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International Business After Consensus: Firms in an Era of Geopolitical Change

Thematic Area: International business

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Summary:

For much of the past three decades, international firms operated within a broadly shared narrative linking globalization, technological progress, sustainability, and diversity to economic and social advancement. Although never universally embraced, these ideas informed managerial practices, societal expectations, and scholarly debates. Today, however, many assumptions are increasingly questioned. Geopolitical rivalries, economic nationalism, industrial policies, and competing regulatory regimes suggest that consensus in international business (IB) can no longer be taken for granted (Thomadakis, 2025). Firms face pressures to regionalize operations, selectively decouple, secure critical resources, and navigate fragmented governance structures (Buckley, 2020). Simultaneously, technological change creates opportunities and uncertainties for international expansion (Autio et al., 2021; Luo, 2022).

Yet the challenges facing International firms extend beyond geopolitical and technological disruption. Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives; diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies; and broader notions of corporate responsibility have become increasingly contested across countries and stakeholder groups (Harmes, 2025; Prasad & Śliwa, 2024). Practices often presented as sources of legitimacy and responsible corporate conduct are now subject to political polarization and societal disagreement (Alter & Zürn, 2020; Brejnholt, Rintamäki, & Schnyder, 2026).

Against this backdrop, this Special Track aims to foster academic debate on how international firms respond to these challenges, which factors explain the heterogeneity of their responses, and their implications across diverse institutional contexts. We seek research that advances IB theory and practice by examining how firms navigate geopolitical, technological, and societal challenges in a fragmented and contested global environment.

Overall, relevant topics include, but are not limited to:

- The erosion of global consensus and its implications for IB theory;
- Internationalization in fragmented institutional contexts;
- Technological disruption, AI, digital sovereignty, and platform governance;
- ESG, sustainability and political and societal contestation;

- DEI practices across divergent institutional and cultural environments;
- Selective decoupling and the restructuring of Global Value Chains;
- Legitimacy, reputation, and stakeholder conflicts across borders;
- Innovation and knowledge management amid changing international conditions;
- Organizational capabilities, resilience, and international performance in complex contexts.

Keywords:

International Business; international strategy; global value chain; global fragmentation; international contestation; sustainability, diversity, digital transformation.

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