



Commercial Diplomacy and Internationalization of SMEs: A Scoping Review

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to synthesize information about the possible advantages of SME internationalization. The primary question driving this scoping review is: What is the extent to which field of commercial diplomacy has identified its potential to benefit the SMEs, specifically in their internationalization efforts? We do have done a scoping review adhering to a five-step methodology, and extensively reviewing the relevant studies. A systematic literature review was conducted using electronic databases with predefined inclusion-exclusion criteria. 191 articles were screened, yielding 19 relevant studies for final analysis. Our review not only offers a comprehensive analysis of the current research on the relationship between CD and SME internationalization, but also identifies key themes. While doing so, this study sheds light on significant findings, on-going debates, and identifies research gaps that need future exploration. The study's theoretical and practical implications are also discussed. The role of SMEs in economic growth and innovation is crucial in the context of globalization. Nevertheless, SMEs have several internal and external challenges throughout their process of internationalization. Despite the established significance commercial diplomacy plays in the internationalization efforts of SMEs, centre of attention remains on large organization and their facilitation. While the current body of research mostly focuses on the economic consequences of internationalization for bigger companies, it remains limited on SMEs.

Keywords: SME Internationalization, Commercial Diplomacy, Internationalization, Challenges, Commercial Diplomacy Review

JEL Classifications: F2, F5, F13, N4

1. INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) has emerged as a crucial catalyst for economic development and innovation in an era of escalating globalization (Hizarci et al., 2023). These enterprises, characterized by their agility and resourcefulness, adeptly traverse the intricate dynamics of global marketplaces, therefore making substantial contributions to the growth and development of domestic economies (Gherghina et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the process of SME internationalization is not devoid of obstacles. The review by Naray and Bezençon (2017) revealed the identification of many internal and external impediments encountered by SMEs throughout the process of internationalization. The internal obstacles hindering the

internationalization of SMEs were limited resources, expenses associated with the internationalization endeavour, and inadequate human resources. In contrast, the external factors included significant bureaucratic hurdles in foreign markets, intense rivalry, inadequate infrastructure assistance, substantial cultural disparities, and insufficient support from relevant organizations responsible for providing required aid.

Naray and Bezençon (2017) highlight the adverse impact of insufficient government assistance and bureaucratic obstacles on SMEs during their internationalization endeavours, and the concept of commercial diplomacy (CD) was found to be a vital facilitator. CD refers to a diverse array of actions and techniques that are used by governments, diplomatic missions, and trade promotion

organizations to facilitate the worldwide expansion of SMEs (Pacheco and Matos, 2022). The CD was found to be providing strategic assistance, surmounting the obstacles associated with international growth, and engaging in negotiation, lobbying, and relationship-building activities to cultivate advantageous trade and investment conditions for SMEs in international markets (Ruel and Zuidema, 2012). Meeting a wide range of legal frameworks, cultural subtleties, and market dynamics in efforts to expand globally (Child et al., 2022). CD worked as a crucial intermediary, facilitating the connection between firms and significant resources, networks, and possibilities within the global arena (Busschers and Ruël, 2012).

However, the majority of the existing literature has examined the significance of CD in enhancing and facilitating trade ties for the advantage of governments (Afesorgbor, 2019; Pacheco and Matos, 2022). However, these studies are limited to emphasizing the economic effect of such diplomacy, particularly focusing on big firms owing to their substantial resources. Governments and international organizations often prioritize major firms in their trade and diplomacy strategies owing to their capacity to yield substantial economic advantages. The existing literature mostly focuses on giant multinational corporations and neglects the distinct challenges that smaller firms encounter in foreign markets. Furthermore, the literature also lacks emphasis on the potential benefits of tailored support provided via policy networks and intergovernmental collaboration in enhancing the global competitiveness of SMEs. Thus, this lack of attention to how exactly CD facilitate the SMEs in their internationalization efforts seems problematic because it does not merely restrict the emphasis but also hinders the comparative research. This selective focus sounds biased and fragments the literature, raising the question of CD's potential to benefit SMEs, specifically in their internationalization efforts?

Thus, a scoping review of the role of CD in SME internationalization is deemed timely and warranted for the following reasons. A scoping review is deemed appropriate since this study aims to (a) identify key common characteristics of existing research on commercial diplomacy and SME internationalization, (b) acquire a comprehensive understanding of the intricate concept of commercial diplomacy and SME internationalization, classify gaps and fundamental concepts that are present in the field, (c) classify gaps and fundamental concepts that are present in the field, (d) to identify and emphasize the important results, debates, and areas that need future research in this research area which has not undergone significant research yet (Munn et al., 2018).

With the primary objective to conduct an analysis of existing research on the topic of CD and SME internationalization, our exploration of literature results in a methodical framework which summarizes key areas and opens new streams of discussion. The study identifies key themes embedded in the literature, such as CD helps SMEs in (a) strategic partnerships and networking, (b) provides access and information to SMEs, (c) enhances credibility and reputation, (d) risk mitigation and conflict resolution and (e) market access and expansion opportunities. Findings offer identification of important results, debates, and areas that need future research in this research area. Findings also shed light on

methodologies used in this particular area of inquiry, which extant literature fails to capture. Doing so enhances the existing literature on international business and CD by methodically evaluating and categorizing the present understanding of how diplomatic efforts support the worldwide expansion of SMEs.

Our scoping review offers a significant contribution to the literature on commercial diplomacy and SME internationalization. First, the review helps organize the primary contributions and advancements in the subject, particularly regarding the internationalization of SMEs and the unique obstacles they encounter in contrast to larger corporations (Gherghina et al., 2020). Second, this study advances a foundation for developing more sophisticated theoretical frameworks that explain the relationship between diplomatic strategies targeting foreign market access and operational assistance and their impact on the export performance, foreign direct investment, and overall international success of SMEs. Third, our review consolidates existing literature on the potential of CD to facilitate the worldwide expansion of SMEs. While doing so, the focus remains on concrete strategies that CD might use to support SMEs in effectively accessing and functioning within foreign markets.

This scoping review also offers significant practical implications for managers of SMEs, politicians who are promoting internationalization activities and commercial diplomats who are assisting with foreign development. Moreover, this review highlights optimal strategies for offering infrastructural support, securing advantageous trade agreements, fostering international business connections, and aiding small and medium-sized enterprises in managing legal and cultural disparities. By acquiring a comprehensive understanding of the function of CD, professionals may enhance their plans and activities to facilitate the worldwide expansion of SMEs.

2. METHODS

To review the existing literature on CD, this scoping review follows the five-step process defined by (Arksey and O'malley, 2005). The five steps of scoping review consist of formulating the research question, finding relevant papers, selecting the best studies, visualizing the data, and drawing conclusions (Table 1).

2.1. Search Strategy and Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Led by the research question, a literature search was conducted to identify relevant studies. To strictly limit or review the process to the study's core objective, we predefined inclusion-exclusion criteria. The review's inclusion criteria encompassed four main aspects: (1) the primary research area being CD; (2) the focus on CD outcomes; (3) the inclusion of studies that briefly or extensively discussed the benefits of CD for SMEs; and (4) the inclusion of various types of studies, such as descriptive articles, theoretical concepts, qualitative and quantitative research, as well as mixed-methods studies.

Electronic databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar were used to conduct a literature search using

Table 1: Scoping review process

Steps	Description in context of current research
Step 1: Identifying the research question	What is the extent to which the field of CD has identified its potential to benefit the SMEs, specifically in their internationalization efforts?
Step 2: Identifying the relevant studies	Using a detailed search strategy, a total of 258 studies as a prior selection.
Step 3: Selection of studies	After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria in multiple steps as outlined in PRISMA flowchart, a total of 19 studies were selected for the final review.
Step 4: Charting the data	After reviewing these articles, thematic analysis was conducted, and the results are presented in tabular form outlining the information accessed from the articles (Table 2).
Step 5: Collating, summarising, and reporting the results	The next section outlines all the results obtained through analysis of the 19 articles.

the search terms “CD,” “commercial diplomacy,” “SME internationalization,” “economic diplomacy,” “small businesses,” and “diplomatic efforts” (the “AND” Boolean operator was used among the search terms). Keeping in mind our selection criteria, we selected the search result time frame of 2007 to date. The rationale behind selecting the time frame of 2007 to date provides a strategic perspective to analyze the development of these interconnected concepts of CD and SME internationalization. This era represents the rise of CD as a fundamental element of diplomatic tactics on a global scale, occurring simultaneously with crucial transformations in the global economy and improvements in technology (Hajdukiewicz, 2019). Moreover, this era also focuses on the policies, initiatives, and scholarly literature of the past years to capture the most recent developments in this field.

The initial search yielded a total of 258 articles from all the databases, consisting of all kinds of resources, consisting of 67 duplicates among these articles. Removal of, which resulted in a total of 191 articles. No constraints were placed on the type of article (journal articles, reports, editorial, and conference papers were included) or country of origin. At this step, we employed our second exclusion criteria, which was to exclude research conducted in languages other than English. The application of inclusion and exclusion criteria removed 128 articles as these were outside the scope of the current research. In this step, a full review of the remaining articles was done, and 44 articles were removed, which yielded 19 articles for the final review. The following Figure 1 was developed using a PRISMA flowchart (Pham et al., 2014) as it outlines the process in which the selection of articles was done. We also present the scoping review process in tabulated form, following all steps (Table 1).

Table 1 outlines the completed scoping review process, which was guided by Arksey and O’malley (2005) scoping review framework.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results section consists of two main sections: (a) study characteristics and (b) discussion of findings related to how CD benefits SME internationalization. The current section presents the findings relevant to the characteristics of the reviewed studies, followed by the second section discussing the common themes and explaining how CD facilitates SME internationalization. The findings indicated key themes that were identified through scoping review, which included benefits of CD for SME internationalization are strategic partnerships and networking, providing access and information to SMEs, enhancing credibility and reputation, doing

effective risk mitigation and conflict resolution and providing market access and expansion opportunities.

3.1. Study Characteristics

3.1.1. Publication year

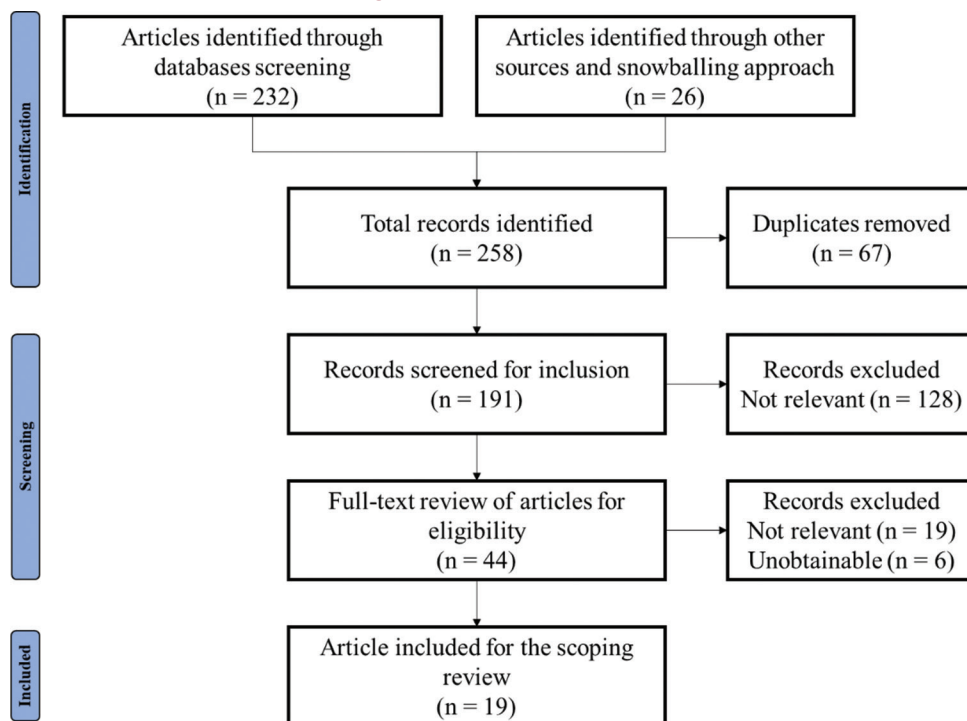
The publication year of the selected papers ranged from 2007 to 2023. The majority of the articles (n = 11) considered for the review were published between 2007 and 2015, showing scholar’s peak interest in how CD might help SMEs with their internationalization activities. The remaining articles (n = 8) were published post-2017. Nevertheless, there was a noticeable surge in publications after 2017, with a total of eight articles published throughout this period. The distribution of attention to the topic indicates a consistent and enduring interest, with an initial realization of its importance and a subsequent increase in attention in recent years. Analyzing these temporal patterns yields useful insights into the development of research on the role of CD in facilitating the worldwide expansion of SMEs and also identifies prospective areas for further exploration in this subject.

3.1.2. Study context

The analysis of contexts provides a look into the wide range of geographic and subject variety found in the scoping review on the topic. Studies (n = 9) concentrate on a wide range of geographical areas such as the Netherlands (Busschers and Ruël, 2012), Malaysia (Ruël, 2013), Serbia (Penev et al., 2014), Slovenia (Justinek, 2012) Poland (Hajdukiewicz, 2019), Saudi Arabia (Aleidan, 2019), Sri Lanka (Vidyarathne and Sumanasiri, 2020), Portugal (Pacheco and Matos, 2022), and Africa (Turker and Konakli, 2016). The presence of many types of businesses in different settings emphasizes the worldwide significance and practicality of CD while also emphasizing the complex and diverse nature of SME internationalization. Furthermore, the incorporation of authors such as Turker and Konakli (2016), who investigate the African setting, and Vidyarathne and Sumanasiri (2020), whose research focuses on Sri Lanka, underscores the significance of comprehending regional subtleties and obstacles in the execution of CD methods.

Most of the studies are in general context or independent context, which represents that there is a lack of studies in the context of many countries that have established good diplomatic relations or plan to do so, specifically for SME internationalization. Nevertheless, there is a need to explore contexts that are favourable for SMEs; there is certainly a chance to broaden the research focus to encompass locations or countries renowned for promoting the growth and innovation of SMEs.

Figure 1: PRISMA flowchart



3.1.3. Research methodology

The authors’ utilization of a wide range of research methods to examine the role of CD in facilitating SME internationalization demonstrates the intricate nature of this subject and the necessity for multiple research approaches to thoroughly address its complexity. The analysis of methods reveals the presence of various types of studies. These include quantitative studies with empirical reviews and case studies (n = 5), qualitative studies with conceptual and theoretical articles (n = 10), mixed studies combining qualitative and quantitative approaches (n = 2), and a small number of review papers (n = 2).

Kostecki and Naray (2007) and Naray (2008) emphasize the significance of utilizing empirical review and case-study research to derive insights from real-world instances and existing literature. This approach informs both theoretical frameworks and practical consequences. Busschers and Ruël (2012) and Justinek (2012) have emphasized the importance of using mixed-methods approaches, which combine qualitative and quantitative analyses. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the various aspects of CD and SME internationalization, capturing both the detailed nuances and the overall scope of these phenomena.

Naray (2012) and Ruel and Zuidema (2012) offer theoretical discussion enhancing the scholarly comprehension of fundamental mechanisms and conceptual frameworks. Furthermore, Penev et al. (2014), Aleidan (2019), and Vidyaratne and Sumanasiri (2020) utilize systematic reviews, quantitative analyses, and qualitative methods, respectively. These approaches provide thorough investigations of empirical evidence, contextual factors, and stakeholder perspectives, thereby enriching our understanding of how CD affects the internationalization efforts of SMEs. Quantitative analysis reveals that the majority of studies are

qualitative in character and highlights the necessity of performing more empirical research to demonstrate correlations among variables through empirical evidence. Table 2 presents the detailed review of selected 19 articles.

The second part of our scoping review resulted in the development of the following themes.

3.2. Benefits of CD for SME Internationalisation

3.2.1. Market Access and Expansion Opportunities

Kostecki and Naray (2007) emphasized the role of CD in advancing international trade and fostering corporate partnerships, which inherently provides market access and expansion opportunities. CD advances international trade and fosters corporate partnerships. He concluded that CD has adapted over time, giving greater priority to trade promotion, attracting foreign direct investment, and enhancing information retrieval, public relations, and business support in line with evolving government priorities (Kostecki and Naray, 2007).

However, the research lacked an in-depth analysis regarding the specific impact of CD on international business development in different institutional contexts, given that countries have diverse institutions with varying elements. Naray (2008) also explored the advantages of CD for both large corporations and SMEs, indicating its potential to facilitate market access and expansion opportunities. Employing empirical case-study research and a thorough literature review, Naray (2008) shed light on the advantages of CD for both large corporations and SMEs. It delved into the factors influencing CD, particularly the skills and backgrounds of diplomats, and also identified and discussed various CD activities.

While Naray (2008) offered a conceptual overview of the subject, its shortcomings lie in the absence of precise quantitative data,

Table 2: Review of selected articles

Author and year	Research purpose	Research context	Methods employed	Results	Critique of the articles
(Kostecki and Naray, 2007)	It focused on analyzing how CD contributes to the promotion of international trade and corporate partnership, to the resolution of business conflicts and the marketing of a country as a location for foreign investments, R&D activities or tourist destination and “made-in”.	General	Empirical Review	CD has evolved to prioritize trade promotion, foreign direct investment (FDI) attraction, and secondary activities like information search, public relations, and business support in response to changing government priorities and technological advancements.	The paper did provide empirical support by focusing on data related to allocation of diplomats by country of origin and allocation of time among various CD activities. However, there was a lack of in-depth analysis of the impact of CD on international business development in a specific context as all countries have different institutions with varying elements.
(Naray, 2008)	It focused on the importance of CD in the globalization age.	General	Empirical case-study research Literature review	The results indicated the benefits of CD for large companies and SMEs and factors that shape CD, such as skills and background of diplomats. CD activities were also identified and discussed.	The current study did offer a good conceptual overview of the subject of CD research. However, the study lacked the inclusion of precise quantitative data to provide more specific future recommendations and the study was not focused on a specific context.
(Busschers and Ruël, 2012)	It aimed to identify to what degree, in what contexts, for whom, and under what circumstances is CD viewed as helpful from the standpoint of SMEs.	Netherlands	Mixed (Qualitative and Quantitative)	The findings of this research indicated that the perceived quality of service has a substantial influence on the value that SMEs assign to CD. Moreover, SMEs that have acquired worldwide experience tend to attribute lesser significance to CD. Conversely, SMEs that serve foreign public clients see a higher level of value in CD.	The article provides valuable insights into the evaluation of CD for SMEs. However, it would be beneficial to further explore issues pertaining to statistical power, cross-country analysis, and the influence of instrument adaptation in order to enhance the overall academic contribution and research validity.
(Naray, 2012)	It aimed to develop a framework to understand value creation through CD	General	Conceptual paper	The developed framework focused on input, process, and output. It included managerial concerns, capabilities and resources, performance of roles, and value for stakeholders, such as SMEs, large businesses, business support organizations, and government.	The article provided with an extensive framework that can guide companies about the CD and its implications for businesses. However, the framework was developed without any support of primary data collection.
(Justinek, 2012)	It focused on analyzing the effect of CD for enhancing SMEs performance in terms of export.	Slovenia	Mixed (Qualitative and Quantitative)	The findings suggested that diplomatic efforts have the potential to enhance export assistance for tiny nations such as Slovenia. However, the effectiveness of the export support system plays a vital role in enabling SMEs to make optimal use of this assistance.	This article emphasized the potential of diplomacy in facilitating export assistance. However, SMEs might benefit from a more up-to-date evaluation and proposes the need for enhanced organizational structure and people in the export support operations.
(Ruël et al., 2013)	It focused on analyzing the perspectives of international business executives in regard	Malaysia	Qualitative	The results of the study indicated that enterprises that have prior knowledge and experience in the	The study provided an informative perspective on benefits of CD for new businesses. However,

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Table 2: (Continued)

Author and year	Research purpose	Research context	Methods employed	Results	Critique of the articles
	to how CD can benefit them.			Malaysian business climate tend to request less diplomatic business help. However, it is observed that support provided to new entrants is seen as very beneficial.	the study only focused on collecting data from Netherlands embassy in Malaysia, which limited its generalizability.
(Ruĕl, 2013)	The objective of this research was to elucidate the evolving dynamics of the global economy and underscore the significance of diplomacy and diplomatic competencies in achieving international commercial success within this period of transformation.	General	Theoretical paper	The study's results indicated that SMEs do not fully use the potential of CD services. Moreover, the effectiveness of these services is contingent upon several aspects, including the expertise of commercial diplomats and the level of readiness shown by businesses to engage in economic activities inside a foreign nation.	The study offered significant insights into the evolving dynamics of global business and the significance of diplomacy. However, there was a lack of more comprehensive examination of the many obstacles and complexity associated with the execution of commercial and corporate diplomacy initiatives with the lack of any method of primary data collection.
(Ruĕl, 2013)	The study aimed to promote further investigation into the field of CD by academics specializing in international business. This study aimed to investigate the notion of CD, its importance, and its role in facilitating international corporate activities.	General	Theoretical paper	The findings outlined the historical and contemporary significance of CD, its definition, and its effectiveness in supporting international business.	The study underscored the significance of examining CD but there was a dearth of comprehensive perspectives or comparative studies within this domain.
(Visser and Ruĕl, 2014)	The research aimed to identify areas of research that would enhance understanding of international business concepts in CD. This helped businesses and governments better adapt to each other and operate more efficiently.	General	Review paper	The findings indicated recommendations for future researchers by emphasizing the importance of expanding research in CD to include micro-level international business perspectives and highlight the need for multi-method studies to enhance understanding in this area.	The study based its findings on critical review of studies published without considering perspectives of stakeholders or by any empirical support.
(Penev et al., 2014)	The research analyzed the chronology of implementation of CD in Serbia, scope and efficiency of its activities, and the areas for improvement.	Serbia	Quantitative	The study's findings suggested that enhancing the effectiveness of CD necessitates enhancing coordination across the relevant organizations. This coordination is crucial to prevent redundancy in their efforts and to optimize the use of limited resources.	The research indicated the challenges faced by companies in terms of internationalization. However, the findings are based on a very small size, and it lacks the inclusion of perspectives from relevant stakeholders.
(Berridge and Berridge, 2015)	The research aimed to identify how commercial and economic diplomacy guide businesses in their development.	General	Theoretical paper	The results indicated that there has been a decrease in economic and CD in recent times as a result of political instability in important areas. This has led to foreign ministries having limited participation in negotiations that involve	The research was based on only theoretical discussion without any support of empirical or subjective data. Also, the research was based in a general context, without any focus on a specific country or region.

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Table 2: (Continued)

Author and year	Research purpose	Research context	Methods employed	Results	Critique of the articles
(Turker and Konakli, 2016)	This study examined the impact of Turkish nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) on the construction of Turkey's national image and the advancement of the country's brand via the utilization of public diplomacy strategies inside the African continent.	Africa	Conceptual paper	multiple parties, while embassies have assumed a more prominent role, particularly in commercial endeavours. Consequently, there is a need to consider the most suitable administrative approach for managing these activities. The findings suggested that the provision of civil society support has considerable importance, particularly for SMEs in developing nations, given the inherent challenges associated with the limited worldwide image and reputation of these countries.	The research showcased the significance of public diplomacy, but it lacked empirical evidence or practical applications to support the theoretical findings.
(Naray and Bezençon, 2017)	The study aimed to conduct a systematic review on CD to identify the important themes and trends and provide future recommendations.	General	Systematic Review	The findings indicated a correlation between CD and the government's role in promoting exports and commerce, as well as the organizational structure and administrative responsibilities associated with this function. Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of the connection between commercial diplomats and companies in facilitating successful CD efforts.	The study provided interesting recommendations in regard to the field of CD, which can guide the future researchers.
(Hajdukiewicz, 2019)	The primary objective of this study is to analyze the function and complexities associated with modern CD in the context of promoting business activities and facilitating international trade and investment.	Poland	Theoretical paper	The study demonstrated that the nature and concentration of CD have undergone changes in response to the global economic and trade system's evolution. The current scope of activity encompasses several endeavours, including the promotion of domestic brands, enhancement of the reputation of national enterprises, facilitation of tourist growth, attraction of foreign direct investments (FDIs), and provision of assistance to SMEs in international markets.	This study successfully discussed CD 's shifting position in globalization and economic dynamics. Literature examination, legal document analysis, and a case study strengthen the conclusions. However, the research could use additional examples and statistics to support its claim with a more focus on commercial diplomats' challenges and opportunities.
(Ruël, 2018)	The article focused on outlining the importance of trade missions as an important CD activity for the internationalization process.	General	Theoretical paper	The findings indicated that trade missions are among the very crucial facilitators that connect the home and host countries organizations for better economic growth and development.	The research was based on only theoretical discussion without any support of empirical or subjective data. Also, the research was based in a general context, without any focus on a specific country or region.

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Table 2: (Continued)

Author and year	Research purpose	Research context	Methods employed	Results	Critique of the articles
(Aleidan, 2019)	The study aimed to evaluate the impact of CD on SME internationalization in Saudi Arabia.	Saudi Arabia	Quantitative	The findings of the study indicated that SMEs have limited knowledge about the different functions of CD. However, the research emphasized the significant significance of incorporating CD into national initiatives for driving positive outcomes in terms of SMEs' expansion into international markets, their ability to enter foreign markets, and their establishment of long-term relationships in the global market.	The research highlighted some crucial aspects, such as challenges and opportunities related to SME internationalization with the support of empirical data.
(Vidyarthne and Sumanasiri, 2020)	The research investigated the role of Sri Lankan foreign missions in promoting trade with Germany, specifically in the electronics sector. It identified effective trade promotion activities and key roles of foreign missions, highlighting areas for improvement in meeting exporters' expectations and offering recommendations for enhancement.	Sri Lanka	Qualitative	The findings indicated that trade fairs and business networks and meetings were identified as the most efficacious trade promotion activity. The foreign mission has been shown to have six crucial functions: internalizing industries, promoting, business intelligence, stakeholder communication, creating strategic connections, and inter-governmental interaction. The study also indicated that the operations of the Sri Lankan Foreign Mission in Germany fall short of exporters' expectations and provides suggestions for improvements to both governments and foreign missions.	Although the article provided significant insights on the role of foreign missions in trade promotion and proposes opportunities for improvement, its qualitative approach, limited analysis, and wide recommendations diminish its overall value and application. Additional study was employing mixed-methods methodologies and addressing the mentioned constraints could have enhanced the comprehension of the subject matter.
(Pacheco and Matos, 2022)	This study conducted a practical analysis of the correlation between the ownership and control structure of companies, particularly the involvement of foreign capital, and their degree of internationalization, with a specific focus on metrics of intensity and diversification.	Portugal	Quantitative	The results indicated that the participation of foreign owners in SMEs has a beneficial effect on the process of internationalization and the findings also revealed that there exists a direct association between the distance variable and indices of internationalization. Moreover, the study indicates a curvilinear correlation between the development level of the country from which share capital originates and internationalization. This implies that SMEs with capital from more advanced nations tend to	The study conducted quantitative research to examine how different ownership forms, namely the inclusion of foreign capital, affect the worldwide expansion of SMEs in Portugal. The study identified the positive impacts of foreign ownership and established connections between distance and the level of development in the origin country. However, it did not thoroughly analyze the causes behind these benefits and failed to consider qualitative elements that influence the dynamics of internationalization.

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Table 2: (Continued)

Author and year	Research purpose	Research context	Methods employed	Results	Critique of the articles
(Gupta et al., 2023)	The study examined how embassies help firms develop overseas, focusing on their contribution to the innovation ecosystem and the need for specific assistance policies, especially for SMEs.	General	Theoretical paper	attain greater degrees of internationalization. The results of the study suggested that embassies play a crucial role in facilitating American enterprises' access to valuable information on global markets by virtue of their interactions with diverse stakeholders. Although the financial burden of embassy aid for companies is very low, SMEs require more extensive and tailored support measures.	The study signified the need of implementing tailored support strategies and establishing strategic alliances. Nevertheless, the inclusion of concrete examples or case studies in the text would enhance its effectiveness in demonstrating the ways in which embassies have facilitated the achievements of enterprises in global marketplaces.

limiting the specificity of future recommendations. Additionally, the study lacked a specific contextual focus, which could have enriched its findings by providing a more nuanced understanding of CD in a particular setting. Similarly, the study by Justinek (2012) focused on evaluating the impact of CD on improving SMEs’ export performance, with a specific focus on Slovenia. Employing a mixed-method approach, the study revealed that diplomatic efforts could indeed enhance export assistance for smaller nations like Slovenia. However, it highlighted the crucial role of an effective export support system in enabling SMEs to fully leverage this assistance. While Justinek (2012) underscored the potential of diplomacy in facilitating export support, it would benefit from a more current assessment, and it suggests a need for improved organizational structures and personnel within export support operations to maximize its effectiveness in practice.

Ruël (2013) also explored the potential advantages of CD for international businesses, including SMEs, in the context of Malaysia. In regards to this, in a study conducted by Ruël (2013), the authors explored the viewpoints of international business executives regarding the potential advantages of CD, particularly in the context of Malaysia. Employing a qualitative approach, the authors uncovered that enterprises with prior knowledge and experience in the Malaysian business environment tended to request less diplomatic assistance. Conversely, new entrants found such support highly beneficial. While they offered valuable insights into the role of CD for new businesses, it was limited by its sole reliance on data from the Netherlands embassy in Malaysia, which restricts its broader applicability and generalizability to a wider range of international business contexts. Visser and Ruël (2014) proposed recommendations for future researchers, stressing the importance of broadening research in CD to incorporate micro-level international business perspectives and advocating for multi-method studies to enhance understanding in this domain.

Aleidan (2019) also conducted research in Saudi Arabia assessing the impact of CD on SME internationalization, emphasizing the importance of integrating CD into national strategies to facilitate

market access and expansion for SMEs. Aleidan (2019) conducted research in Saudi Arabia that aimed to assess the impact of CD on the internationalization of SMEs. Employing quantitative methods, the research unveiled that SMEs in Saudi Arabia possess limited knowledge about the various aspects of CD. Nevertheless, it underscored the substantial importance of integrating CD into national strategies to facilitate SMEs’ expansion into international markets, their entry into foreign markets, and the establishment of enduring global market relationships. A notable strength of the study by Aleidan (2019) lies in its empirical data-driven approach, which sheds light on critical aspects, including the challenges and opportunities associated with SME internationalization. However, a more extensive critique of the study would require a deeper examination of its research design, sample size, and potential biases in data collection and analysis.

3.2.2. Risk Mitigation and Conflict Resolution

Kostecki and Naray (2007) highlighted how CD contributes to resolving business conflicts, indicating its role in risk mitigation and conflict resolution. Kostecki and Naray (2007) explored how CD contributes not only to resolving business conflicts but also to marketing a country as an attractive hub for foreign investments, research and development endeavours, and tourism. Similarly, Busschers and Ruël (2012) also revealed that the perceived quality of CD significantly shapes SMEs’ assessment of its value, which indirectly relates to risk mitigation and conflict resolution in international business contexts. For instance, Busschers and Ruël (2012) aimed to discern the relevance of CD for SMEs, focusing on its degree of usefulness in the context of the Netherlands. Employing a mixed-method approach, the authors revealed that the perceived quality of service significantly shapes SMEs’ assessment of the value of CD. Interestingly, SMEs with extensive global experience tend to assign less importance to CD, while those serving foreign public clients perceive it as more valuable. While they provided valuable insights into SMEs’ perspectives on CD, further exploration of statistical significance, cross-country analysis, and the impact of instrument adaptation could enhance its academic contribution and research validity.

Hajdukiewicz (2019) analyzed modern CD in Poland in promoting business activities and facilitating international trade and investment, suggesting its potential in mitigating risks associated with international business endeavours. Authors (Busschers and Ruël, 2012; Hajdukiewicz, 2019) also focused on analyzing modern CD in the context of promoting business activities and facilitating international trade and investment in Poland. Their study took a comprehensive approach, combining literature examination, legal document analysis, and case studies to reinforce its conclusions. However, one potential improvement could have been the inclusion of more examples and statistics to support its claims and a deeper exploration of the challenges and opportunities faced by commercial diplomats.

Naray (2012) discussed an interesting outcome related to CD, which was linked with value creation. This conceptual paper's framework encompassed crucial aspects like managerial concerns, capabilities, resources, performance of roles, and value for various stakeholders, including SMEs, large businesses, business support organizations, and government.

3.2.3. *Providing access and information to SMEs*

Naray (2008) discussed various CD activities, which could include providing access and information to SMEs, among other functions and argued that facilitating SMEs' access to information is crucial for promoting their growth and long-term viability. Stakeholders assist SMEs by providing them with essential knowledge and resources, including market insights, technical breakthroughs, and regulatory compliance information, which enables these businesses to improve their competitiveness and take advantage of new opportunities. Access to information not only fosters innovation and enhances the development of skills inside SMEs but also facilitates networking and collaboration (Naray, 2008). This, in turn, results in mutually beneficial relationships and the exchange of knowledge. Furthermore, the promotion of inclusivity in information access contributes to economic growth by facilitating the active involvement of entrepreneurs from various backgrounds in the market (Naray, 2008), hence advancing overall societal advancement and prosperity.

Similarly, Ruël (2013) explored the viewpoints of international business executives regarding the potential advantages of CD, particularly in the context of Malaysia, which could involve providing access and information to SMEs. Authors presented a comprehensive overview of the historical and contemporary significance of CD, its definition, and its efficacy in supporting international business. However, the study's limitation lies in its lack of in-depth perspectives or comparative analyses within the field, highlighting the need for more extensive research in this area to provide a fuller understanding of CD's nuances and applications. Aleidan (2019) assessed the impact of CD on SME internationalization in Saudi Arabia, highlighting the importance of integrating CD into national strategies to provide access and information to SMEs about international markets. Additionally, Ruël (2018) emphasized the importance of trade missions as a component of CD for internationalization.

Vidyarathne and Sumanasiri (2020) identified six crucial functions of a foreign mission, and the findings highlighted the critical role of

trade missions in connecting home and host country organizations for economic growth and development. Additionally, the findings have shown that trade fairs and business meetings exhibit the highest efficacy among various trade promotion activities. Naray and Bezençon (2017) revealed a strong correlation between CD and the government's role in promoting exports and commerce, emphasizing the organizational structure and administrative responsibilities involved. Moreover, the authors underscored the significance of the relationship between commercial diplomats and companies in facilitating successful CD efforts.

3.2.4. *Enhanced credibility and reputation*

Naray (2008) discussed the advantages of CD for both large corporations and SMEs, indicating its potential to enhance credibility and reputation in international markets. In their analysis, the benefits of utilizing CD for both major enterprises and SMEs were highlighted, emphasizing its capacity to bolster credibility and reputation in global marketplaces. Through participation in capacity development initiatives, firms can enhance their operational efficiency and showcase their dedication to on-going improvement and professionalism. This, in turn, strengthens their credibility and reputation on a worldwide scale (Naray, 2008).

Ruël (2013) highlighted the significance of diplomacy and diplomatic skills in attaining international business success, leading to improved credibility and reputation. Diplomatic abilities facilitate firms in managing cultural disparities, conducting effective negotiations, and establishing robust connections with international counterparts and stakeholders, thus augmenting their reputation and credibility in the global marketplace (Ruël, 2013). Berridge and Berridge (2015) aimed to delve into the influence of commercial and economic diplomacy on business development. The authors emphasized a noticeable shift in the role of embassies, particularly due to increased political instability. Gupta et al. (2023) emphasized the crucial role that embassies play in aiding the global growth efforts of businesses and their influence on the innovation ecosystem, indirectly implying a positive impact on credibility and reputation. By utilizing diplomatic channels and receiving assistance from embassies, firms can gain access to valuable resources, networks, and market insights. This enables them to establish themselves as dependable and esteemed participants on the global stage, thereby enhancing their credibility and reputation (Gupta et al., 2023; Gupta et al., 2023).

Turker and Konakli (2016) highlighted the importance of civil society support, especially for SMEs in developing nations. However, a significant limitation of this study by Turker and Konakli (2016) was the lack of empirical evidence or practical applications to substantiate its theoretical findings, which indicated the need for incorporating empirical data and real-world examples to validate the significance of public diplomacy for nation branding and the support of SMEs in international markets in other contexts for increasing the generalizability of the study.

3.2.5. *Strategic partnerships and networking*

Kostecki and Naray (2007) emphasized the role of CD in fostering corporate partnerships, indicating its significance in strategic partnerships. Organizations can improve their talents

and skills by investing in capacity development projects. This will make them more appealing to potential partners for joint ventures and strategic alliances, leading to mutually advantageous collaborations (Kostecki and Naray, 2007). Naray (2008) shed light on the advantages of CD for both large corporations and SMEs, suggesting its potential in facilitating strategic partnerships and networking. By engaging in capacity-building initiatives, businesses of all scales can enhance their connections with stakeholders, recognize prospects for partnerships, and establish cooperative networks, all of which are crucial for attaining strategic goals and fostering innovation (Naray, 2008).

Ruël (2013) explored the viewpoints of international business executives regarding the potential advantages of CD, particularly in the context of Malaysia, which could involve strategic partnerships and networking. Also, Penev et al. (2014) research sought to examine the implementation timeline, scope, and efficiency of CD in Serbia, with a focus on areas for improvement. Employing a quantitative approach, the study's findings underscored the importance of enhancing coordination among relevant organizations to improve the effectiveness of CD. The authors highlighted the challenges faced by companies regarding internationalization. Pacheco and Matos (2022) identified that foreign shareholders had a beneficial impact on the process of internationalization. Additionally, the study revealed a non-linear correlation between the amount of share capital development in the country of origin and the degree of globalization.

4. CONCLUSION

This first-ever scoping review aims to explain the diplomatic tactics facilitating the global achievements of SMEs, and it identifies a significant theme discussed in the literature. Based on the reviewed literature (Kostecki and Naray, 2007; Naray, 2008), we summarized the findings into five key themes, explicating the ways in which CD expedites SME internationalization efforts. Literature (Kostecki and Naray, 2007; Naray, 2008) also indicates that CD helps SMEs in (a) strategic partnerships and networking, (b) provides access and information to SMEs, (c) enhances credibility and reputation, (d) risk mitigation and conflict resolution, and (e) market access and expansion opportunities. This review establishes the foundation for creating conceptual frameworks that clarify the complex connection between diplomatic tactics and the global achievements of SMEs. The importance of customized support mechanisms, such as policy networks and intergovernmental collaboration, in improving the competitiveness of SMEs on a global level is emphasized. These identified themes form the basis for standardized future studies in the field of CD and SME internationalization.

4.1. Implications for Theory, Management and Practice

The review offers significant insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers by highlighting specific tactics that CD might use to help SMEs effectively navigate overseas markets. The findings of this analysis can be utilized by managers of SMEs, policymakers advocating for internationalization operations, and commercial diplomats engaged in overseas development efforts

to improve their strategic planning and operational activities. Providing concrete solutions to help SMEs enter and operate in overseas markets offers practical advice for stakeholders involved in SME development and international commerce. Moreover, the focus on cultivating international commercial relationships underscores the potential for SMEs to broaden their networks and partnerships, thus augmenting their worldwide presence and competitiveness.

4.2. Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

Based on the review, we acknowledge study limitations and propose key agendas for future research. First, since our review was not systematic and is qualitative rather than quantitative in nature, the next suggested step would be a systematic review accompanied by a meta-analysis in order to validate these themes. A systematic review can clarify issues that the current scoping review fails to address (Fusar-Poli et al., 2020). Moreover, quantitative research is deemed appropriate in order to get accurate and comprehensive insights into the efficacy and consequences of CD initiatives that future researchers should undertake. This approach will enable the collection of empirical data, facilitating a more nuanced comprehension of CD activities and yielding particular suggestions tailored to the needs of companies. In order to have a thorough understanding of the impact and efficacy of CD, it is recommended that future studies integrate the viewpoints of diverse stakeholders, such as diplomats, business support organizations, and government officials.

Second, this review demonstrates the expanding importance of CD in facilitating international commerce, fostering corporate collaborations, and promoting global business growth. The CD has undergone adaptations with time to place more emphasis on trade promotion, the attraction of foreign investment, as well as the enhancement of information retrieval, public relations, and business assistance. Nevertheless, a comprehensive examination of various contextual settings and the acquisition of more particular data are necessary in order to provide accurate and specific suggestions. Future studies should aim to investigate the precise effects of CD on the process of international SME growth, particularly in various institutional settings.

Third, although the scoping review has made valuable contributions, the generalizability of the findings may be limited due to the context-specific nature of the research included in the review. Furthermore, there can be deficiencies in the extent of information available, especially when it comes to recent developments or novel strategies in the field of commercial diplomacy and the worldwide expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises. Moreover, the review's findings are dependent on the extent of the current body of literature, which could potentially inject biases or constraints into the analysis.

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