). *E-export incentives*. <https://www.tevetoglu.av.tr/en/new-and-insight/e-export-incentives-2022-09-01-170830>
47. Thorbecke, W., & Sengonul, A. (2023). The impact of exchange rates on Turkish imports and exports. *International Economics*, 174, 231–249. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.inteco.2023.04.003>
48. Tranfield, D., Denyer, D., & Smart, P. (2003). Towards a methodology for developing evidence-informed management knowledge by means of systematic review. *British Journal of Management*, 14(3), 207–222. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.00375>
49. Turkish Statistical Institute. (n.d.). *Home*. <https://www.tuik.gov.tr/en/>
50. UNCTAD. (2023). *Measuring the value of e-commerce*. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/dtlecde2023d3_en.pdf
51. U.S. International Trade Administration. (2025). *Turkey country commercial guide: E-commerce*. <https://trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/turkey-ecommerce>

52. Wen, H., Liu, Y., & Zhou, F. (2023). Promoting the international competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises through cross-border e-commerce development. *SAGE Open*, 13(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231210119>
53. World Bank. (2014). *Evaluation of the EU-Turkey Customs Union* (Report No. 85830-TR). <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/298151468308967367/pdf/858300ESW0P1440disclosed090260140TR.pdf>
54. World Bank. (n.d.). *Turkey trade summary* [Data set]. World Integrated Trade Solution. <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/TUR/>
55. Yang, B., Bai, W., Chen, Y., & Rong, K. (2025). Internationalization of digital firms: A systematic review and research agenda. *Journal of Business Research*, 189, Article 115124. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115124>
56. Zhang, X., & Pertheban, T. R. (2023). Exploring the factors affecting consumer trust in cross-border e-commerce: A comparative study. *Academic Journal of Business & Management*, 5(19), 51–57. <https://doi.org/10.25236/AJBM.2023.051909>