

**KEY FACTORS AND BRAND STRATEGIES FOR
'INTERNATIONALISING' CHINESE BRANDS OF ALCOHOL**



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A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

September 2022

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the key factors that play a role in the ‘internationalising’ of Chinese brands of alcohol. It develops the overarching research question: What are the key factors that play a role in the ‘internationalising’ of Chinese brands of alcohol?

By then considering what the concepts of internationalisation and branding strategies are, the study considers how key factors affect the internationalisation of brands and what are the brand strategies that might assist Chinese brands. Insights into the key factors that play a role in ‘internationalising’ Chinese brands of alcohol were sought by considering current knowledge of the UK consumer market. Given the upheaval of the Covid-19 pandemic on the international marketplace, and of Brexit upon UK imports and consumers, an examination of grey literature provides evidence towards this exploration of the gap in current knowledge from the unprecedented impact upon the marketplace during this period. Due to the constraints of a pandemic limiting opportunities for primary research, by progressing a documentary review, the thesis looks to contribute insights which were not available pre-pandemic. This provides greater understanding for the factors arising within the post-pandemic marketplace.

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Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Research background

Recent market developments have increased competition for companies operating across the globe. Due to this increased market competition, companies are striving hard to remain competitive. Internationalisation is determined to be one of the most important concerns of practitioners and academics because it significantly contributes towards the development of market competition (Eriksson et al., 2015).

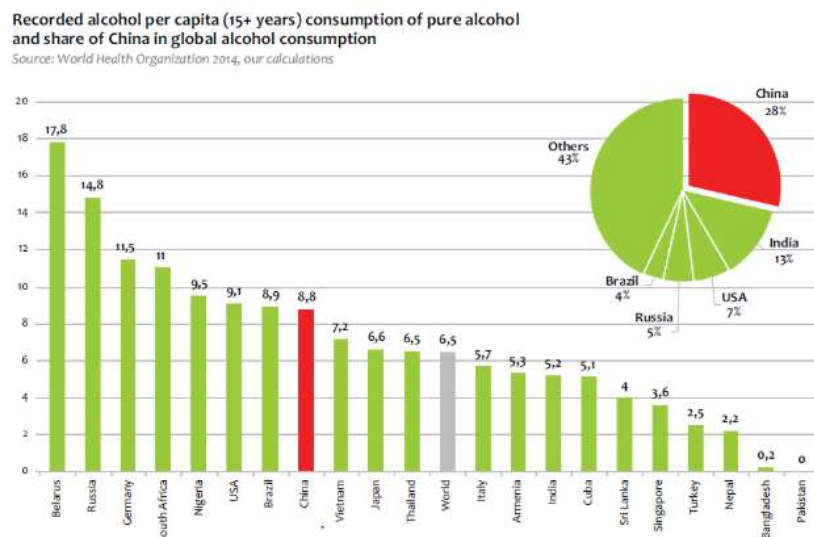


Figure 1: Alcohol market share

(Source: JournalBeer, 2018)

In the case of China, development of the alcohol industry is one of the rising contributing factors of business internationalisation. Figure 1 illustrates that 44 per cent of people in China over 15 years old consume alcohol. The figure shows that the percentage of Chinese people drinking alcohol slightly exceeds the world average of 37 per cent, but European countries and the US are still ahead of China. The figure shows that China has an increased alcohol consumption of 28 per cent compared to other countries due to its large population. In fact, it

can be presumed that China has first place in the world by volume of consumption; indeed in 2013 it accounted for 25.6 per cent of the global volume of beer output, before decreasing by the end of 2015 to 24.2 per cent in total. China's high level of beer consumption is specifically attributed to its availability and low price. This is the reason that Chinese beer consumption was 36 litres per person in 2015, whereas the very high pricing of beer in India, coupled with low standards of living, sets a consumption rate there of only 2 litres per person.

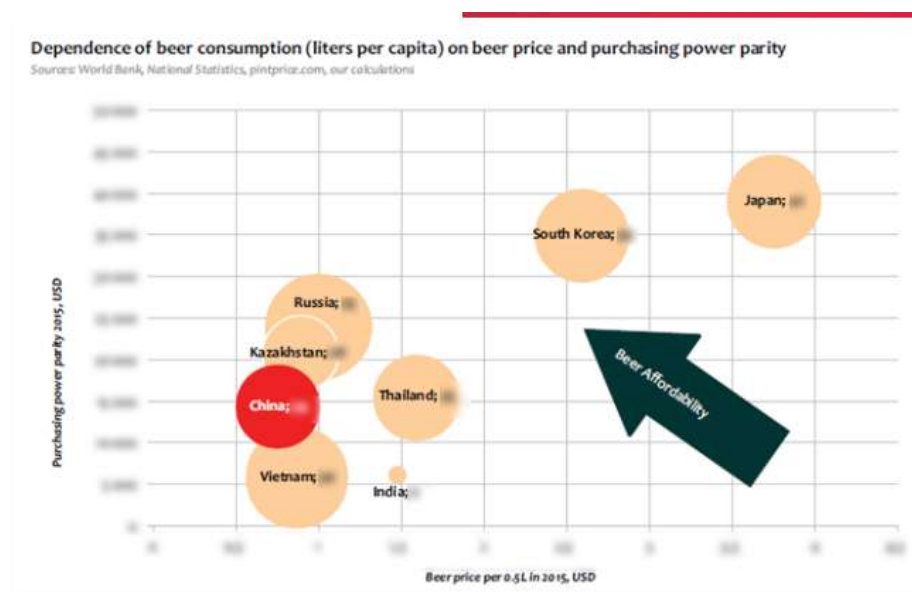


Figure 2: Beer consumption in China

(Source: JournalBeer, 2018)

Figure 2 further illustrates that alcohol consumption is increasing in China. Rapid developments in the industry inform this study, which aims to explore internationalisation strategies for the alcohol industry of China (JournalBeer, 2018). In addition, the findings of De-Wit (2015) and Cavusgil and Knight (2015) demonstrate that, along with more efficient access to political developments and news, businesses operating across the globe are expanding manufacturing and distribution operations internationally. Fernhaber et al. (2014) explain that, due to technical advancements and market developments, numerous companies

operating in different markets are significantly tempted to expand operations across the globe. The process of expanding operations in the international market is regarded as internationalisation, and is viewed as one of the rising concerns of many practitioners. Pukall and Calabrò (2014) explain that the development of internationalisation strategies across the globe is determined to be influenced by several different factors. It is imperative for practitioners and academics to explore these factors with the end goal of formulating suitable branding strategies.

Attig et al. (2016) cite that it is imperative for managers to understand the factors that can affect internationalisation of companies but it is found to be fruitful for companies in numerous different ways. For instance, internationalisation is effective for improving the overall income of a company. To be specific, the studies of Marano et al (2016) and Estrin et al. (2016) identify that numerous business owners intend to generate primary income through selling services and products. Internationalisation can be an effective strategy to foster overall human development specifically through understanding and respecting nations. The study of Dodgson (2018) notes that internationalisation is important because it can ensure the expansion and sustaining of economic competitiveness.

1.2 Problem statement

Rapid internet advancement across the globe has contributed towards internationalisation of companies. However, the lack of updated information regarding the key factors that play a role in the ‘internationalising’ of companies represents a gap in the in the current knowledge regarding the nature of internationalisation of Chinese alcohol products or Chinese companies seeking to progress the marketing of Chinese alcohol. The problem statement can be summarised as:

The UK domestic alcohol market offers potential for Chinese export of luxury alcohol products, but the cultural differences of attractiveness of Chinese alcohol lacks exploration. The impacts of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic on trading need further investigation.

1.3 Research questions

In order to successfully explore the key factors that play a role in the ‘internationalising’ of Chinese brands of alcohol within the UK consumer market, specific questions have been developed that this study aims to address:

Main research question

- What are the key factors that play an important role in the internationalisation of Chinese brands of alcohol?

Sub research questions:

- What is the concept of internationalisation and how did it manifest during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- What are the key factors that played important roles in the Chinese alcohol brands’ internationalisation in the UK market during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- Were there any strategies that Chinese companies adopted to successfully market their alcohol brands in the UK market during the Covid-19 pandemic?

1.4 Aims

This study aims to explore the key factors that play a role in the ‘internationalising’ of Chinese brands of alcohol. The study also aims to provide critical insights for Chinese alcohol companies that are planning to enter the UK alcohol marketplace.

1.5 Objectives

The objectives of this research study are:

- To study the concept of internationalisation and corresponding strategies of business companies.
- To investigate the key factors that affect the internationalisation of products.
- To explore the key factors that influence the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol products in the UK market.
- To explore suitable strategies that Chinese companies can adopt to achieve seamless internationalisation in the UK market.

1.5 Significance, rationale and benefit

The practical reason behind studying internationalisation with regard to Chinese brands of alcohol is that the alcohol industry is one of the leading industries in China. This study is considered necessary because companies operating in the alcohol industry are required to develop and implement branding strategies. The development of branding strategies suitable for internationalisation is determined to be of concern for numerous associated reasons. Apart from theoretical and practical reasons, this study attempts to explore key factors that play a role in the 'internationalising' of Chinese brands of alcohol due to personal reasons. The relevance and familiarity of the field of study has encouraged this investigation. It can be assumed that the context of the study is the Chinese alcohol industry, which points to a wide research scope. In the relevant literature, the scope of such a study is identified as wide because it attempts to study and evaluate major variables of the marketing field. The study is of high scope because findings are determined to be applicable to industry in a practical manner.

The findings of this study concerning key factors that play a role in ‘internationalising’ of Chinese brands of alcohol are intended to be useful and significant for multiple concerned associates and entities as well as being beneficial in terms of both theory and practice. The investigation specifically intends to be advantageous for managers operating in the alcohol industry, policymakers and future scholars, particularly with regard to the future development of the alcohol industry in China. The study findings can further facilitate industries in developing suitable strategies for improving business internationalisation. The practical findings of the study are identified to be relevant specifically in terms of identifying suitable branding strategies for Chinese brands of alcohol. The research is also useful for future learners because it can serve as a guide for them. The findings of this study can benefit future scholars and learners in gaining an in-depth view of the key factors that play a role in ‘internationalising’ Chinese brands of alcohol. The study can benefit managers operating in the Chinese alcohol industry because evidence is likely to contribute towards the existing body of knowledge in the field. Importantly, the study is effective because it provides awareness about practical knowledge about internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands. Overall, the significance of this study can be considered regarding both theory and practice.

Section 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The key aim of this study is to explore the key factors that play a role in the ‘internationalising’ of Chinese brands of alcohol. Because China is developing its alcohol industry and Chinese companies are trying to tap into foreign markets, it is extremely important to understand, investigate and explore internationalisation strategies for the alcohol industry in China. The main purpose of this literature review is to survey past and present studies on the topic of internationalisation in relation to Chinese alcohol products’ internationalisation in the United Kingdom. Including past literature in the scope of this chapter serves a few noteworthy purposes. First, it provides direction to understand the topic from the core. Second, putting existing literature into a formal systematic review helps maintain a better understanding of the perspective and scope of the topic. Third, this activity raises opportunities to build a solid foundation to articulate the framework and a critical analysis of the topic under investigation. Additionally, there is a noticeable gap between past and present knowledge due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This is because globalisation-based internationalisation was extremely different before it was disrupted by the pandemic. In this context, this study fills this literature gap by specifically focusing on the latest data that has emerged right after the Covid-19 pandemic.

This is an important part of the study because, although the topic of internationalisation has been shaping and reforming the business area for decades, it is still a broad strategic agenda and a multifaceted concept that is driven by a broad number of factors. These factors include but are not limited to the dynamic combination of political, economic, sociocultural and academic stakeholders. Therefore, when a company starts planning to go global, it is

important to understand the process of internationalisation, i.e. what the process is, how it works, how complex it is and what are the potential opportunities and challenges involved in it. The next section explores internationalisation theory. Explaining internationalisation theory is important because it is considered one of the major theoretical foundations on the topic of internationalisation. This theory explains the internationalisation processes involved in the choices of entry mode in single markets based on the analysis of transaction cost. The main construct of internationalisation theory revolves around the explanation of how businesses get engaged in international operations in foreign markets and make resource commitments by selecting the market and making the choice of entry. Then the study discusses the literary investigation of the Uppsala model of internationalisation. The Uppsala model is highly relevant to this study because it explains how companies begin the process of internationalisation through a sequential approach (Johanson and Vahlne, 2015). This model explains how companies incrementally internationalise with a construct that the company lacks foreign market knowledge which is damaging to internationalisation.

Then the study intends to explore the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the process of internationalisation and its influence on international trade policies and global value chains (GVCs). For example, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected a great deal of internationalisation operations. The economic activities related to international trade have been halted. Global industries have shrunk, which has led to global economic recession. Therefore, international trade policies regarding international business operations have been changed, which has greatly affected GVCs. GVCs are strongly associated with international production and delivery in this era of globalisation, which includes ‘the full range of activities that firms and workers perform to bring a product from its conception to end use and beyond’, so in every aspect, the process of internationalisation has been greatly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Numerous question marks have been placed on the historical benefits of

internationalisation because the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly affected internationalisation through lockdowns, closure of companies and social distancing measures. In consequence, the process of internationalisation is adversely affected due to the rise in trade costs, travel and transportation costs, and its effects on international trade policies.

2.2 The internationalisation process

The topic of internationalisation has been shaping and reforming the business sector for decades. Internationalisation is a relatively new, multifaceted and broad strategic agenda and a concept that is driven by a dynamic combination of academic, sociocultural, economic and political stakeholders. In simple terms, internationalisation can be referred to as a process of action that makes something international. Internationalisation is about thinking globally before taking some action locally (NCA, 2022). De Wit and Altbach (2021) indicate that the terms ‘internationalisation abroad’ or ‘mobility’ are often associated with internationalisation as an international activity that itself manifests in a broad number of ways.

Numerous scholarly studies in the past have investigated this topic from many perspectives, especially in terms of studying the internationalisation process of businesses by using different theoretical approaches (Agndal, 2004; Etemad, 2004; Sveclicic et al., 2007; Amal and Freitag-Filho, 2010; Abrahamsson, 2016). Glaum and Oesterle (2007) conducted 40 years of research on the topic of internationalisation and conclude that a consensus has not been established on a unified definition of internationalisation. The process of internationalisation is often related to globalisation, which is mostly relevant to the interconnection among global countries. However, Cavusgil et al. (2014) highlight that the notion of internationalisation is different from globalisation because it is centred on the systematic increase of the activities related to international business. In this context, internationalisation can be described as a process where individual companies group together

and move towards internationally recognised broader areas. According to Welch and Luostarinen (1988), internationalisation is a process where the involvement is increased in international operations. It can be said that internationalisation is associated with the evolutionary process involved in expanding methods of foreign operations, the process of locating target markets and locating objects to be sold. The process of internationalisation also relates to other types of international market activities such as organisational structure, finance and organisational capacities, for example. Fojcik (2015) indicates that the above-mentioned dimensions illustrate the internationalisation level and leverage the internationalisation process.

Internationalisation can be understood as a way of thinking globally and a process in which such thinking is involved. When companies become more internationalised and global, they engage in global markets and operations outside their native country; thus they can be referred to as companies involved in the process of internationalisation. According to Albaum et al. (2008), the process of internationalisation can work either by occurring in reaction to new threats and opportunities or as a well-organised and thoroughly planned process. Additionally, the process of internationalisation does not warrant itself to be an ongoing activity since the process of de-internationalisation or reverse internationalisation can initiate at any level. Schwens et al. (2018) and Carneiro et al. (2018) conceptually describe internationalisation as a process to implement services and products and planning, with the final objective of particularly adapting them to a specific international market. Economically speaking, internationalisation is a final source of processes due to which companies' overall involvement increases in foreign markets (Carneiro et al., 2018). Cuervo-Cazurra et al. (2018) describe that internationalisation can form the basis of the final source of promotion since the scope of business development and applicability is improved through internationalisation. Global showcasing of products and services remains one of the most prominent features of

the internationalisation of organisations. This global showcasing urges business organisations to market their products and services in the global market.

In the domain of international business, one of the central issues relates to the internationalisation of business firms. The field of internationalisation explains why and how companies stretch their business activities across national boundaries. This process allows companies to access new resources and markets through various means, such as exports or 'foreign direct investment' (FDI). When companies expand their operations in multiple countries, this process leads to increased coordination, communication and transportation costs. The process of internationalisation illustrates many of these opportunities and challenges in the activities of international business research. In this context, two wider streams of research can be examined. Scholars indicate one stream of research in the shape of the 'internationalisation process', signifying how businesses start, expand and advance their international operations (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009; Knight and Liesch, 2016; Vahlne and Johansson, 2017). The second stream of research is associated with economic theory, in that the notion of internationalisation describes why business companies engage in FDI, what modes they select to enter into foreign markets and how the companies' international expansion is influenced by location-based factors (Hennart, 1982; Hashai and Buckley, 2014).

The process of internationalisation is extremely complex. For instance, if internationalisation is considered by the traditional focus on the 'country' specified as the central unit of analysis, then it becomes extremely complex to check internationalisation in numerous countries. Recognising the importance of heterogeneity among countries is another aspect that becomes complex due to increasing economic integration between global countries. This scenario brings internationalisation to be judged on the grounds of supranational regions such as ASEAN, NAFTA and EU. The broad-based acknowledgement and application of

digitalisation have also extended the process of internationalisation through advanced information and communication technologies (ICTs). Digitalisation means an extensive adoption of advanced digital ICTs, in that companies use different digital technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), software, connected mobile devices and broadband internet access (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014). Digitalisation has played the role of a catalyst that has transformed many aspects of business activities and has a significant impact on the internationalisation activities of companies. There are numerous reasons why companies prefer to digitalise their international business operations. For example, advanced ICTs can decrease intra-company coordination costs, transaction costs and communication costs. ICTs are also useful for businesses because they permits them to provide numerous services remotely without requiring any essential FDI (UNCTAD, 2017). Additionally, Autio and Zander (2016) indicate that companies can have more timely and precise information about foreign markets thanks to digitalisation, which in turn reduces internationalisation barriers. Now companies can easily utilise digitalisation to send their products and services over the internet to their targeted customers. It can be said that digitalisation has enabled businesses to internationalise instantaneously and without much cost. This is because they can enjoy internationalisation rapidly by just making their products available over the internet and reaching their targeted customers accordingly.

Eden (2016), Coviello et al. (2017) and Autio (2017) highlight that digitalisation is going to change how companies do business across borders. They argue that the barriers to internationalisation have been significantly reduced by digitalisation. One of the most famous examples in this regard is the expansion of Uber (ride company); in just six years, Uber managed to expand its internationalisation operations to over 80 countries. At the same time, scholars argue that theoretical and empirical investigations on the internationalisation of digital companies should be done to exploit this domain (Alcacer et al., 2016; Vahlne and

Johanson, 2017; Coviello et al., 2017). This also substantiates the importance of understanding and including theoretical approaches in a research study. The theoretical approach reflects the description of past theories that are proven or applied and how they might be applied to the new study under investigation. Osanloo and Grant (2016) indicate the theoretical framework as an extremely important component of the research study. This is because the theoretical approach sets the tone for the development of research questions, literature review conceptualisation, designing the framework and the plan of analysis for the study. Furthermore, the theoretical approach also offers an explanation of the significance and validity of the topic. Discussing the theoretical approach also connects the researcher to the existing knowledge and allows him to intellectually transit from merely explaining a phenomenon to broadening numerous aspects of the phenomenon. The next section briefly illustrates the existing theoretical approaches to the process of internationalisation.

2.3 Theoretical approaches to internationalisation: internationalisation theory

Internationalisation theory is referred to as one of the major theoretical foundations of the topic of internationalisation. Internalisation theory explains the existence of the firm because it is the most efficient way of coordinating a set of activities rather than market exchange (Buckley, 2018). This theory is principally used to explain how companies get engaged in international operations in foreign markets and make resource commitments (Erramilli et al., 1999). The theory explains the selection of market and the choice of entry.

Santangelo and Meyer (2017) argue that, instead of analysing the international expansion process, international theory focuses on describing why companies tend to internationalise and why they get engaged in 'foreign direct investment' (FDI). This theory assumes that companies entering into foreign markets should have firm-specific advantages (FSAs) because they would face additional challenges and costs in foreign markets. These FSAs

include the capability of coordination across countries, management capabilities, branding strategies and technical know-how. In this context, internationalisation theory is associated with how such FSAs are exploited by companies internationally. For example, such FSAs can be exploited by conducting value-adding activities in foreign countries, country-specific advantages, trade barriers and transportation costs and by exporting the finished service or product from the home country. Secondly, if FSAs need to be exploited away from the home country, i.e. within foreign markets, then the company can evaluate external market conditions (such as by contacting the local manufacturer) or by establishing its personal subsidiary within the foreign market.

It is noteworthy that it can become extremely hard for a company to exploit foreign markets because they are often imperfect or missing especially the knowledge-based or information-based FSAs. Hennart (1982) and Buckley (2009) indicate the reason that it becomes extremely hard to protect and transact when a company deals with external parties. At the same time, it offers an opportunity of internalising value-adding activities through FDI in foreign markets. This means that, from an internationalisation perspective, great opportunities are offered to businesses to discover and develop new perspectives and practices in foreign markets. Ozkan et al. (2022) indicate that the historical trend revolved around entering foreign markets from advanced economies to emerging ones. However, this trend has changed recently because emerging markets companies have been setting a new trend of pursuing business opportunities in developed countries. Tapping into foreign advanced markets offers significant opportunities, but it is not without risks and uncertainties. For example, companies can be exposed to internationalisation risks due to changes in trade policies, untoward impacts on global value chains (GVCs) and uncertainties involved in domestic policies, and so on.

These facts show that the process of tapping into a foreign market is not without challenges as well as opportunities. On one hand, it offers potential challenges and risks for business companies, while on the other hand, it also lures them to explore lucrative business opportunities that they cannot enjoy in domestic markets. This is where the famous Uppsala model of internationalisation is useful because this model illustrates the phenomenon of investing in a single country or entering a new market. This model helps business companies to learn from their practical knowledge and experiences in the past. This model emphasises the importance of increased market knowledge for a company that will result in increased market commitment (Arvidsson and Arvidsson, 2019). The authors state that ‘The Uppsala model is based on the relation between knowledge about the market the company seeks to penetrate, managerial decisions regarding commitment and the outcome of initial activities as a determinant for future commitment’ (p. 1). The next section describes the renowned Uppsala model of internationalisation in the given context of internationalisation.

2.4 The famous Uppsala model of internationalisation

A great deal of research on the process of internationalisation in businesses revolves around the ‘Uppsala model’ of the internationalisation process, which was initially developed by Vahlne and Johanson in 1977 (Vahlne and Johanson, 1977; 2017). This model illustrates the process of internationalisation as an iterative, incremental process based on the behavioural theory of the company. Vahlne and Johanson (1977) argued that international market entry for businesses is associated with the main issue of committing non-re-deployable resources to a foreign market. In that case, companies have insufficient knowledge that is critically needed to tap into the target market. This situation increases internationalisation-based risks for companies. In reaction, it is commonly observed that companies do not make large resource commitments initially when they enter a foreign market. Since they lack foreign market

knowledge, they initiate their entry with extremely limited resource commitment. This is to ensure that they gain enough experience before they move forward with additional resource commitment in the future. What companies gain is experiential knowledge concerning local business conditions in the host country in addition to the opportunities and risks involved. Thus, based on the gained experience and knowledge, the business would commit more resources. This means the Uppsala model of internationalisation is based on a mutually coordinated and reinforcing pattern of market knowledge and market commitment. This procedure is good in the sense that it explains how companies understand the internationalisation process as they start tapping into the foreign market. An important and positive attribute is the gradual movement or shifting of the company from simplicity to complexity during the internationalisation process. In the Uppsala model, the internationalisation process of a company greatly depends on its knowledge acquisition of the foreign market (Vahlne and Johanson, 1977). First, foreign market-specific knowledge is extremely important because it guides the company on how to do business in the foreign country. However, there is an issue in this perspective because foreign markets in different countries have different particularities; therefore, the knowledge a company gains in one foreign market might or might not be relevant to conducting business in some other foreign market. Secondly, the crucial knowledge that a company acquires after tapping into a foreign market is experienced-based. It is experience-based because this knowledge emerges from the activities generated in the foreign marketplace; therefore, it is a kind of learning-by-doing process. Vahlne and Johanson (1977) indicate a disadvantage in this respect that this experience-based knowledge is not easily disseminated across the company since it is also grounded on personal experience embedded in experiential knowledge. Thus, the transfer of this kind of knowledge across people (from one employee to another) or across companies' units is intertwined with difficulties. This is where the present study is useful, because the

role of knowledge acquisition in the process of internationalisation is far more intriguing and complex. For example, knowledge about the foreign market is not the only thing that affects the process of knowledge acquisition; other facets of internationalisation activity also influence it. Welch and Luostarinen (1988) and Pedersen and Shaver (2000) indicate this aspect of general internationalisation knowledge that involves concepts like how to design incentive structures regarding independent, local business partners and how to operate affiliate networks, for example. That means the experiential knowledge is also contingent upon internationalisation knowledge per se. This includes diverse knowledge of local business markets, as well as of local institutional conditions including the culture and values of the foreign country.

Critically speaking, this knowledge acquisition by companies during internationalisation also seeks knowledge management. For example, managers in a company can confront some questions, such as: How much knowledge is to be acquired? How should this knowledge should be acquired? What form should the acquired knowledge take? This is because it would be at the sole discretion of the company's management as to how much or how little risk they are willing to take while acquiring knowledge of internationalisation in a specific foreign market (Pedersen et al., 2003). Acquiring knowledge is not a straightforward phenomenon in the process of internationalisation. Similarly, the transfer of such knowledge is also contingent upon managerial discretion. This means how much experiential knowledge should be made transferable across employees and throughout the company also depends on managerial decisions. Given these facts, it can be said that the Uppsala model has both advantages and disadvantages in the sense that it sets the tone and direction of a company's progress during internationalisation, and new aspects of knowledge in relation to internationalisation, but it does not provide straightforward answers to how this process of knowledge acquisition begins and how it successfully proliferates throughout the company.

Vahlne and Johanson also found two key empirical findings while studying the internationalisation process of businesses. The first finding is related to the 'Establishment chain'. In that case, numerous manufacturing companies from Scandinavia used independent export agents while tapping into the foreign markets, and then they formed subsidiaries and sales, and finally manufacturing activities (Vahlne and Johanson, 1977). The second finding relates to the propensity of the business to tap into those countries that have a low psychic distance to the home country. This is the first step before they increase their tendency towards a greater psychic distance. Vahlne and Johanson (1977) refer to the term 'psychic distance' as the sum of factors that prevent information flow from and to the market. This can include linguistic and cultural differences. The term 'psychic distance' is also relevant in more recent literature. Dinner et al. (2019) and Kusi et al. (2021) refer to it as an important element that increases the challenges and uncertainties that internationalisation companies face when they operate in foreign markets. In that case, it points out the disparities between the two countries, which is helpful from the perspective of internationalisation.

Santangelo and Meyer (2011) further investigate and expand the Uppsala model of internationalisation by accounting explicitly that market commitment 'decreases' with the passage of time. Pedersen and Shaver (2011) revisit the process of internationalisation and call it a discontinuous process, comprising a 'big step' into the very first foreign market by a company, and then easier and less costly subsequent market entries. Scholars also indicate that it is not just market knowledge that business companies should develop while entering into the foreign market, but rather they should also get a hold of local business networks to increase their success (Forsgren, 2016; Vahlne and Johanson, 2020).

By contrast, the Uppsala model has also been criticised by scholars, especially when it comes to its application to entrepreneurial, small companies (Zahra et al., 2000; Knight and Liesch,

2016). They found that instead of internationalisation being considered a gradual, incremental and cautious process, some small entrepreneurial companies follow internationalisation at a rapid pace early on. Similarly, such small entrepreneurial companies do not bother about local market conditions when they intend to internationalise.

Critically speaking, the Uppsala model of internationalisation is feasible for indicating experiential market knowledge for sustainable international business; however, it is still time-consuming and sluggish. However, there is a question over how this model would work in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic when internationalisation is more difficult to achieve due to lockdowns and social distancing measures. The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have adversely affected global economies, as well as internationalisation companies, not only in the demand dimension, but also in the supply dimension. For example, in the domain of supply, companies have been losing employees due to Covid-19 infection rates within the company. Companies also suffer from supply chain interruptions due to lockdown actions, resulting in a scarcity of products and services. From the demand side, the impacts of Covid-19 have also been adverse. Companies have been hardly able to continue their operations due to lessened consumer spending (due to lockdowns and danger of infection), dearth of liquidity and rising uncertainties. Furthermore, internationalisation has also been affected due to decreased global transportation and decreased customer confidence. This is an extremely important issue currently because Chinese companies would need to survive in the UK's foreign market despite the hindrances of the pandemic. Given these facts, the next section critically discusses the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the process of internationalisation.

2.5 Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the process of internationalisation

The concept of cross-border business has been significantly altered due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The process of economic lockdowns across the globe in the year 2020 has raised substantial concerns about the present and future aspects of internationalisation. The past benefits of internationalisation had been acknowledged on a global scale in relation to investment liberalisation, capital and trade, but the current weakness due to the Covid-19 pandemic has put many question marks on the historical benefits (Kersan-Skabic, 2022). The pandemic has had an indirect influence on internationalisation through border controls and transport issues, and a direct influence on production due to measures taken by at-risk employees and the Covid-19 infection rates in different industries. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (2020) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2020), a slowdown in international trade and production had already been initiated during the 2010s; however, the current pandemic situation has expanded that crisis. The pandemic has critically hit the foreign direct investment (FDI) situation across the globe, predicted to have declined in the year 2020 by between 5 per cent and 15 per cent (UNCTAD, 2020). However, the actual decline has been realised as more downward than initially predicted, and between 30 per cent and 40 per cent downward pressure on global FDI was forecast later (Jaworek et al., 2020).

Because millions of lives were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, international trade and economic activities landed at a standstill. This resulted in a global economic recession, crucially disrupting economic growth and transformation in countries across the world (Vo and Tran, 2021). The process of internationalisation was greatly affected because international investment and trade have always depended on transmitting goods and individuals across borders. It can be said that the process of internationalisation largely relies

on direct contact and transportation between global countries so that numerous types of trade activities can be conducted. In contrast, personal mobility and movements of goods and services were greatly affected because governments across the globe implemented policies on social distancing, travel restrictions and measures for the protection of public health on a large scale. All these measures resulted in restrictions that caused a negative impact on cross-border trade. Post-pandemic issues of cost, such as the Ukraine–Russia war also led to a need to consider the rise in trading costs.

2.6 The rise in trade costs

One major effect of the Covid-19 pandemic that affected the internationalisation process was the rise in trade costs. Economists have taken great interest in examining the issue of trade costs in international trade. While analysing trade costs, Samuelson (1954) utilised the ‘iceberg’ model, whereby the costs of transporting goods correspond to the quantity of the goods. Later on, in commercial cost modelling theory, greater progress was made by Reed (1976). He postulated that international trade is associated with a necessary service of transport. Bems et al. (2012) indicates that in 2008–2009 international trade collapsed because total spending fell so sharply due to the global recession. Moreover, the decline in trade was further exacerbated due to the limited supply of exports having had an impact on the supply of credit. Numerous pieces of evidence recommend that the international trade policy had little impact in the previous global crises. However, the international crises due to the Covid-19 pandemic have been phenomenal because it inculcated great levels of uncertainty on global trade, pushed up trade costs, non-trade policies, disrupted professional and personal travel and disrupted the supply of goods. According to Kumano (2020), the Covid-19 pandemic brought in a type of recession that is extremely different from previous economic recessions. For example, in the case of the Lehman Shock crisis, people were short of money for buying products. In contrast, the Covid-19 pandemic caused such a recession

that greatly influenced consumption, employment and wages, business profits, production and exports. Additionally, this study points out that numerous past studies have conducted in-depth examinations of past recessions, however, the overall global impact in the context of internationalisation has not been analysed in depth so far. However, it is necessary to study internationalisation through the lens of the Covid-19 pandemic because the pandemic significantly restricted travel and transportation activities. This situation has significantly influenced the rise in trade costs because industries either had to bear the expenses of their idle employees or fire them. As a consequence, airline fares (when partially opened) had a significant rise. All these situations cannot be studied in the past literature, but only by studying the recent literature after the occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic. This necessitates the idea of an in-depth examination of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on business costs of the global business.

2.7 Travel and transportation costs

In the context of global travel, global governments restricted travel to limit the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The World Trade Organization (WTO) initiated temporary travel restrictions by imposing social isolation, health quarantine and border closures. These restrictions included but were not limited to delaying or cancelling international business meetings, restricting all non-essential foreign travel, global entry restrictions and temporary closure of embassies and consulates (Vo and Tran, 2021). Additionally, governments also imposed border entry restrictions on goods and people. The main focus of all such restrictions was to alleviate the health impacts of Covid-19 and protect people from the hazards of the pandemic. However, these restrictions significantly affected travel and transportation activities, so that international trading and transport costs were significantly increased. Vo and Tran (2021) indicated WTO statistics from April 2020 that showed that the cost of trade due to travel and transport restrictions had risen by almost 50 per cent. It is noteworthy that,

in all sectors, a significant portion of the trade cost is made up of travel and transportation costs. Smooth operations of global supply chains were greatly affected due to the rise in transportation costs. Numerous forms of travel restrictions were imposed by 150 countries from early March 2020, such as travel bans, screening and quarantine in high-risk areas. In the first quarter of 2020, transport efficiency was further dropped by 30 per cent in developing countries. This was again further dropped in the months of April and May 2020 (Vo and Tran, 2021). These transport services include rail, air, road and sea transport services.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) highlights that airline revenues dropped by almost 80 per cent between April and May 2020, thereby dropping air revenues from \$244 billion to \$420 billion. The pandemic also compromised the road transportation industry, as well as the maritime cargo transport for the transportation of goods between China and Europe (Tardivo et al., 2020). However, Vo and Tran (2021) indicate a 70 per cent rise in rail transport in May 2020 which was less affected by the pandemic. The reason is that numerous global manufacturers and businesses preferred to transport their goods by train due to the benefits of low transport costs coupled with larger volumes. Additionally, relatively few drivers are required in rail transport; therefore, the procedures of medical quarantine are faster via rail compared with other modes of transport. These facts show how great the challenge for international businesses and trading companies was to meet such a huge rise in travel and transportation.

Given these circumstances, the risks and uncertainties associated with the process of internationalisation have been unprecedented. To become more resilient to these situations, debates have been started regarding rethinking of the global value chains (GVCs), the ideas of reshoring instead of offshoring, and so on (Javorcik, 2020). International production is heavily dependent on the conditions (such as trade policy rules) associated with imports and

exports because these conditions govern the global trade scenario. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused international trade to drop significantly in 2020. The predictions for the drop in international trade were huge, while the actual decline was even greater for global business companies. However, the overall picture is not as pessimistic as it seems. Kersan-Skabic (2022) indicates that, although early predictions presented a massive drop in international trade activities during the early 2020s, a more optimistic picture was later released during the mid-2020s. The reason is that economies which shrunk in the early stages of the pandemic started to open up and perform normal activities.

Gruszczynski (2020) has been optimistic about this scenario by making a theoretical contribution to the idea that the Covid-19 pandemic will have both short-term and long-term impacts on international trade. In the short term, international trade is expected to decline. However, in the long term, with a few structural changes, businesses will start conducting normal activities. This means the first half of the pandemic will negatively affect the process of internationalisation from the perspective of international trade. However, the later stages can expect substantial recovery. Additionally, not all sectors will suffer in the same manner; for instance, medical-related goods will have a positive impact while durable goods are likely to have a negative impact (Hayakawa and Mukunoki, 2021).

This study argues that the process of internationalisation is also related to trade policies that are described as core interventions or regulations for facilitating the imports and exports of services and goods (Nuruzzaman et al., 2020). These trade policies are formulated by governments, as well as domestic institutions. Here, governments support trade areas through initiatives that directly assist a specific company in successfully doing business in foreign markets via exports. For example, governments can directly assist them by lobbying so that companies get foreign contracts. Governments can also help by initiating trade missions,

providing companies with training to achieve international certification, and providing export companies with credit guarantee schemes. The kinds of trade policies that have been highlighted by scholars include the negotiations initiated by the Chinese government with host country governments for representing the aggregated interests of Chinese companies investing in the African region (Newenham-Kahindi et al., 2013). Similarly, trade policies also take the shape of indirect interventions in the domain of trade, such as when governments impose regulatory obstacles to cross-border trade. Specific companies are not targeted in these indirect trade policy interventions, and they involve multilateral trade agreements (Nuruzzaman et al., 2020). These indirect and direct trade policies have been greatly influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic. This necessitates the idea of critically investigating and exploring this impact on international trade. The next section discusses the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on international trade policies.

2.8 The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on international trade policies

The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on trade policies are undeniable. While investigating trade policy responses by different countries, Evenett et al. (2022) present high-frequency data on food and medical products during the early stages of the pandemic. The data indicate that trade policy instruments were used by different countries with extensive heterogeneity across countries. Some countries reacted by facilitating imports and restricting exports, others conducted different measures, and some countries did not conduct trade policy changes at all. This heterogeneous attitude from different countries recommends several research questions about how different countries gave trade policy responses to the pandemic, and how the change in trade policies affected the process of internationalisation. At the same time, this situation also necessitates the idea of stimulating debates and analysis about developing flexible and resilient trade policy systems. This is to ensure that early indicators of a

pandemic can be traced and appropriate trade policy measures can be made effective in response to internationalisation processes. Trade policies can be designed to consolidate the internationalisation process rather than hinder it.

Trade policies are strongly associated with the situations experienced by a country such as pandemics, shocks, recessions, and so on. These untoward experiences can motivate the country to impose protective measures such as prohibiting imports or exports (Wiwoho and Kukab, 2020). For example, before the Covid-19 pandemic, governments in developed countries showed a propensity for collecting more authentic information regarding AIDS cases in order to formulate feasible trade policies in relation to public health outcomes (Wilson et al., 1999). Scholars argue that the risk of disseminating cross-border infectious disease is magnified by an increase in international trade (Bettcher et al., 2000). Scholars emphasise that the role of trade policies should be clear to countries in the sense that diseases' risk factors can spread uncontrollably and cannot guarantee that trade agreements in the future do not increase those risks (Labonte et al., 2011). For example, trade policies stipulated by the World Trade Organization (WTO) are believed to have contributed to the spreading of infectious diseases in livestock such as horses (Timoney, 2000).

The role and impacts of trade policies have been studied by Eichengreen and Irwin (2009) during the years of recession. They found that trade protectionist policies were incorporated due to the Great Depression. Similarly, Bems et al. (2013) investigated the collapse of international trade during the years 2008 and 2009 and found that the collapse in total spending was the key reason behind the global recession. Additionally, the supply of exports was limited due to the impact on the supply of credit. This situation further declined the overall international trade scenario. However, Vo and Tran (2021) indicate that while relatively small impacts on the trade policies were observed in past crises, the impact was

manifold during the economic crisis that emerged due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This is due to numerous factors such as uncertainty in global trade, changed global trade policies, disruption of travelling and transportation, disruption of goods and increased costs of international trade. At least 10 per cent of the trade costs in all sectors were accounted for due to cross-border costs of transport and regulatory differences between policies (Vo and Tran, 2021).

International trade policies not only reduce the global supply of products, but also raise the prices of products. For example, Espitia et al. (2020) indicate that the late 2000s happened to be instructive in relation to global demand and supply of food and trade policies. The world witnessed numerous shocks in 2006 and 2007, as well as in 2008–2011, which rendered a significant gap between the international supply of food in relation to its demand. As a consequence, this resulted in higher food prices. In response, many countries imposed trade policy restrictions in an attempt to isolate their home food market from the rest of the world. From an internationalisation perspective, these actions reduced the global supply of food but also resulted in higher food prices. In this context, it was observed that around a 13 per cent rise in global food prices on average was attributed alone to uncooperative trade policies (Giordani et al., 2016). Another research study reveals that the world price of rice was increased by 45 per cent and the world wheat price rose by 30 per cent due to changes in trade policies (Martin and Anderson, 2012).

Given these facts, trade policies in response to the Covid-19 pandemic may also result in disrupting the overall demand and supply of global products, including the food market. The changed trade policies could result in logistics bottlenecks within and across borders. On the one hand, countries would be experiencing a decrease in food demand due to factors such as social distancing and lockdowns, and restaurants could not operate normally. On the other

hand, governments would also be formulating trade policies in fear of a sudden change in food demand in relation to food scarcity when the restrictions become low after a few months of the pandemic. In fact, when the global supply of products shrinks and international trade declines, consequently, the prices of products will rise due to the widened gap between global supply and demand. This factor is also indicated by Fontagne et al. (2019) in their investigation of 152 countries using product-level elasticities in which they observe an increase in world food prices due to lower international export supplies. Espitia et al. (2020) utilise Fontagne et al. (2019) research and finds that the spike in food prices was due to uncooperative trade policy effects. Espitia et al. (2020) also highlight the multiplier effect of trade policy during the times of initial shocks brought about by the pandemic. This multiplier effect is associated with governmental trade policies. For instance, when the shock hits the world food market and the prices of food products rise high above a certain threshold, then the loss incurred by consumers is responded to by exporting governments in the shape of export tax imposition. Because the same shock is faced by different exporters and governments try their best to insulate the domestic food market, further trade policies are imposed by the governments in an attempt to stabilise domestic food prices. Espitia et al. (2020) argue that the subsequent policy actions are not driven by the fundamentals, but rather as a reactionary policy response by the governments, which is referred to as the multiplier effect. This multiplier effect has the potential to magnify the consequences of the pandemic shocks by raising the price of food internationally.

The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on international trade policies have been significant. This is because, in the early 2020s, right when the pandemic started, a fear of the rise of protectionism by countries was visible. Governments centred their attention not only on import tariffs, but also on imposing export trade policies in an attempt to ensure sufficient supplies of products and goods for the internal needs of the home population. The effects of

these trade policies can also be observed in the closing down of all types of non-essential imports (such as alcohol), while also ensuring essential medical supplies (such as medical products related to the pandemic). Such types of trade policies might have affected the internationalisation of many products, including alcohol products, thereby shortening the global value chains (GVCs) together with a fall in foreign direct investment (FDI). Kersan-Skabic (2022) argues that the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly upset the aspect of liberalised international trade policies that have been advocated and practised globally for the past seven decades. The pandemic has significantly changed trade policies in many countries. The key reasons for this are keeping prices down and ensuring goods for the national population. It is understandable that new types of trade policy barriers were imposed considering the uncertain and unfavourable conditions (environment), which can substantially affect the internationalisation of trade.

Given the research conducted by Espitia et al. (2020), Wiwoho and Kukab (2020) and Kersan-Skabic (2022), it can be said that trade policies can have both positive and negative impacts on the process of internationalisation. The point is that trade policies that govern the mechanisms of internationalisation or cross-border trade can play a vital role in either spreading viruses or acting as feasible solutions to prohibit them. This study observes that internationalisation research has conventionally stressed differences among countries, as well as potential effects that business organisations can experience when they intend to cross national borders. It is a fact that many countries have a different set of subnational variations. For instance, countries differ in terms of economic development, they differ with respect to infrastructure and they also differ in terms of institutions, culture and language. All these factors become potentially important because they have implications for how companies internationalise. Businesses might seek well-established market-supporting institutions in foreign countries before establishing foreign subsidiaries. The country of selection for

internationalisation and the location of their subsidiary, along with other similar factors, might make or break the risks associated with the process of internationalisation. This means companies need to be proactively knowledgeable when internationalising their products and services in foreign markets. This also indicates that internationalisation is not an experimental process, but rather a systematic process where every single decision needs to be informed by proper knowledge, attention to detail and a focus on the internationalisation strategy to be adopted. The company needs to understand the foreign market conditions of the specific country they select to internationalise their products. They should have valuable knowledge about the institutions, political set-up, cultural orientation, retailing set-ups, and many other local conditions which can affect their process of internationalisation. At the same time, this study argues that internationalisation processes remain complex so far, in that the internationalisation process is not yet fully understood and applied in different countries. For example, if a Chinese company wants to tap into the foreign market of the United Kingdom, it might not get a specific internationalisation model to follow. This gap in the research might be evident because longitudinal studies are not sufficiently found in the literature. All in all, internationalisation is a complex process and businesses are required to strategise their internationalisation tactfully.

Apart from trade policies, global value chains (GVCs) also influence the internationalisation of business companies. GVCs are the networks at the cross-border that assist in bringing a service or product from conception to market. Within these GVCs, international manufacturing, trade and investments occur, in which, 'different stages of the production process are located across different countries' (OECD, 2022). These activities, including designing, production, marketing, distribution and final delivery to the customer, can be conducted either by a single company or by different companies. Because GVCs relate to the process of internationalisation due to their benefits from the networking of international

companies, they also suffer from numerous issues, including network problems, limited financing, weak technological innovation, and weak linkages with foreign markets (Su et al., 2020). These issues have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic in the present times. Given this context, it becomes extremely important to discuss the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on GVCs. The next section offers insights into the literary investigation related to this.

2.9 The influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on global value chains (GVCs)

The global value chain (GVC) is defined as ‘the full range of activities that firms and workers perform to bring a product from its conception to end use and beyond’, which can be conducted globally and be undertaken by one or more companies (Hernandez and Pedersen, 2017). International production and delivery are tightly connected with GVCs, especially in this era of globalisation. However, the recent impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has raised serious questions regarding whether the world is further moving towards increased disturbances in GVCs, and maybe towards a new norm of economic deglobalisation (Roscoe et al., 2020; Gupta, 2020). Scholars indicate that numerous companies have started seeking the sources of lowest cost of supply to eliminate costly regional suppliers. GVCs were already facing heavy pressures due to the economic and social sustainability of information communication technology (ICT), including shorter value chains and digitalisation of distribution channels (Hagberg et al., 2016; Clarke and Boersma, 2017; Kurpjuweit et al., 2021). Finally, the vulnerability of GVCs in the present era was revealed during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is also noteworthy that GVCs had already started focusing on regionalisation, i.e. more attention to regional markets. They had established some regional hubs closer to the location of consumers, and also acknowledged the dominant role of digitalisation.

There is a growing discussion about GVCs' resilience and efficiency. One study concluded that sustainability of efficiency is essentially required for achieving the target of long-term resilience and survival (Golgeci et al., 2020). Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic is not the only cause in terms of determining the future of GVCs' strategies and structures. The development of international production in the past three decades was investigated by Giroud and Ivarsson (2020) under the supervision of UNCTAD. It was found that the first two decades marked a massive growth of both GVCs and FDI development. However, the last decade showed stagnation. Production and supply chains have been disrupted by the pandemic, which in turn triggered a global recession. However, in the long run, it has also triggered the necessity to increase supply chain resilience and also production capacities at the regional and/or national level. It can be said that GVCs were in the middle of a perfect storm due to previously established mega trends coupled with pandemic-based sudden and long-term impacts. In that context, the previously established mega trends include digitalisation, technological change, less physical assets dependence, less tangible products and high usage of organising production in non-equity modes. The previously established trends also include the international policymaking fragmentation where countries started shifting towards increased protectionism and regionalism. The imperative of sustainable development was also central among these trends (Giroud and Ivarsson, 2020).

Furthermore, the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2020) investigated how GVCs would be affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, either indirectly or directly. The OECD made various recommendations around the idea that this new type of risk should be dealt with separately for the supporting channels of government and for management levels. Lund et al. (2020) in the research 'Risk, resilience, and rebalancing in global value chains' presented the McKinsey Global Institute report, signifying that global production shocks are not new, but rather, they are becoming more severe and more frequent.

This is not the first time that GVCs have been exposed to global production shocks. Previous disasters also affected GVCs through terrorism, geopolitical uncertainties, natural hazards and cyber-attacks on digital systems. The Covid-19 pandemic can be referred to as the most recent and massive shock for the GVCs. Notably, GVCs are not exposed to shocks evenly because some sectors (pharmaceutical products, food and medical devices) are exposed less than others (apparel, communication).

In the context of the pandemic's impact on GVC productions, two main shocks are exposed by Baldwin and Freeman (2020). The first relates to the inhibition of the ability of people to work, whereas the second is associated with the expectation that the demand for manufacturing goods is significantly declining. Consumption and imports will be reduced due to the drop in income of a nation, whereas the drop in exports affects production. In the context of China, where the pandemic started, Chinese borders were closed which had an impact on global production. High-income countries had become dependent on high-tech production and imports from China (Javorcik, 2020). This is because these parts were usually produced in China. As a result, it was expected that MNCs and other international business companies would try to re-align or re-engineer their GVCs. The previously established GVCs were centred on achieving the greatest levels of profits and efficiency but the Covid-19 pandemic made this impossible. In such a situation, international companies might try to diversify their supplier base to increase their resilience. Diversifying the supplier base means changing locations of companies so that unavailability of the input issues can be resolved and buffer stocks of products can be utilised in times of need. One research study centred on the Covid-19 pandemic's short-term impact on GVCs in relation to the production capacity of China (Qin et al., 2020). They found that China's disrupted productions adversely affected the downstream countries and sectors compared to the upstream ones. The most affected countries were Germany, Japan, South Korea and the United States. In addition, the most

affected sectors include wholesale trade, manufacturing, machinery, textiles and optical and electronic equipment.

Renationalisation of GVCs is also noteworthy in the context of post-pandemic situations and the corresponding effects on the process of internationalisation. For example, it is also probable that the internationalisation process is affected due to the extreme situation of nationalisation. This means that companies would focus their attention on import-substitution strategies and self-sufficient production. In order to evaluate the economic effects of the pandemic, Bonadio et al. (2020) investigate 33 sectors in 64 countries. They find that in the context of international production, the real GDP is likely to drop by 29.6 per cent during the shock of pandemic. They also find that if supply chains would experience renationalisation, then this drop will be even higher, i.e. 30.2 per cent. In that case, resilience will not be compromised due to contraction generated globally and shift to domestic inputs based on availability. The reason is that the lockdowns and related activities will also perhaps affect the domestic economy. Higher protectionism policies protect local regimes amid lower income levels and lower levels of economic activity. It can be said that when GVCs rely on or shift to more localised production, consumers and businesses will depend less on global (foreign) suppliers, then less internationalisation will occur (OECD, 2020a). This means that localised GVCs will show fewer interconnections, less fragmentation of production and less trade and subsequently lower GDP and economic slowdown. It is noteworthy that this renationalisation or a shift toward a localised regime during the times of pandemic will adversely affect the global real GDP.

This shows that the process of internationalisation will be greatly affected by the factor of renationalisation. Reducing international linkages and re-localisation will lead to less stability and less efficiency. While quantifying the effects of stability and efficiency in the context of

GVCs and localisation during the pandemic, Arriola et al. (2020) investigate 22 countries and evaluate the possible exposure to demand or supply shocks. They find that only a few supplying countries happen to be the major exporters, whereas more diversification is observed in the imports. The companies that operate internationally with dispersed interconnections with suppliers and production phases in different countries have a greater probability to be adversely affected by types of risks that are specific to a particular country.

When critically analysing Arriola et al. (2020), Bonadio et al. (2020) and Qin et al. (2020), it can be said that GVCs have numerous challenges due to the pre-existing mega trends, as well as new challenges as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The pre-existing challenges include scepticism about globalisation, shortening of the sustainability of GVCs, regionalisation trends and the emergence of digitalisation. However, new challenges due to the pandemic include risk management, diversification, governance adjustment, supply chain resilience and relevant issues associated with regionalisation and digitalisation. All in all, it is certainly not expected that GVCs will function in exactly the similar manner as they did before the pandemic. This is because the direction of their future development and working will be influenced by many factors such as the speed and scope of vaccination, the uncertainty of re-emergence of pandemic variants and possible future lockdowns of world economies and trade policy measures. Clearly, global countries during the Covid-19 pandemic have been trying to ascertain effective health systems to protect public health. The economic consequences of imposing trade barriers and locking down economies are undeniable. These effects will have impacts on global or international companies operating in multiple countries. In the past, the GVCs had evolved on the grounds of technology-seeking, resource-seeking and efficiency-seeking strategies. The benefits of efficiency are not in question in the presence of digitalisation in the world markets. However, it is noteworthy that the process of changes in GVCs had already begun in the 2010s, and a slowdown was observed due to competing

strategies of sustainability, fragmentation in international economic policymaking, technological changes and digitalisation. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated that slowdown and complicated the internationalisation process due to the new barriers it imposed on companies operating in different countries. These barriers include, but are not limited to, job perspectives, travel uncertainties, uncertain scope and speed of vaccination, rising of nationalisation, decreased income, reduced demand, bans on exports and border restrictions. Although it is a fact that countries might be shifting towards renationalisation and localised businesses in the context of GVCs, it is still not recommended that business companies ignore the benefits of internationalisation for the future activities of GVCs (Bonadio et al., 2020; Kersan - Škabić, 2022). Enlargement of supply chains and diversification through global imports/exports are bigger than just squeezing back to localisation or regionalisation. Lastly, governments are recommended to focus their attention on liberal trade policies so that a high level of cooperation can be established between countries for business purposes. What is more important is that regionalisation or localisation strategies can be temporarily adopted during the pandemic but they are not useful nor desirable in the long run. Especially from the perspective of internationalisation, these strategies will render a bigger global loss. Both GVCs and internationalisation are likely to overcome the disruptions triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic. It is necessary to this end that they continue their operations with more adjustments to the international new market conditions with more resilient strategies.

Regarding the internationalisation process, it is to be noted that, in the sphere of international business, companies need to further investigate and explore how internationalisation works and how to extract the maximum benefits from it. Brennan and Garvey (2009) emphasise the important role of knowledge in internationalisation. Freeman (2006) also stresses that having enough financial resources is important for companies but the resource of knowledge is also extremely important regarding their aversion to taking risks. The spread of knowledge is an

extremely important factor for successful internationalisation (Gulanowski et al., 2018; Ferraris et al., 2021).

Another important aspect relates to Brexit in relation to the process of internationalisation. Scholars argue that the departure of the UK from the EU will presumably result in ever-increasing tensions among international companies (Crescenzi et al., 2018). This is because companies that are involved in internationalisation can be crucially affected by economic and political shocks in foreign markets. Faced with economic and political uncertainty due to Brexit in the United Kingdom, international trading activities for Chinese firms can greatly change. It has been discussed in the review of the Uppsala model of internationalisation that international companies try to follow an incremental in the shape of a series of sequential steps to further their cross-border trade (Vahlne and Johanson, 1977; 2017). However, these incremental steps can be greatly disturbed due to the impacts of Brexit in the UK. In this context, the UK's relationship with foreign companies including Chinese companies can also change. On the other hand, Chinese companies can also consider Brexit impacts to be either positive or negative from the perspective of international trading. Given this context, the next section critically discusses the impacts of Brexit on internationalisation and business relationships with China.

2.10 The impact of Brexit on UK internationalisation and business relationships with China

The United Kingdom's referendum results on 23 June 2016 in terms of leaving the European Union (EU) changed the overall landscape for the prospects of the UK economy (Oehler et al., 2017). The literature provides numerous perspectives regarding the association between internationalisation and political uncertainty. On one side, a business can be considered as a portfolio of activities and projects, however, if the company operates internationally, then it

can have diverse benefits. For example, Hill et al. (2019) indicate that by operating internationally, domestic risks can be diversified by companies because these risks are different across borders in different countries. It is argued that companies operating internationally in different countries render numerous benefits. For example, companies with diversified operations across different geographic markets have more chances to shift their operations in these different markets, thereby minimising the negative impacts of political uncertainty on the interest rates or input/output prices (Hill et al., 2019). On the other hand, Boutchkova et al. (2012) indicate that a high degree of internationalisation exposes companies to the potential impacts of political uncertainty. For example, those companies which depend on foreign trade are negatively affected by the increase in political uncertainty. This is because differences and changes in trade regulations and trade agreements increase their operational risks. In consequence, those companies operating internationally can have much lower future cash flow compared to those companies that are operating regionally or locally in domestic markets.

Scholars argue that companies operating internationally are also exposed to uncertainty in trade policy that can reduce the profit values from international operations, which can also negatively affect sales (Handley and Limao, 2015). This argument can also be applied to Brexit in the sense that, by leaving the EU, the uncertainty in the UK would increase regarding the future tariffs between the United Kingdom and other foreign countries, including EU and non-EU countries. This, in turn, can adversely affect the operations of international businesses working with the UK market. The uncertainty of Brexit can also affect exporters, as well as companies that are operating internationally in complex international collaboration through international supply chains (Boutchkova et al., 2012; Handley and Limao, 2015). This is because Brexit uncertainty can raise the cost of supplies,

companies can lose suppliers, and if trading terms become uncertain, then the internationalisation-based firms will be more affected compared to domestic ones.

It is also noteworthy that uncertainties associated with Brexit are also expected to adversely affect British companies that operate internationally. This is because they would be subject to particular regulations, such as standardisation or licensing. Hill et al. (2019) highlight that financial companies based in London were able to operate in any EU area without any restrictions. However, Brexit brought them under significant uncertainty, especially from the perspective of internationalisation. All in all, it can be said that Brexit's uncertainty is strongly related to the internationalisation of business companies, including both the UK's domestic companies and foreign companies that intend to operate within the UK.

The impact of Brexit on China is worth noting because China is an emerging giant, which means Brexit is likely to influence China in terms of policy, trade and economy (Zhang, 2018). Regarding trading and business activities, business relationships between the UK and China have been phenomenal. Morris (2015) calls it the dawn of a 'golden time' in Sino-British relationships. This means that the United Kingdom gives significant importance to maintaining business associations with China. Although that 'golden time' was called before Brexit, the former prime minister of the United Kingdom Theresa May stressed in 2016 at the Hangzhou Summit GB20 that the United Kingdom wants to develop strong associations with China. Zhang (2018) highlights that the UK and China are also important partners. Statistics illustrate that comparing the total exports to the EU from China in 2015, Chinese exports to the United Kingdom took up to 16.7 per cent. Additionally, UK imports to China were 9 per cent. The trade scale of the UK and China was analysed by Li et al. (cited by Xiong, 2022) based on the index of trade integration, the structure of bilateral trade goods. It was found that, as a former member of the EU, the UK no longer enjoys preferential trade terms. This in turn

might result in increasing the UK–China volume of import and export, trade scale expansion, trade surplus reduction and the development of a new pattern of UK–China trade policy. These facts and figures indicate that both countries are willing to establish strong business relationships with each other. These figures also indicate that the Brexit-based UK future policy, as well as the Chinese response to Brexit, will be vitally significant in terms of furthering business relationships. Welfens (2017) indicates that the UK can obtain relatively good results through the decisive and complex leadership of the British government. In that context, if EU countries are not capable of handling their issues through sustainable and intelligent reforms, they will fall behind the United Kingdom. Therefore, it will be an opportunity for non-European countries (such as China) to establish stronger links with the United Kingdom rather than the EU countries. In that context, it is expected that the UK might also prefer to strengthen its business relationship with China. This is because, unlike in the past, when the UK was bound to operate within the trade regulations stipulated by the EU, the UK will enjoy the freedom of establishing business relationships with non-EU countries. This means that, from the internationalisation perspective, the UK will be able to freely conduct international trade with Chinese companies. This would also be feasible for future business relationships between the UK and China.

At the same time, concerns for Chinese internationalisation companies might be raised post-Brexit for numerous reasons. For example, in the past, many Chinese companies used to do business within the UK, including R&D set-ups, because they considered the UK as the main bridge to the European market (Zhang, 2018). However, their internationalisation from the perspective of doing business within the EU member states might be disrupted since Brexit. If they had established their subsidiaries in London, then those subsidiaries might be exposed to uncertain tariffs post-Brexit. This might pose risk in their internationalisation-based global production if they were doing business with the UK, as well as with the EU countries. These

facts show that the effects of Brexit on Chinese companies within the UK are undeniable. It is possible that some Chinese companies will not further their investments projects in the UK. On the other hand, it is also possible that some Chinese companies would want to take the benefit of doing more business with the UK post-Brexit, specifically because the UK would be re-finalising its trading terms with the EU members. However, one thing is sure, which is that Chinese companies will change their international operation strategies within the UK.

Under the background of Brexit, specific changes in economic and trade relations between the UK and China are worth noting. This study assumes that the import–export scale of UK–China trade is likely to increase, and high expectations for future business industry cooperation can also be assumed. This is because both the UK and China have great strategic importance in their respective foreign trade and economic activities. Because China has been a great strategic partner of the UK in terms of trade and economy between the two countries, both countries would cater to their needs when developing future trade policy adjustments post-Brexit. Additionally, China’s ‘Belt and Road’ initiative (which is a global infrastructure development strategy since 2013) for investing in international organisations in nearly 70 countries has prompted the United Kingdom to take an active part (Xiong, 2022). This means that the UK knows that economic and trade cooperation with China is necessary for having opportunities in terms of successfully restoring its foreign trade and economy with the rest of the world, especially China. On the other hand, China also knows that the UK has been an extremely important trading partner and both countries have relatively complete market systems with important positions in global politics, finance, trade and economy. Therefore, China would get all the potential impacts after the UK changes its foreign trade policy post-Brexit. From the perspective of Brexit impacts on UK–China economy and trade, it is likely that the UK might tighten its trade protectionism policy post-Brexit. At the same time, the United Kingdom also claims to be a free trade economy; therefore, the degree of

protectionism in relation to Chinese trade will determine the actual impact of Brexit on Chinese products. The literature also indicates that, although the domestic market's flexibility would be directly affected post-Brexit, more autonomy enjoyed by the UK in economic policies would also be conducive to recovering domestic economic growth (Paun, 2016). However, the UK would need to further grow its trade relationship with foreign countries (such as China) because the UK would no longer fully apply the EU regions-based preferential trade rules. Henokl (2018) investigated these propositions by focusing on how Brexit would influence the United Kingdom and EU, as well as the cooperation between the UK and other major foreign countries represented by China. He observes that in the process of leaving the EU, negotiations-based negative impact should be erased as much as possible, and development protection-based policies should be implemented. The impact of Brexit on the investment of Chinese enterprises in Britain has been analysed by Zhang (cited by Xiong, 2022) in the short and long term. The research is based on the specific data of the investments of Chinese enterprises and their merger from 2009 to 2019. It was found that, during the transition period, the risk of hard Brexit was still faced by the UK, with severe challenges of investment to be faced in the short term. Nevertheless, the UK will be more open and freer in the medium and long term, thus providing a bright perspective of the investment of Chinese enterprises in the United Kingdom.

These facts show that, as a whole, the impacts of Brexit on internationalisation and business relationships with China is likely to be positive. However, UK–China business relationships can be both positive and negative. It is expected that significant trading opportunities will be presented for both China and the UK through trading agreements such as the 'Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership' (RCEP) agreement and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) (Cash, 2022). Both countries

have the potential to become trade partners, to successfully negotiate and develop smooth trade policies, and to accumulate the desired experience in digital technologies.

Critically speaking, this study argues that, to be successful in the UK business market, China needs to critically examine the key trading aspects that they might encounter when initiating cross-border business. This critical analysis should go beyond merely examining trading policies, economic policies or the changing dynamics of the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit. For example, Chinese companies might need to investigate the image of China being represented to UK consumers. If it is being construed as a threatening political and economic superpower (Wang, 2021), companies will need to work on promoting themselves as peaceful business partners through media campaigns and product slogans. Chinese companies might also need to investigate the cultural differences and preferences of UK consumers. They might need to critically explore the spending nature of consumers in the target country, orientations of wine markets and wine culture in both countries, differences in retailing studies, and so on. This means that the dynamics of business relationships between the UK and China post-Brexit should be deeply analysed based on those factors that are beyond the statistics of trading and economics. This study is centred on analysing the key factors that can play important roles in Chinese alcohol brands' internationalisation in the UK market during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study also aims to explore the strategies that Chinese internationalisation companies can adopt to successfully market their alcohol brands in the UK market during the pandemic. Therefore, the next section intends to deeply analyse the differences between Chinese and UK drinking cultures from an internationalisation perspective. This is because this literature investigation is likely to reveal deeply ingrained cultural aspects of drinking (in China and UK). It can be of significant help for Chinese companies to understand different aspects of the UK drinking culture, as well as the key

differences in Chinese drinking culture. As a result, Chinese companies can utilise these insights to successfully promote their alcohol products within the UK marketplace.

2.11 The Chinese and UK alcohol drinking cultures

There is little information found on the term ‘drinking culture’. A literature review intended to explore drinking culture conducted by Gordon et al. (2012) does not include any explicit definition of the term. Gordon et al. (2012) suggest that the term ‘drinking culture’ seems to be abstract and open to interpretation. Despite this conceptual vagueness, researchers continue to use the term in their studies. Gordon et al. (2012) outline a few main themes that influence the use of this term. It is observed that it has been unproblematically and paradoxically understood and referred to in studies without being defined. Savic et al. (2016) indicate that the term ‘drinking culture’ is used as a common-sense concept – a term that the listener or reader will commonly understand when it is used. Because the word ‘culture’ signifies a macro-sociological focus, it represents a society or a nation as a whole. For example, when talking about UK or Chinese drinking culture, it refers to patterns and rules of drinking that are observed and applicable across and particular to a national culture. It can be said that specific patterns of drinking as a symbol of social celebration, mateship and social solidarity can be referred to as drinking culture. This culture can also denote excessive drinking as an acceptable social norm. It can point out how much drinking is acceptable and where to drink is generally allowed and preferred. Drinking culture can also refer to male drinking in national cultures. Drinking cultures are also commonly given such terms as ‘wet drinking’ and ‘dry drinking’. Here, ‘wet drinking’ cultures can be observed in countries such as Italy or France, where the consumption of alcohol is high per capita, with less control on drinking habits and high rates of alcohol-based mortality and chronic disease (Savic et al., 2016). On the other hand, ‘dry culture’ refers to the countries such as the US or Sweden,

illustrated through heavier but less frequent drinking, more control on drinking habits, and with examples of alcohol-fuelled social disruption and violence (Savic et al., 2016). Rodrigues et al. (2022) identified that most of the alcohol-consuming cultures are characterised by three known categories: for instance, the Mediterranean region is known by 'wine cultures', most of Africa and Europe have 'beer cultures', and the Scandinavian and Eastern Europe countries have 'spirits cultures'.

Alcoholic beverages have largely been recognised as an integral part of social life around the globe, but it has always been hard for societies to comprehend or control their use. Scholars have explored different phenomena of drinking culture around the world. For example, men are deemed to be the gender that consumes more alcohol, also being more highly likely to drink compared to women (Wilsnack et al., 2005). Because of this gender difference in consuming alcohol, it can be said that it affects men's social behaviour. The second aspect of alcohol relates to the cultural aspect. For instance, alcohol is an important aspect of Chinese culture because alcohol drinking is conventionally accepted in China (Wang et al., 2020). One of the key Chinese spirits is called 'Baiju', which remains the most popular alcohol for male Chinese citizens (Sandhaus, 2014).

Why is understanding drinking culture important? This can be explained by an example illustrating a relevant event in China. Moore (2020) illustrates a social example in China when a business banquet was hosted by the employees of Xiamen International Bank's Beijing branch. In that meeting, a new employee with the surname Yang was present. He warned his manager beforehand that he would abstain from drinking for personal reasons. However, Yang was later forced to drink by a leader of the bank, despite Yang's attempts to decline. Yang was made to take three rounds of Baiju. After a while, another bank leader also insisted Yang drink more, using the argument that he also took the toasts despite being

allergic to alcohol. Ultimately, Yang became unwell and had to leave the meeting, with many other workers chasing and teasing him. This incident shows the importance of understanding how Chinese drinking culture works and how it shapes the social preferences of Chinese citizens. Nowadays, most of the alcohol beverages in China (more than 80 per cent) are consumed in as Baiju, or other drinks that are available in a similar category of taste, quality and choice. Understanding culture is also important because people are likely to consume alcoholic beverages in the spirit of their cultural significance, despite associated bad behaviours and higher death rates.

Understanding Chinese drinking culture in comparison with the drinking cultures of other countries (such as the UK in this study) is extremely important because culture is likely to set the trends of how much alcohol citizens in a specific country would consume and why. Tang et al. (2013) highlight that Chinese people used to drink 0.4 litres of pure alcohol per capita per year back in 1952. However, their drinking level increased to 2.5 litres per year in 1979, and again to 4.9 litres per year in 2009. A recent report indicated that, on average, Chinese citizens per year drink more than 7 litres of alcohol, mostly spirits and beers being drunk by men (more than 11 litres) and 3 litres by women (The Straights Times, 2019). Hao and Young (2000) highlight that the Chinese enjoy festive drinking as a part of their traditional culture, such as the Chinese New Year festival which is closely associated with eating and drinking. The Chinese also consume alcoholic beverages on happy and celebrational occasions such as ‘white happiness’ at funerals and ‘red happiness’ at weddings. Recreational drinking is another cultural activity in China; alcohol often goes side by side with poetry, dance, music and other recreational activities. Hao and Young (2000) also illustrate the tradition of the ‘business drinking’ culture in China that is also considered a part of their custom due to the rapid growth of the business community and industrialisation on a large scale in China. Drinking alcohol has been a customary norm in the Chinese business

community, during business meetings, business negotiations and the like, for facilitating social exchange among businessmen in China. One interesting aspect of Chinese drinking culture is the fact that it does not encourage solitary drinking, but rather encourages social drinking per se. During social occasions, people are encouraged to drink centred on the custom of toasting so as to fill the environment with a congenial and joyful atmosphere. This can be observed in the case of the Yang bank employee gathering (discussed above), where the employee Yang was urged by more than one employee to toast. By contrast, Chinese society does not prefer women drinking. The past literature illustrates that many female non-drinker women in China described their non-drinking behaviour as being due to restrictions imposed by society (Hao et al., 1998).

Although the above literature, such as The Straights Times (2019), Wang et al. (2020) and More (2020), indicates that Chinese citizens drink too much alcohol as they deem it part of their social and cultural existence, it also shows that the Chinese are changing their drinking habits because alcohol consumption in women and the younger generation has increased (Mersol and Luo, 2018). It is observed that most of the Chinese consumers intend to drink beverages that are marked with a lower content of alcohol due to health issues. In this sense, it can be said that the Chinese drinking culture is not static, but rather, it can experience changes over time due to health concerns, natural disasters such as the Covid-19 pandemic or other economic influences such as inflation rises.

When it comes to examining the alcohol drinking culture in the United Kingdom, it is observed that alcohol consumption has long been acknowledged as an integral part of conventional UK culture (Rodriguez et al., 2022). In the United Kingdom, the consumption of alcohol is broadly accepted as an integral part of social life, which can be seen in the nation's low proportion of abstainers. Room and Makela (2000) identified the UK drinking

culture as a 'beer country' due to having a broad range of beers that are mostly consumed domestically and a long history of breweries. The per capita consumption of alcohol in the United Kingdom is 73 litres in 2018, which puts the UK high on the list of alcohol consumption countries (Rodriguez et al., 2022). Pubs have been recognised as extremely important parts of the UK drinking culture; the UK had 47,200 pubs trading in 2021. 'Pub' is short for 'public house' in the UK; the pub is a place where people can enjoy drinking together with other people. Pubs are considered somewhere people can go to relax and relieve the tiredness of the day. The House of Commons Library (2021) acknowledges that the British culture is surrounded by pubs, which enhance the engagement of community, and for tourists, pubs are considered the third most popular activity. British culture also has a long history of production and consumption of spirits such as gin and whisky. However, the production of commercial wine is relatively new in British culture and only started as recently as the 1990s. However, Parr and Rodrigues (2020) indicate that wine has been an integral part of traditions and meals throughout the British Empire. Far more than the remaining western world, the consumption of wine is estimated at 108 bottles of wine each year by a Briton on average (Rodriguez et al., 2022).

Anti-social behaviour and alcohol drinking go hand in hand in the UK, and half of reported crimes entail alcohol drinking behaviour (Gordon et al., 2012). UK culture is also significantly different in terms of alcohol consumption frequency beyond safe limits. For instance, alcohol drinkers in the United Kingdom tend to consume more than five drinks on a single occasion, which is high compared to other nations. Coleman and Cater (2005) interviewed 14- and 15-year-old Britons and observed that they do not condemn the element of drunkenness in their culture. The teenagers consider binge drinking as a normal tradition in British culture and, instead of focusing on its adverse effects, teenagers are more focused on its positive results. For instance, they recommend drinking alcohol to forget the worries and

issues they face, and they prefer drinking as a form of social facilitation. This might be the reason that British culture not only allows, but also prefers and recommends, alcohol drinking to the level of intoxication (Jarvinen and Room, 2017). Young people's affection for alcohol consumption can also be observed in extreme situations. They can be seen drinking at any time and at any place, be it in pubs, small alleys or main streets. Jiang (2011) indicated this cultural difference by using the words that 'If delicacies and a bottle of nice alcohol are put in front of a British and let him choose, the British will choose the alcohol without hesitation' (p. 252). This might seem to be an exaggeration, but by closely analysing UK culture it becomes evident that alcohol drinking is a main part of British everyday activities. For example, many British people do not have their meals without having alcohol on the dinner table. That means they would not eat until they are sure that it is accompanied by alcohol. It can be said that many Britons like to have alcohol before eating, along with the food and even after they have finished eating. Perhaps this might be the reason that in many restaurants there is a bar counter.

UK culture allows people of almost all ages to drink alcohol without any concern. Young or old can raise a cup of wine and take alcohol. Jiang (2011) indicates different types of alcohol in Britain being preferred by and marketed for different people. For instance, for senior citizens, there may be a special offer of wine. Drivers are offered non-ethyl or low-ethyl alcohol drinks. What British culture does is support people to experience the effects of the drink. They will promote alcohol as an aid to relieve the tiredness of their daily life activities, to commiserate with someone on a sad occasion, to celebrate with a friend or family on a happy occasion, and so on. Holding a cup of alcohol and saying 'Cheers!' is customary in Britain.

British culture often includes a 'beer festival', which may take place each year. Cabras et al. (2020) indicate that UK customers have shown a great propensity toward craft breweries that provides them with a broad range of new flavours and tastes of alcoholic beverages. As a result, organisations in the industry have shifted their attention towards diverse marketing strategies during beer festivals. These cultural festivals play a vital role in terms of lifting local tourism and the economy. The number of beer festivals in the UK has spiked in recent years, yet this has been a historical tradition in the UK since 1978. Cabras (2017) highlights that the number of micro-breweries and craft were 142 in the 1980s and have risen to more than 1,700 in 2017.

UK drinking culture has also deeply proliferated in and around universities (Gill, 2002). This proliferation of the UK drinking culture has even raised ongoing concerns for foreign students since they feel almost excluded from the native UK students due to their absorption in the drinking experience (Thurnell-Read et al., 2018). Due to the UK students' absorption into the drinking culture, foreign students often feel marginalized. Scholars argue that foreign students are unable to participate in the activities of UK students due to the 'binge drinking' culture that is unacceptable to some other cultures. One reason might be because a club or pub remains the foundation for the UK students' socialisation activities. This fact also differentiates the UK drinking culture from other drinking cultures in the world. This is because British culture facilitates sociability and friendship at drinking venues on one hand, whereas on another hand, this might be challenging for other cultures due to their ethnic, social and religious customs. Notably, Thurnell-Read et al. (2018) also highlight a note on the official website of the British Council, stating that pubs have 'a long history and are an important part of UK culture', that going to the pub is 'one of the most popular ways to spend an evening in the UK'. The British Council go on to describe pubs as 'very welcoming, safe places' but warn of a 'minority' that 'can be rowdy' (p. 574).

It is noteworthy to mention that the drinking culture is strongly associated with, and influences, the country's retailing business. This is evident in the research study conducted by Bhattacharya et al. (2018). The authors investigate the dependence of the alcohol industry on heavy drinking in England. They found that the proportion of the revenue for alcohol sales varies between retailer types and beverages due to people drinking above guideline levels, on average. If the consumers were to reduce the level of their drinking, sales of alcohol (from the retailing industry) would be likely to go down by as much as 30 per cent, which is a significant level. Furthermore, every retailer has significant exposure to the sales revenue drawn from alcohol purchasers. This implies that understanding and studying the UK retail sector is one of the most important aspects Chinese alcohol companies should consider from the perspective of internationalisation. The next section conducts a literary investigation of the UK retailing studies in this context.

2.12 Internationalisation of alcohol products and the UK retailing sector

There is no single agreed definition of the alcohol industry because it can be defined in different ways. Normally, the alcohol industry refers to the companies and corporations which produce alcoholic beverages. However, wider definitions are also used. According to Jernigan (2009), the alcohol industry includes numerous providers, such as hospitality providers, point-of-sale operators, distributors, wholesalers and producers. Additionally, the alcohol industry is also connected with capital goods packaging, manufacturing, trucking and agriculture industry. McCambridge et al. (2018) describe the alcohol industry as an environment of alcohol acquisition that provides the interface of alcohol provision through the 'alcohol supply chain' which is comprised of regulatory, economic, political, processing, distribution and production contexts of the alcohol industry and alcohol consumption.

The World Health Organization (WHO) refers to sellers, marketers, distributors, producers and developers of alcoholic beverages in its definition of the alcohol industry (Dwyer et al., 2022). It can be said that the alcohol industry is deeply intertwined with many corporations and companies that collaborate in the alcohol value chain. In this regard, retailers remain one of the most important participants that play a vital role in the promotion and selling of alcoholic beverages.

The retail sector can refer to any sector that includes individuals and businesses involved in selling products to customers directly (Hutton, 2021). The retail sector includes internet retailers, door-to-door sales, market stalls, supermarkets, department stores and shops. It also includes the manufacturing sector (where retailers sell the products manufactured), the logistics sector (associating producers and wholesalers with retailers) and the wholesale sector (which supplies products to the retailers). The retail industry of the UK plays a vital role in the country's economy which spans over 3 million people who contribute their fair share to this sector (Smith, 2021). The UK retail industry is comprised of over 300,000 separate businesses with retail sales of 439 billion GBP in 2019 (BRC, 2022). Notably, the retail sector is influenced by several domestic and international factors such as changing economic conditions, increased online shopping and changing consumer behaviour, for example.

The retail sector is an extremely factor to consider in seeking an understanding the process of alcoholic beverages and their relationship with internationalisation. The reason is that the internationalisation of a product such as alcohol is significantly influenced by both internal and external barriers. Here, internal barriers include sufficient knowledge about domestic uncertainty, the attitude of the domestic market to foreign products and risk perceptions.

External barriers include government regulations, economic and political instability, differences in culture, fluctuations in exchange rates and distribution difficulties, for example.

Decades ago, it was stated by Williams (1992) that ‘retailing across borders is far from easy’ (p. 9). Then, in 2002, this observation was again made in a report to the DTI, suggesting that the UK government should analyse the process of markets opening to British retailers (Hutchinson et al., 2009). This is to ensure that barriers to internationalisation can be reduced. The quote from Williams (1992) shows that the internationalisation process of retailing is not a simple task because international retail bodies can face significant obstacles during the process. Regarding external barriers for retail internationalisation, operating in another country’s business environment is subject to currency fluctuations, restrictions and fierce competition in the foreign market when retailers try to expand their business operations in foreign markets. Other external barriers can include custom barriers, competitiveness, bureaucracy, cultural differences and lack of support (Hanell et al., 2019; Morais and Ferreira, 2020). On the other hand, barriers have also been identified in the shape of language difference, recruitment and staffing, site acquisition and consumer tastes (Alexander, 1990). Regarding internal barriers to retailing internationalisation, research has identified a few key barriers such as retailer size, the financial capacity of the retailer, lack of knowledge and the internal managerial culture (Hutchinson et al., 2009; Hanell et al., 2019).

The internationalisation of retailing in the current era of globalisation has emerged since the 1990s in numerous western countries with increasing dynamics (Swoboda et al., 2008). The largest retailers in the world, such as Tesco, Metro, Carrefour and Wal-Mart, as well as smaller ones such as GAP, H&M and Douglas, have achieved foreign turnover growth rates, but they also need to increasingly work on an international basis by working over their value chain processes or activities. While retailing studies have been abundantly discussed in the

literature, the work is so scattered and broad that knowledge of retailing studies and their application from the perspective of internationalisation is still not that extensive. Two important international retailing research studies are worth mentioning. Alexander and Doherty (2009) explore international retailing studies by stressing theoretical or conceptual papers, the characteristics of the host market, activity patterns of the international retailer, market selection and entry methods, the motivation behind the international activity, and management of retailing in the international markets. Swoboda et al. (2009) emphasise similar kinds of international retailing strategies in addition to various market operations connected with retailing.

By reading Hutchinson et al. (2009), Doherty (2009), Swoboda et al. (2009), Hanell et al. (2019) and Morais and Ferreira (2020), it is observed that understanding retailing studies from the perspective of internationalisation is far from easy due to their broad nature and scope of operations. However, retailing studies in relation to alcohol products within the UK have a few important characteristics. First, there are a few parliamentary Acts that regulate the retail of alcohol in the United Kingdom. The Licensing Act (2003) illustrates an integrated single scheme that regulates the supply or sale of alcohol (Purewal, 2017). The Licensing Act (2003) (Mandatory Licensing Conditions) (Amendment) Order 2014 stipulates the necessary conditions retailers must comply with in order to sell alcohol in the UK. The amendment includes age verification policies and notices on irresponsible promotions (such as ‘all you can drink for 10 pounds’ or speed drinking, for example). Next is the issue of strict policies on pricing of any alcohol product in the UK. This strict pricing is ensured for numerous reasons, such as making sure that retailers do not get engaged in cartel-style or anti-competitive practices. This means that, in the United Kingdom, retailers are obligated to work around strict rules of pricing and competition. In other words, retailers cannot make a cartel and collectively set the prices of alcohol products based on their preference. There is an

obligation for UK retailers to individually set alcohol product prices, but they must ensure that minimum conditions of pricing the alcohol products are met. This price regulation is unique to the UK and as such the retail market in the UK has evolved generally in the shape of non-priced service-based competition in the past two decades (Burt et al., 2010). It can be argued that one of the major challenges in the UK retail market is to introduce a competitive, price-sensitive approach for the offers of retail. The arrival of other world-level discounters such as Wal-Mart, Costco, and Netto during the 1990s has drawn the attention of the world's consumers over the margin and pricing strategies of grocery retailers. However, consumers might be concerned that low pricing might reflect the low quality of products, or that low pricing might reflect issues with food safety. Chinese companies which are planning for internationalisation in the UK market can also take low pricing in retailing as an opportunity for them. This is because China is known for selling low-cost but good-quality items. This means that Chinese companies would not face any major trouble to sell their good-quality alcohol brands at low cost in the UK retail market. Secondly, from the perspective of internationalisation, Chinese companies can assume that consumers in the UK will expect that their retail sector offering alcohol products at low cost will not compromise on quality thanks to the high service levels and quality shopping environments in the UK. Because large retailers try to maintain their service and environment to entice UK consumers, therefore, Chinese companies should collaborate with those large retailers, especially those companies which opt to sell low-cost alcohol products. In this way, Chinese companies will take extra advantage of the excellent retail service and environment of these large retail businesses.

The collaboration of Chinese companies with large retailers is also beneficial because the UK government deems big retailers as a social force, not only for price regulation, but also for the potential role of these retailers in changing consumers' behaviours/bad habits. Burt et al. (2010) indicate that regulations have been enacted by the UK government after taking large

retailers into confidence regarding alcohol sales, smoking displays and the contents of product descriptions. Large retailers are taken into confidence to combat health issues. Therefore, collaboration with these large retailers will help Chinese companies to strategise their marketing campaigns in terms of aligning them with both government and consumer expectations.

Purewal (2017) indicates that UK retailers must show responsibility regarding the promotion and marketing of alcohol products. This is not to discourage them from creating market differentiation and competitive advantage, but rather to ensure that they are fully complying with legal frameworks and obligations stipulated for alcohol promotion. Because Chinese companies would need to work in coordination with these UK retailers, it is important for them to study and understand how retailers in the UK operate, what their obligations are when selling alcohol products and what types of marketing and promotions restraints they need to follow. This will significantly help Chinese companies, not only in terms of internationally collaborating and working with retailers, but also in better designing and promoting their marketing campaigns within the UK. At this point, it is clear that the UK retailing industry is different, it has specific regulations that business companies need to comply with, and in a number of ways UK retailing operates differently from the general pattern of retailing in other countries. Some might deem it as the uniqueness of the UK retail sector that likes to stand apart from European retail (Brexit is also a result of this), whereas some would see it as retailing that is specifically associated with the business norms and behaviour that the UK domestic market generally follows.

Another positive aspect of Chinese companies having an understanding of UK retailing studies is to gain knowledge regarding which types of alcohol products UK retailers are

selling. For example, selling alcohol to an individual under the age of 18 is prohibited in the UK (Purewal (2017)).

The literature discussed below also points towards the adoption of the internet in the retail sector within the United Kingdom. Ellis-Chadwick et al. (2002) highlight that the UK retailing business has been significantly influenced by the World Wide Web. For example, digitisation of retailing business through the internet has been adopted for comparatively low costs of online setup. Internet vendors and numerous other online retailing opportunities have also reshaped the retailing business in the United Kingdom. It can be said that gone are the days of bricks and mortar retailing because retailers are now capable of operating online to take a significant market share from their competitors due to offering lower-cost, flexible and fast online solutions. The most spectacular hype in internet retailing started after 2000 when the retailing sector in the UK continued to strongly develop over the internet (Burt et al., 2010). Tesco and Argos are two famous UK retail internet sites that have significantly increased their customer base and products range by adding e-retailing to their existing channels of operations. Numerous UK retailers have now started calling themselves multi-channel. The reason is that UK citizens have been increasingly using the online medium for shopping and placing their orders. The Covid-19 pandemic has also significantly increased this trend. Notably, this trend of online purchasing can further grow in the future because a large number of consumers have still not adopted this online purchasing trend. Hillier (2020) indicates that in the United Kingdom, rather than going to physical stores, one in every five individuals are expected to keep purchasing online. Even the on-premises channels such as nightclubs, pubs, restaurants and bars develop new strategies to seize the opportunity in terms of maintaining and attracting new customers via online media (Alana House, 2020). Despite all of the obstacles that come against alcohol consumption due to the untoward situation of the pandemic, online purchasing seems to be growing at a fast pace. However, how much

acceleration can be observed in these situations, and how much this will change after the pandemic, remains an answer that would need more research. At the same time, it is emphasised that the behaviours expected in online purchasing do not always match up with the situation in reality (Plata et al., 2022).

However, it is not the case that UK retailers have completely shifted to the internet; e-retailing is still connected with physical retailing in the UK. Burt et al. (2010) indicate that some UK retailers have started their operations purely on internet-based operations. However, some retailers such as Tesco have selected to utilise the internet medium in their existing physical store-based operations. Therefore, they pick online orders from customers and deliver them via physical stores. A broad range of products are provided online, so retailers can utilise the distribution network to pick and deliver those products that are not stored in their physical stores or warehouses. However, in the United Kingdom, the internet has become a prominent factor in shopping online. It was observed that, in 2007, retail sales through the internet medium in the UK touched 12.7 billion GBP (Intel, 2008). E-retailing or online retailing is also important due to the changing circumstances after the Covid-19 pandemic. The retail sector has been affected negatively by the pandemic. As a result, the previous retail platforms that were not equipped with e-retailing or digital technology were expected to have less absorption capacity of the pandemic. This is because physical stores faced significant disruption due to lockdowns and social distancing measures, thereby adversely influencing retail businesses (Pantano et al., 2020; Bryson, 2021). On the other hand, those retailers that had already switched to digital retail channels had flexibility in business operations, and therefore they managed to get through the difficult times through e-retailing.

Another important factor related to retail studies is that UK retailers also specifically target Chinese customers because lots of Chinese consumers shop in the UK, thereby bringing a

huge opportunity for retailers (Chandler, 2019). Chandler (ibid.) illustrates that Chinese visitor numbers are likely to spend 1 billion GBP, i.e. an increase of 40 per cent, in which case Chinese wealthy students occupy an 11 per cent rise as well. Briggs (2019) highlights that every Chinese student coming to the UK spends more than 100,000 USD annually based on the statistics of UnionPay. According to the UK managing director of Adyen, Myles Dawson, 'With Chinese tourists budgeting more than £5,300 per trip, and rising numbers of Chinese nationals entering the UK in the last year, the potential opportunity for businesses is too big to ignore'. This means retailers already know the strategies to market products to these Chinese customers. This is going to be beneficial for Chinese companies who are planning to tap into the UK market because these retailers can be of great help to them. These retailers are already providing Chinese consumers with Chinese payment methods, as well as marketing tools specific to Chinese consumers. Thus, Chinese companies can take the sale of alcohol products to the next level by simply collaborating with these retailers. Chinese companies can extract sales data from these retailers to examine what types of alcohol beverages are being sold the most, what types of consumers like them the most, and so on. After analysing the retail data, Chinese companies can modify their branding strategies, their marketing campaigns and their products to best suit potential consumers. The consumer data obtained from retailers can also help Chinese companies to track the patterns of spending of UK consumers. Understanding and analysing patterns of consumer spending is extremely important because it offers important insights into which types of products consumers do or do not prefer. Consumer spending data also highlights economic conditions in the country or effects of other incidents such as natural disasters or pandemics on subsequent spending (Chronopoulos et al., 2020; Naeem, 2020). Companies can use this data to build suitable marketing strategies to entice targeted consumers, change their behaviour toward specific alcohol products, and to manage their manufacturing and inventory based on the demand of

consumers. The next section discusses the spending patterns of UK consumers in these contexts.

2.13 UK consumers' spending patterns on alcoholic beverages

In recent decades, the UK has had great concerns regarding the rates of obesity and overweight (Aresu et al., 2010). One of the key policy objectives in the UK was to reduce the energy intake per capita, as well as improve the quality of food intake. In this context, the policy areas concerned with obesity include the reduction of high-energy beverages such as alcohol products. Research has indicated that UK consumers including children and adults have mostly reduced the consumption of high-fat food products such as coffee, tea and dairy products, but alcohol consumption has mostly been on the rise since the 1990s (Ng et al., 2012). The authors observe a high consumption pattern of alcohol intake in British adults. Ritchie (2007) indicates that, in the life of the UK consumer, the role of alcoholic beverages, particularly wine, goes beyond just drinking. By value, the UK has been one of the largest importers of wine due to its high per capita consumption. Interestingly, UK consumers spend most on imported wine products, since the UK itself has low domestic wine production (Ritchie, 2007). Statistically speaking, in 2005, the wine market in the UK alone had a high value of £10.28 billion, making wine product consumption at 24.6 per cent of all alcoholic beverage spending. It is observed that between 1984 and 2004, this consumption has more than doubled, which is markedly different from consumption trends in other European countries. One reason for this high consumption might be because the prices of wine have barely increased in recent decades. Additionally, UK consumers might be spending highly on this alcohol product because of easy accessibility in cafes, bars and pubs, relaxation of licensing, and comparatively low health issues. Medical research has also indicated fewer

negative effects of this type of alcoholic drink, as well as some quantifiable health benefits in adults (Finkel, 1996; Troncoso et al., 2001).

Critically speaking, the above facts and figures show that UK consumers have been greatly spending on alcoholic wine due to fewer health issues, lower cost and accessibility. However, it is noteworthy that the high consumption of alcohol is indirectly associated with the culture. It is indeed the UK culture that drives consumers to communicate and interact with others through wine celebrations in numerous social situations. UK consumers deeply reinforce their self-perceptions and frequently use wine for defining themselves in their social circle. Scholars have identified a noteworthy connection between food and wine via meal rituals and social intercourse (Charters, 2006; Demossier, 2012). This study argues that UK consumers spending on alcohol products can be analysed through quantitative data extracted from retailers and other venues. This quantification of data is helpful in studying UK consumption patterns, changes in consumption, high consumption and low consumption, and so on. However, it is still necessary to obtain more qualitative data so that consumption patterns of alcohol can be aligned with the personal perceptions and experiences of consumers. This is highly likely to help researchers, businesses (including Chinese internationalisation companies) and other concerned policymakers to retrieve data about the social wine culture of UK consumers. When consumer data is from quantitative means, it shows who purchases wine and how much; on the other hand, consumer data retrieved qualitatively can explain the motivations behind that purchase. It is also noteworthy that the consumption of alcohol in one country might not reflect the consumption of alcohol in other countries. This is due to differences in culture, social values and other dynamics in different countries (Hofstede, 2009; 2011).

Another point in wine consumption is that consumers' behaviour is fluid and reactive to situations (Ritchie, 2007). That means it is not correct that consumers would always consume alcohol by using the same patterns. While wine can be taken as a cultural or social everyday drink in the UK, it can be greatly connected to some special social occasions; however, consumers are free to take it or leave it during different situations. For example, if the health situation in the UK deteriorates due to wine consumption or traffic accidents become common due to heavy drinking habits, then it is possible that the consumers' consumption patterns change based on the changing circumstances. The global alcohol markets have been growing steadily in recent decades. However, these markets were significantly disturbed, at least in part, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Plata et al. (2022), the global consumption of alcohol was over \$1.49 trillion in 2019, whereas the annual revenue decreased to \$200 billion in 2020. On a global scale, when some countries implemented numerous restriction measures such as social distancing and lockdowns during the months of March and April 2020, alcohol sales rose temporarily. Countries such as the United States, Mexico, Australia and the United Kingdom initially saw a significant increase in alcohol purchasing and consumption data (Plata et al., 2022). Nevertheless, after a few more months, it was revealed that consumption data and sales both decreased. The off-trade market revealed sales growth in contrast to the sales made through all retail outlets such as wine shops, kiosks, mini markets, convenience stores, supermarkets and hypermarkets (Hartziotis, 2020). It was expected that this growth would be seen in the on-trade market such as sales through outlets of clubs and bars, which were virtually closed on a global scale. For instance, UK sales data showed that on-trade sales dropped by 40 per cent, whereas off-trade sales increased by 20 per cent. On the one hand, after the initial lockdowns were imposed, the consumption of alcohol either decreased or was maintained. On the other hand, the trend of binge drinking increased among the general public, which also raised critical concerns about

population health (Kim et al., 2020). Regarding alcohol consumption in the UK, it was revealed that during the pandemic, the overall consumption of alcohol decreased but a higher frequency of alcohol consumption was reported among sub-groups (Plata et al., 2022). This indicates the importance of segmentation while analysing the patterns of alcohol consumption. Sallie et al. (2020) conducted survey research in the United Kingdom to explore alcohol consumption patterns during the Covid-19 pandemic among the general population sample (n = 1346). The authors asked respondents to report on drinking behaviours before the pandemic, i.e. in November 2019, and during the pandemic, i.e. in May 2020. A reduction in self-reported alcohol consumption was reported in both months, Nevertheless, an increase in alcohol consumption was observed among individuals such as people with children, essential workers, older people and those with depression. It can be said that the actual patterns of alcohol consumption due to the Covid-19 pandemic (i.e. whether alcohol consumption decreased, increased or stabilised) might require meta-analyses in which a number of factors are analysed. These factors include consumer segmentation, country-specific pandemic onset, measure types, drink types and so on.

All in all, the change in consumption patterns can be strongly associated with the untoward situation of the Covid-19 pandemic that emerged in 2020. Scholars indicate that consumers often build up stocks of 'essential' supplies as a precaution during times of heightened uncertainty (O'Connell et al., 2021). This indeed happened during the emergence of the wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, when UK consumers began to stock large amounts of food supplies, days before lockdown restrictions were imposed. Such extreme spending during natural disasters can also include stockpiling of alcohol products. The significant increase in alcohol consumption during the initial weeks of the pandemic can be attributed to the imposed restrictions in restaurants, bars and pubs, as well as numerous other places where people publicly drink. This increase in consumption can also be attributed to the fear of those

venues/places where maintaining physical distance is difficult for people. Numerous research papers indicate that the pandemic effect in terms of consumer spending (by using financial transaction data of consumers) highlights a rise in the spending on groceries before restrictions. Regarding the matter of alcohol consumption during the Covid-19 pandemic, conventional consumption of alcohol was severely affected in early 2020 (Plata et al., 2022). It can be said that the consumers' association with alcohol was greatly affected. This includes everything, i.e. people's individual habits of alcohol consumption, sales and distribution channels of alcohol, drinking preferences, socialisation dynamics and people's perceptions of patterns of alcohol consumption in the future. In this context, it is yet difficult to say how long these alcohol consumption trends will continue in the coming months and years ahead. At the same time, it is extremely important to predict the future of consumers' alcohol consumption trends, especially during untoward situations (such as natural disasters or pandemics). The reason is that it is extremely useful for an internationalisation company (including Chinese companies) to forecast consumers' alcohol consumption trends if they want to successfully market their alcohol products and excel in this industry.

This suggests that the analysis of patterns of UK consumers' alcohol consumption should also focus on the 'premiumisation' aspect. Here, premiumisation means switching of consumers' preferences towards premium alcoholic beverages, i.e. those alcoholic beverages that are highly priced and available in high quality (Anderson and Nelgen, 2021; Reis, 2021). This is because the UK market is also segmented in terms of increasing wealth in some consumers. Therefore, these wealthy consumers are mostly fond of enjoying high-quality and high-priced alcoholic beverages. Chinese companies can also investigate and explore the alcohol consumption patterns of these wealthy consumers. This is because, despite natural disasters such as the Covid-19 pandemic or other similar untoward situations, these wealthy consumers often do not change their drinking habits. It can be said that they are mostly

resistant to crises. Secondly, most of the high-priced alcohol beverages such as spirits (that also fall in the best-selling category) are often purchased through online channels, i.e. via the internet. This also substantiates the argument that Chinese companies should collaborate with large e-retailers and should focus on their online presence to ensure they do not miss such types of wealthy consumers in the UK. Considering that the physical stores and the off-premises channels are still recovering from the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, Chinese companies can now beneficially utilise the increasingly dominant online format, by which consumers can purchase alcohol from the comfort of their own homes. Since more consumers have been staying at home in the UK due to social distancing restrictions and lockdowns, being unable to have drinks with their social circle at specific locations such as restaurants and bars, premium categories of alcohol beverages provide them with the opportunity to celebrate those 'lost experiences' again at home with family. For instance, in the United Kingdom, sales of spirits have increased, which can be associated with this trend (Plata et al., 2022). At the end of 22 March 2020, the sales of spirits through online channels increased by 23 per cent compared to the previous year of 2019. It is also expected that the sale of premium spirits will further increase in the coming years, regardless of the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

While analysing the data regarding patterns of UK consumers' consumption, it has been observed that digitisation or online selling is extremely beneficial for the promotion and selling of alcohol products. In this context, there also have been some consumption trends in 'quarantine cocktails' that consumers prepare and enjoy themselves at home (Murazyan and Hovhannisyan, 2021; Savic, 2021). Covid-19 restrictions on pubs, bars and restaurants have forced these places of public drinking to temporarily close their operations. Therefore, consumers have been trying other new ways to revitalise those lost experiences again at home. Meanwhile, this emerging trend has also been geared by numerous alcohol companies in

terms of developing strategies to enable consumers to make their personal drinks at home. In this context, the term ‘home mixology’ is being used, by which people can celebrate social online experiences on one hand, while maintaining restrictions of social distancing on the other hand (Plata et al., 2022). This avenue can also be explored by Chinese companies where they can provide a ‘home mixology’ experience to UK consumers based on the rising consumption trend. If Chinese companies can develop high-quality gastronomic experiences for UK consumers, they might successfully sell more alcohol products, especially during crisis times such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Chinese companies can analyse the UK consumers’ consumption trends of ‘home mixology’, which would also help them sell their alcohol products after the pandemic ends. They can also collaborate with food and beverage businesses to expand those novel experiences. Because UK consumers commonly order food through online channels, adding a touch of ‘home mixology’ cocktails or other complementary alcoholic beverages can further increase Chinese companies’ customer base if they join hands with food and beverage businesses.

Chinese companies can also deliver premixed cocktail kits to UK consumers. Nielsen (2020) indicates that premixed cocktails delivered directly to customers at home have been extremely popular in the United States. Chinese companies can also take help from some creative initiatives around the globe. For instance, pubs in Australia have developed interesting market strategies, such as having the entire pub experience recreated at home (Plata et al., 2022). There are companies in Australia that send a box of craft beer, vinyl records, music playlists, pub snacks, glasses and appetisers to customers after engaging with them in online chats. Nicklin (2021) highlights that companies in the United Kingdom have developed specific types of environmental and innovative packaging for sending samples to their customers, such as letterbox-fitting flat bottles. They also entice their customers by providing them with virtual tastings of their alcohol products via Zoom and other apps. It

would be beneficial for Chinese companies to take leverage from online drinking parties and provide consumers with discounts during the pandemic. Moreover, Chinese companies can also opt for provision of ready-made ‘ready-to-drink’ (RTD) types of beverages (Smith et al., 2005). Plata et al. (2022) indicate that the popularity of RTD has risen sharply during the Covid-19 crisis. The reason is that consumers like the experience of having a cocktail at home, but they do not want it to be too costly in terms of preparing cocktails from scratch at home. It can be said that the home experience trend seems to be on the rise, or at least has accelerated due to the pandemic crisis. Chinese companies can take leverage from it, even after the pandemic ends, because it is a niche that UK consumers might want to continue in the future.

When reading Salley et al. (2020), O’Connell et al. (2021) and Plata et al. (2022), it is observed that alcohol consumption trends have been significantly disturbed due to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in a number of meaningful ways. This has shown a major impact on the purchasing behaviour of alcohol consumers in the United Kingdom. In this situation, Chinese companies can deeply analyse a few noticeable consumption trends among UK consumers so that they can better manufacture and strategise their marketing campaigns accordingly. Whether the pandemic proceeds in the coming years or slows down and vanishes, analysing the UK consumer trends before, during and even after the pandemic is going to benefit Chinese companies in terms of strategising their marketing campaigns and successfully selling their alcohol products in the UK.

Summary

A few notable factors in the times of the Covid-19 pandemic that affect the internationalisation process of Chinese businesses include the difference between Chinese and UK alcohol drinking cultures. Normally companies would not explore such differences in

culture, but the literature suggests it might be one of the most important factors that can make or break the success of the internationalisation process (Jiang, 2011; Gordon et al., 2012; The House of Commons Library, 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2022). This is because drinking culture is not the same across the globe; different countries have different drinking cultures and norms. These drinking cultures set the tone of consumer consumption practices by highlighting accepted quantities of consumption and fashionable places to drink.

A noteworthy Chinese example of the importance of a country's drinking culture, signifying how Chinese drinking culture works and how it shapes the social preferences of Chinese citizens, is Moore (2020). After explaining the different aspects of Chinese drinking culture (Hao and Young, 2000; Tang et al., 2013; The Straight Times, 2019), this chapter illustrates the alcohol drinking culture in the United Kingdom (Room and Makela, 2000; Parr and Rodrigues, 2020; The House of Commons Library, 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2022). For example, the UK is considered a beer culture due to having a wide range of beers; the consumption of alcohol is broadly accepted as an integral part of social life; pubs have been recognised as extremely important parts of the UK drinking culture; wine has been an integral part of traditions and meals in the UK; and people mostly focus on the positive side of drinking so, therefore, teenagers consider binge drinking as a normal tradition. These aspects, and many others of the UK drinking culture, are beneficial for the Chinese alcohol companies to strategise their marketing campaigns and successfully sell their alcohol products.

Another important factor is understanding the UK retailing sector from the perspective of internationalisation. The chapter discusses some important legislation, around which the UK retailing sector conducts its operations, such as The Licensing Act (2003) regarding alcohol supply and sale and its Amendment Order (2014) that stipulates the necessary conditions retailers must comply with in order to sell alcohol in the UK. The issue of strict policy on the

pricing of any alcohol product in the UK is also discussed (Burt et al., 2010). Lastly, the chapter offers noteworthy insights into UK consumers' spending patterns on alcohol beverages. The chapter critically discusses how these consumption practices can be beneficially utilised by Chinese companies, especially during the untoward situation of the Covid-19 pandemic that emerged in 2020 (Briggs, 2019; Chandler, 2019; Naeem, 2020; Chronopoulos et al., 2020).

Conceptual Territory

Whilst the application of a Conceptual Framework is often presented to display relationships gained by the consideration of current knowledge with regards to a topic. However the fundamental nature of the gap in knowledge which arose by way of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as compared with traditional viewings of marketing and internationalization potentially means any historical viewing as an approach might be arrogant in its assumptions. The evolution of BREXIT having a potential for major trading implications happening also furthers the problems of assumptions of relationships applied in the Conceptual Framework model since the combination of fundamental and potentially unknown factors make this a unique situation.

This chapter then presents the conceptual territory which informs the investigation in the recognition of the potential gap in knowledge from published sources. A conceptual territory currently provided through the lens of the principles and aspirations of Internationalisation, legal constraints and trading relations cultural implications of alcohol consumption is then progressed. Through the investigation of further factors revealed through the eclipse of two unprecedented acts of the pandemic and BREXIT combined reflects the need for the necessary extension of the conceptual territory from historical publication. By recognizing the gap in the prior literature simply by its predisposition to report published material pre-

pandemic and BREXIT, the conceptual territory is both progressed and challenged by progressing the notion of the need to take a new lens towards insights that these fundamental changes might represent.

The intention of the investigation then in meeting the research problem, aim and questions was to consider progression of the conceptual territory and challenge accepted literature from the review chapter in terms of whether there is post pandemic and BREXIT fundamental changes to any accepted conceptual territory.

Section 3: Methodology

3.1 Research strategy

This research uses inductive reasoning to explore and identify the main factors that affect the ‘internationalising’ of Chinese brands of alcohol. Comparatively, an inductive approach aids in the development of a reasonable theoretical evaluation and analysis. Inductive reasoning has been selected to strengthen subjective and theoretical information relating to research problems and issues (Kitokivi and Mantere, 2010). The current research uses an exploratory method and inductive approach. Using an inductive approach enables identification of themes by studying documents and other printed material for historical issues concerning the changing nature of UK drinking and the time boundaries around the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands. An exploratory study investigates a problem that is not clearly defined, which is an appropriate approach to address the aims of this study (Swedberg, 2020).

Furthermore, the aim of this research is to try and determine the key factors and brand strategies that would work in the process of internationalising Chinese brands of alcohol. The intention of any predictive study is to explain what is happening in certain circumstances (Kamper, 2020). Therefore, the solutions that are proposed in this study aim to be applicable in any other cases that exhibit similar characteristics. The aim is to attempt to forecast which Chinese business situations should be enacted for the businesses to be successful in foreign markets. The intention is that this research can be used as a reference by other businesses with similar characteristics or by SMEs that have similar market scenarios.

Despite exploratory research not providing conclusive findings, it ensures a better understanding of the existing problem (Stebbins, 2001). It starts with a general idea and then uses research to identify issues that may be focused on in future studies. An essential aspect

of exploratory research is that researchers should willingly, if the need arises, change the direction of their research to discover new insights. An exploratory design is mainly conducted when the problem is at the preliminary phase and is associated with interpretive research or ground theory approach because it focuses on why, what and how (Stebbins, 2001). An exploratory design has been selected because it suits the aims of the current study by identifying and exploring factors affecting internationalisation. An exploratory design will provide avenues for exploring unknown variables of the study.

The philosophical way of referring to a thinking pattern or thinking process that affects how knowledge is studied and understood is known as 'paradigm' (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). It is the research paradigm that sets the expectations, intent and motivation for the research process. It can be said that, if the paradigm is missing from the research, then formulating the succeeding steps of methodology will be baseless. The reason is that a philosophical stance must be taken by the researcher, which would reflect the conceptual lens of the research: a set of shared beliefs, a school of thought and the worldview of the researcher and his thinking patterns (Cohen et al., 2007). These are the grounds on which the researcher will run the methodological considerations.

The research paradigm is the conceptual lens that builds and formulates the philosophical patterns and approaches initially set out by the researcher in a piece of research. The paradigm shapes the research approach, i.e. the procedure and plan consisting of steps of wide assumptions to detailed data collection methods, analysis and interpretation (Chetty, 2016).

3.1.1 Research paradigm-based philosophical assumptions: ontology and epistemology

To understand philosophical assumptions based on the research paradigm, DeCarlo (2018) provides an example related to social sciences. The author acknowledges that paradigmatic assumptions are somewhat difficult to understand because everyone has their own way of personal thinking. This means that people have different philosophical assumptions in real-life situations. This is where the paradigm shapes one's stance on the issue, or one can say, a set of philosophical assumptions (DeCarlo, 2018). In the research process, generally, the research paradigm is comprised of key philosophical assumptions underpinned by 'ontology' and 'epistemology' as addressed in detail below.

3.1.2 Ontology-based subjectivism and objectivism

The 'study of being' is referred to as ontology (Scotland, 2012). Ontology means knowledge of what is reality or what is entailed as truth in the real world (Guba, 1990; Tuli, 2010). It can be said that ontological assumptions reflect the philosophical position that the researcher takes up to perceive how things really are and how they work. According to Guha Thakurta and Chetty (2015):

'Ontology is based on the nature of reality. It is classified on the basis of objectivism and subjectivism. The first aspect of ontology, objectivism portrays the position that social objects persist in reality external to social actors. Secondly, subjectivism is concerned on the social phenomena which are emerged from the perceptions and consequences of those social actors concerned with their existence.'

The perspective the researcher adopts in research depends on objectivism and subjectivism. An objective approach could be applied if the researcher perceives that there is an objective world out there that can be objectively known; for instance, sales margins can be used as an

objective measure of organisational performance. On the other hand, the researcher may believe that certain concepts are a result of human categorisation of the world and that their meanings are circumstance-dependent. In this study, the content of text data is identified through the systematic classification of coding and identifying themes. The findings of this research may also be interpreted differently depending on the researcher. The latter view is called a subjective perspective because it depends on the subject involved in the study. In general, subjectivism means that the research participants' subjective experiences and the researcher's perspective are embedded within the research process rather than completely detached from it (Letherby et al., 2013).

Subjectivism emphasises the study of experiences from individual perspectives and considers personal perspectives and interpretations to be important within a research process. Consequently, subjectivism is mostly associated with phenomenological research. Subjectivism makes interpretations and conclusions from data derived qualitatively. The current research uses a documentary review to subjectively examine contents in documents that are related to the research topic, which makes this research interpretive (Letherby et al., 2013).

3.1.3 Epistemology-based positivism and interpretivism

Epistemology refers to the nature and forms of knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007). Epistemology reflects how the researcher will gain understanding about truth, reality or knowledge in the real world (Guba, 1990; Tuli, 2010). Epistemological assumptions represent how the process of creating, acquiring and communicating knowledge can be conducted. According to Guha Thakurta and Chetty (2015), epistemology can be categorised into two key philosophical approaches, namely positivist philosophy and interpretivist philosophy. Here, positivist philosophy or positivism represents a 'resource researcher' who deals with data from the

perspective of a natural scientist. By contrast, interpretivist philosophy or interpretivism reflects a 'feeling researcher' who is primarily interested in attitudes and feelings. Thus, in the domain of research philosophy, epistemology can be classified into the two branches positivism and interpretivism.

It can be said that, based on the philosophy of what is already known, positivism reflects the scientific method of investigation (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017). According to Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), in the social world, positivism is applied on the presumption that the social world can also be examined similar to the natural world: 'that there is a method for studying the social world that is value-free, and that explanations of a causal nature can be provided'. Cohen et al. (2007) state that, according to positivism, objects have an existence independent of the researcher. This means a discoverable reality or knowledge exists independent of the researcher. It can be said that, according to positivism, reality or knowledge cannot be mediated by our senses because the researched and the researcher are both independent beings. There is no value for the researcher's conscience because meanings are contained within the objects of the research. The only effort the researcher can make is to retrieve knowledge or meaning from the object.

Positivism involves the philosophical approach of a natural scientist according to the observable entity (Guha Thakurta and Chetty, 2015). This strategy is conducted based on data collection and hypothesis development that is tested and confirmed for use in future research. Scotland (2012) highlights these quantifiable methodologies, such as structured questionnaires, statistical or mathematical methods-based social surveys and official statistics by using standardised tools.

Positivism can be related to objectivism because objectivism is often modelled on natural sciences methods, for instance, large-scale surveys and experiments. Objectivism attempts to

establish law-like generalisations that may be applied to a similar phenomenon in different contexts (Letherby et al., 2013). Such a perspective that benefits objectivism is referred to as positivism and depends on data that can be statistically analysed and generalised. Positivism uses quantitative research approaches which depend on measurements and numbers to collect and analyse data (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). This research will not be concerned with quantitative measurements and numbers during data collection and analysis; rather it will extract content from grey literature to examine qualitative meanings, themes and patterns that are latent in the texts.

By contrast, epistemology-based interpretivism is centred on assessing differences between humans as social actors (Guha Thakurta and Chetty, 2015). In the interpretivism philosophy, research is primarily conducted on humans rather than objects. Interpretivism stresses understanding the subjectiveness of human experiences. Interpretivism is associated with subjectivism because it is based on a subjective perspective and it depends on the subject involved in the study. In general, subjectivism means that the research participants' subjective experiences and the researcher's perspective are embedded within the research process rather than completely detached from it (Letherby et al., 2013). Interpretivism explains that knowledge or reality differs from person to person because it is subjective. Without consciousness, there is no meaning in the world because our senses mediate knowledge or reality. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) highlight that interpretive research can offer an insight into the minds of the participants: by speaking to them and comprehending and interpreting their thinking patterns, such as how they make meaning of their experiences. It can be said that the researcher obtains reality or knowledge by engaging with the human subjects. Because interpretivism involves comprehending and interpreting insights into human behaviour, it commonly prefers qualitative methods to collect data (Scotland, 2012).

These qualitative methods include interviews, focus groups, open-ended questionnaires and observations.

Interpretive research relies on theoretical sampling, where study sites, participants or cases are selected taking into account theoretical considerations, such as their suitability in the phenomenon under study and whether they have characteristics that make them uniquely suited for the study. On the other hand, positivism relies on random sampling (or a variation of this technique), where cases are randomly selected and generalised. Therefore, small samples and convenience samples are suitable for interpretive research provided that they fit the purpose and nature of the study, but not in positivist research (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). Notably, these large-scale samples seek to confirm a relationship that is generalisable to other situations.

Additionally, the researcher's role is important in interpretive research. In a positivist approach, the researcher is deemed to be external to and independent of the research context and is not presumed to bias data collection and analysis. In interpretive research methods such as observations, action research and ethnography, the researcher is deemed part of the social phenomenon and their roles and participation in the research must be clearly explained during data analysis (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). However, the role of the researcher in the current study revolves around collecting and examining data through rich data (documentary review), which is highly likely to counter any bias of subjective readings. This will ensure the researcher's personal biases or preconceptions do not taint the nature of subjective inferences derived from an interpretive approach.

3.2 Data collection methods

3.2.1 Primary data collection and secondary data collection methods

Research is a key process in which factual and relevant data or information is collected by the researcher, then the data is analysed to draw interpretations and conclusions in order to inform further courses of action (Appiah-Opong, 2018). This is called systematic enquiry, in which the researcher focuses on a careful research methodology to discover some useful facts. Data collection also refers to statistics and facts collected for reference and analysis, which means collecting pieces of information on ideas, objects and so on, in an unorganised and raw format.

Two types of data collection methods are generally employed in research studies, namely, primary and secondary data collection (Raj, 2020). Although a documentary review research methodology for data collection is the key method used in this study, it is important to note that documentary review also resembles content analysis, which includes extracting and examining data that already exists. Therefore, it can be said that documentary review can be quoted as an example of secondary data methodology, as outlined further below.

Gouvea-Reis and Murray (2020) highlight that data collected for the first time for the purpose of a particular study is called primary data. Primary data is unique and original data collected by the researcher directly from a source that involves the application of interviews, observations, case studies, surveys and questionnaires (Ajayi, 2017). By contrast, secondary data is already published, produced or collected by other researchers. Secondary data is easily accessible because other researchers have already put their efforts into researching and collecting it (Johnson, 2017). Secondary data collection is also known as a 'desk-based' data collection approach because the researcher does not need to spend more time and energy in

terms of arranging participants, meeting them and dealing with other aspects in order to conduct research on human subjects.

3.2.2 Secondary data collection procedures

Raj (2020) highlights that primary data, after performing statistical operations, also turns into secondary data that can be used by the researcher. Sources of secondary data collection vary according to the research question and purpose of the research study. Johnston (2017) highlights that secondary data collection starts with an investigation to understand what is already known and what remains to be known regarding a topic by reviewing secondary investigations and sources other researchers have already conducted in a specific area of investigation. This is where secondary data collection takes a step further in re-analysing already published or collected past data. Because the already published data is abundantly available to the researchers, secondary data collection methodology has turned into a systematic research method itself. It is opined that secondary data includes both published summaries and raw data (Olabode et al., 2019). For example, many organisations also produce data about their business operations, and that secondary data is not easily accessible to the researcher unless authorised by the organisation. This is the reason that many researchers also believe that the main original source of secondary data is also primary data (Olabode et al., 2019). According to Boslaugh (2007), the difference between primary data and secondary data depends on the association between the researcher who is examining the data and the research/individual team who collected the dataset. This is important in the sense that in one analysis the same dataset can be primary data, whereas in another analysis it can be secondary data based on the environment, purpose and time interval. It can be said that secondary data analysis is any further examination of a subsisting dataset that shows knowledge, conclusions or interpretations different from, or additional to, those shown in the

first examination. Moreover, irrespective of the different definitions of secondary data presented by different scholars, one thing that is certain is that the interval of time differentiates between the original purpose and later purpose of collecting data. Watson (2013) also agrees that secondary data is referred to those analytical works that interpret and comment on other works from the primary source and, thus, they are second-hand published data since they have been created after primary data sources and their main talks also involve primary data sources.

Notably, secondary data comprises information collected by agencies, governments or an individual researcher (Raj, 2020). Two broad classifications of secondary data are referred to as internal sources and external sources. Here, internal data can refer, for example, to sales data that is normally collected by all organisations regarding their daily business operations such as sales returns, received orders, inventory details and so on. This is the data through which an organisation analyses factors such as customers' preferences and profitable products, for example, to inform future practice. Internal data can also refer to the financial data of an organisation through which it can detect its financial stability. This data is largely available to financial professionals so that they can analyse it and forecast the company's performance. Internal data also includes storage data, which contains information about raw material, working capital and finished products that helps to decide efficiency in inventory management practices (Raj, 2020).

On the other hand, external sources of secondary data can include data not collected by an organisation but by an outside agency. These external sources can include government publications (such as industries production details, agricultural statistics, social surveys, import-export details and census), mass media reports (published on the Internet, electronic

media, newspapers and magazines), commercial services, national and international institutions and trade association reports (Raj, 2020).

Data collection and analysis in interpretive research can be undertaken simultaneously and repetitively (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). For instance, a document may be read and coded before moving to the next one. Simultaneous analysis gives opportunities to identify and rectify weakness in the adopted analysis protocol or alter it to better suit the phenomenon of interest. The original research question may also be changed if the initial research questions are unlikely to give new or important insights. This is an essential characteristic of interpretive research and is unavailable in positivist research where the research aims cannot be changed without having a significant impact on the entire project once data has been collected (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). This research employs the technique of reading through a source and coding it before moving to the next one.

While qualitative methods are associated with inductive reasoning, quantitative methods are associated with deductive reasoning because they explore a known theory or phenomenon and test the theory's validity in a given circumstance (Oflazoglu, 2017). A quantitative approach seeks to understand the prevalence of a problem by looking for results that can be projected to a larger population (Oflazoglu, 2017). Such an approach is unsuitable in this research because it does not involve human participants who represent the overall population. According to Sessions and Gotthold (1984), quantitative methods are based on a single truth that is not affected by people's perceptions. This is contrary to the research topic. Different authors may have documented various ways in which Brexit/Covid-19 affected the market and their explanations are different. Thus, multiple truths exist rather than a single truth promoted by the quantitative approach.

A qualitative research approach aims to discover and understand participants' experiences, opinions and perspectives. Considering that qualitative research methods explore meaning, purpose or reality, this approach is a situated activity that locates observers in the world. A qualitative approach involves interpretive and material practices that transform the world to make it more visible. It focuses on methods for collecting or generating data while placing less emphasis on analytical techniques for data interpretation. Qualitative research transforms the world into various representations, including interviews, recordings interviews, conversations and memos to self. It comprises interpretive and naturalistic approaches to the world, meaning that it studies subjects in a naturalistic setting, getting insights or interpreting phenomena based on assigned meanings (Myers and Avison, 2002).

Foundational to qualitative research is socially constructed multiple truths (Sessions and Gotthold, 1984). Qualitative research explores a topic of interest in detail and collects information through case studies, interviews, ethnographic methods, and even participant observation. This type of research is open and flexible because it allows the study of unique interactions among researchers and respondents in a natural setting with minimal boundaries. The term 'unique interactions' means that different researchers may obtain different findings from the same participant because participants and researchers create results in a specific situation (Uribe et al., 2020). The current research does not aim to replicate and generalise research findings, but rather to answer research questions from the standpoint of different sources related to the topic. The research does not entail measurements and numbers in data collection and analysis, but focuses on themes. Through thematic analysis, the research considers various aspects of the main factors that affect the 'internationalising' of Chinese brands of alcohol.

According to Norman and Yvonna (2005), the inductive approach uses a qualitative research design associated chiefly with interpretative philosophies. It first makes observations and then proposes theories at the end of the research based on those observations (Norman and Yvonna, 2005). An inductive approach is used with interview design, making generalisation difficult. Thus, findings obtained from the inductive approach cannot be replicated, as the qualitative research does not focus on graphs and numbers but on statements that can be analysed to propose a theory based on the findings. Although an inductive approach is characterised by a small sample size, it provides a detailed picture from the collected samples. Embedded in qualitative research is the perspective regarding the impartiality of the researcher; that is, to conduct the research in an unbiased way, acknowledge own preconceptions, and treat research findings impartially (Norman and Yvonna, 2005).

This research uses documentary review of the grey literature to explore the effects of Covid-19 and Brexit on the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands. The present study follows the desk-based approach (secondary data collection methodology) as the key data collection method. This is because this data is easily extractable from authentic online sources. To conduct the analysis, the researcher has identified and written down a list of keywords that can be used to retrieve the most relevant documentary review data from online sources. The selected list of keywords has been employed on prominent search engines such as Google and Google Scholar. Vine (2006) and Martin-Martin et al. (2018) corroborate that Google Scholar is a globally recognised database of secondary data sources. The keywords have been selected based on the topic under investigation, research questions, research aims and objectives, and title of the study. These keywords have then been used in different combinations to ensure that the most sought-after, appropriate and relevant sources are retrieved.

The aim therefore was to extract a large number of documentary data sources regarding the research questions. The complete list of retrieved data was then reduced by screening them, analysing them and applying specific inclusion and exclusion criteria, as is standard practice for a research investigation with a focus on the research questions (Patino and Ferreira, 2018; Connelly, 2020).

After collecting some data, patterns were identified, which led to an initial theory to explain these patterns. Thus, the inductive approach facilitated in making observations before shifting from particular experiences to more general propositions about the experiences. An inductive approach would imply going from certain to general or from data to theory.

In this study, much effort has been made to try and use the two philosophies as a continuum with interpretivism and positivism being on each end. Evidently, when operating with a continuum, the assumptions and characteristics of one philosophy may be eventually replaced by the other. Specifically, for this research, if the intention was to depend purely on the positivist philosophy, a very extensive dataset would be needed. However, retrieval of extensive quantitative data was not possible due to Covid-19 restrictions. A more flexible interpretivist approach was therefore chosen because it is more applicable to resources available and the topic in question. The study thus explores variables like social, economic and cultural contexts and naturally leans towards interpretivism. Investigating the penetration of Chinese alcohol brands in the international market is in itself naturalistic, which is also a key facet of this philosophy (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). The study focuses on strengthening the understanding of Chinese local brands and their trajectory and what methods or factors they employ in order to enter international markets.

Alongside positivism and interpretivism, this research can also be considered from the viewpoint of phenomenology or grounded theory. Phenomenology is mainly concerned with

the research participants' lived experiences. Phenomenology aims to understand the subjects' experiences and seeks to answer a specific research question about this. Grounded theory focuses on the experiences and various data sources to develop a more objective understanding of the subject of the study. Grounded theory aims to develop a model or explanation of the meaning of the study. While grounded theory is a sociological approach, phenomenology is a philosophical approach (Sayre, 2001). This research uses documentary review and no research subjects are involved. Thus, a phenomenology approach is inappropriate in the current research. Grounded theory is suitable because it is based on naturalistic inquiry and allows collection of data from multiple sources. Data has been systematically analysed by means of coding and placing it in categories. In inductive documentary review and grounded theory, the researcher seeks themes from data analysis and trustworthiness can be improved by developing a criterion for measuring the quality of qualitative methods in addition to specific criteria for each method (Cho and Lee, 2014). Using grounded theory and an inductive approach, the researcher gains theoretical insights from data by identifying and analysing patterns or themes.

3.3 Research sampling

This research samples documents about the impact of Covid-19 on the UK alcohol market published between March 2020 and March 2021 (a one-year window). The documents about the impact of Brexit on the market are sampled from 2017 onwards, after the British referendum vote which took place in June 2016. As per the main theme of this research study (key factors and brand strategies for internationalising Chinese brands of alcohol), the target market is the United Kingdom's market. However, due to Covid-19 restrictions, this research study does not use any primary data, thus no surveys or interviews were conducted. This research study partly uses peer-reviewed literature review, especially to investigate what was

known before Covid-19. Then the study largely employs documentary review, including grey literature in addition to other sources of secondary data (Brewis et al., 2017).

3.3.1 'Documents' in documentary review-based research

The current study employs documentary research in data sampling. Ahmed (2010) defines 'document' as a 'written text'. It can be said that the study of 'document' can be ascribed as studying some socially situated products or issues. Documents can be classified into many types, such as images, official proceedings' records, statistical records or files (Silverman, 1993). However, documents are the records that can also be distinguished; for instance, a record is defined as any written statement prepared by an agency or individual to provide an accounting or attest to an event (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). Nevertheless, documentary research is beyond just the process of 'facts recording'. By contrast, documentary research is a reflexive process within which the researcher not only retrieves, understands and presents the documents, but rather also tries to situate those documents within a theoretical framework, by which the reader can understand the content. This is why documentary research is one of the most widely applied data collection methodologies in social research.

Green and Thorogood (2018) write that documents are said to be a broad range of available written material sources against a specific topic at hand. These documents can be prepared by a team or organisation for public use or by an individual for private reasons. Regarding some commonly used documents in the context of public policy, these documents can be found in the shape of training manuals, implementation guidelines, meeting proceedings, national strategies and guidelines and policy reports (Kayesa and Shung-King, 2020). These documents are written on some basis and with a purpose on specific assumptions, and they are presented in some specific style or manner. The researcher must be familiar with and fully aware of the original audience of the documents, their purpose and origins (Mogalakwe,

2006). Another fact about documents is that they are not principally produced with a central aim of doing research, but rather they are naturally occurring objects with a semi-permanent or solid existence, indirectly telling us about the social world of the people who created them (Payne and Payne, 2004). In this context, it can also be said that, unlike a speech, a document can also be taken as an independently existing object that is written beyond the context of its production and beyond the writer. In the context of research, documents are found in the shape of various data sources, which include but are not limited to pictorial, visual and written sources in diverse forms, government proceedings and announcements, census publications, institutional reports and memoranda. For a social researcher, official statistics and government publications can be attractive and useful propositions.

Not only has documentary research been the core method of data collection and analysis in social research, but it has also at times been considered by leading sociologists the only method (Ahmed, 2010). Documentary data is widely available in numerous work settings and organisations, including case records of health visitors, death causes and its classifications, medical records and school reports, but one of the main issues in extracting those documents lies in the capability of the researcher to use them correctly. This is because the researcher needs to be capable enough to correctly use credible sources of evidence to investigate the topic at hand. This means the researcher should be able to conduct correct document analysis.

Bowen (2009) emphasises that document analysis requires that the researcher examines and interprets the data to gain understanding, elicit meaning and develop empirical knowledge. Normally, researchers dig deep into the past literature relevant to the topic under investigation and use that information in their research reports. By contrast, document analysis is comparatively a different type of research methodology that provides a list of

analysed documents without even including previous literature studies. Notably, past studies are also a great source of data but the researcher will not rely exclusively on them.

Generally, document analysis has been used in research studies where a combination of methodologies with other qualitative research methods is used for the same topic (triangulation) (Denzin, 2017). For example, when a qualitative researcher is required to use at least two different sources of evidence, then he can use document analysis in addition to other qualitative research methods such as interviews, physical artefacts and observations. It can be said that document analysis will help the researcher in providing confluence of evidence. This can also assist the researcher in terms of reducing the potential bias that might occur in other studies with a single piece of evidence. Patton (1990) says that triangulation assists the researcher by guarding against the accusations of investigator's bias that might occur because of using a single source or a single method of investigation. In the current dissertation, the researcher uses triangulation by examining numerous documentary sources on a single topic or theme.

Thus, research studies can take considerable benefits from document analysis. For instance, Rossman and Wilson (1985) used a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods to extract quantitative data through surveys and qualitative data through semi-structured and open-ended interviews, as well as document analysis. The rationale for using document analysis lies in identifying the main agencies that support the programmes of school improvement as per their research. To make it possible, Rossman and Wilson (1985) primarily analysed agencies' missions as explained in the documents to answer the topic under investigation. Another research study conducted by Sogunro (1997) uses a combination of interviews and questionnaires along with direct observations and document analyses to evaluate the effect of training on leadership development. With the help of document analysis, Sogunro (1997)

evaluates the noticeable impact of leadership training programmes as per the substantive content, enrolments, objectives, goals and history provided in document-based records. This relates to the present study because the examination of grey literature contains both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The rationale for using document analysis can also be described in the sense that documents can contain such types of information that can suggest some questions relevant to the phenomenon and situation under investigation. For instance, the research study conducted by Goldstein and Reiboldt (2004) uses document analysis as a principal method for generating new interview questions. Their research demonstrates the rationality of using document analysis for complementing their research investigation. They describe the usefulness of document analysis thus: 'interview data helped focus specific participant observation activities, document analysis helped generate new interview questions, and participant observation at community events provided opportunities to collect documents' (p. 246). Also, supplementary research data is provided by documents. For a knowledge base, informational insights retrieved from documents can be of great value. Therefore, researchers should focus on using library archives and catalogues to analyse documents in order to give value to their research. They can also be used for the purpose of corroborating evidence from other sources. Researchers can use document analysis to verify their findings. Resultantly, if the researcher finds that the evidence gained from document analysis is contradictory instead of corroboratory, then the researcher can further investigate the given area of research. On the other hand, if the findings obtained from document analysis corroborate the information retrieved from other sources, then it will add credibility (trustworthiness) and greater confidence in the obtained findings.

The data contained in documents can be effectively used as a vital source of evidence for research studies. This is also identified by Merriam (1988, p. 118) that ‘Documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem’. This also points to the fact that document analysis strategy can also be used as a standalone methodology. Even some research studies only rely on document analysis methodology to investigate the phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). Given these facts, the rationale for using document analysis lies in its significant role and usefulness in research studies. They are useful in providing context and background of the research, generating new questions, providing supplementary data and verifying findings from other data sources.

3.3.2 Sources of documentary research

Kayesa and Shung-King (2020) describe that many documents (such as the documents of policy discourse) are publicly accessible, however, documents can also be private and not accessible to the general public. For example, documents containing minutes of meetings are hard to access by the general public. In the documentary research study, two types of documents are generally used, namely primary documents and secondary documents (Mogalakwe, 2006). Documents that are produced as eye-witness accounts are said to be primary documents in which people experienced the specific behaviour or event one wants to research. By contrast, secondary documents are produced by people who also received eye-witness accounts of other people, but they were not themselves present at the scene. It can be inferred that documents are the visible signs or material traces of what happened at a certain point in time or situation. Narrowing down the personal documents’ context, it can include personal letters, diaries, notes, medical records, address books, photo albums and household account books (Mogalakwe, 2006).

Documentary research is an old research technique that has been extensively used by classical social researchers such as Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx. For instance, between 1841 and 1867, Karl Marx used documentary sources extensively, such as ‘Her Majesty Inspectors of Factories Reports’ (Ahmed, 2010). Harvey (1990) highlights that Marx also used periodicals and newspapers including *New York Daily Tribune*, *Economics* and *The Times*.

Given the facts stated above, it can be said that the sources of documentary research provide the researcher with an opportunity to closely examine a particular phenomenon or an issue at hand that he wants to investigate and study. The documentary research method is used in categorising and investigating certain resources (particularly written documents) that are available in either the public or private domain. This kind of research method is as good and at times even more cost-effective compared to observing participants, in-depth interview methods and social surveys (Ahmed, 2010).

Notably, while conducting the documentary review and grey literature, this study takes certain factors into consideration when investigating the theme (key factors and brand strategies for internationalising Chinese brands of alcohol), for example, the theme of economic disruption versus the volatile nature of media influence on consumer tastes in the United Kingdom or the impact of Covid-19 on the Chinese-UK market, luxury alcohol and promotion of Chinese alcohol culture. The researcher might also conduct data mining of Web sources such as Worldmeters to analyse the themes and trends informing the research study. Another factor relates to investigating attitudes of the governments towards Chinese trade and food products post-Brexit. The study will also focus on the historical discussion of issues and themes related to the changing nature of UK drinking in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, as

well as the cultural issues of convergence/divergence between the UK and China followed by the Brexit impact.

3.3.3 Using grey literature in research investigations

The term 'grey literature' can seem incomprehensible to define; however, a common definition is: 'Information produced on all levels of government, academia, business and industry in electronic and print formats not controlled by commercial publishing i.e. where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body' (Lawrence et al., 2015, p. 230). There are three factors that can aid an understanding of grey literature, namely: a document's nature, the types of procedures and the means of distribution. Grey literature is a complex and extensive source of information. Because grey literature is not published formally in the popular sources of academia such as journals or books, specific words/items are associated with grey literature such as policy documents, websites, fact sheets, newspapers, conference proceedings, theses and reports (Godin et al., 2015). Higgings and Green (2011) argue that unpublished data and research can also be considered types of grey literature. Additionally, one of the most common platforms where a broad range of organisations publish grey literature, including non-profit organisations, health institutes, research centres and government organisations, is the Internet. Grey literature can serve the purpose of being a valuable resource for decision-makers and practitioners across several disciplines because these documents usually entail research and policy-related information; for instance, legislation, programme evaluation studies, research reports and clinical practice guidelines. Godin et al. (2015) highlight that grey literature documents are broadly accessible because they do not need specific subscriptions or access rights such as in the case of peer-reviewed scholarly literature.

Although the term 'grey literature' lacks specific clarity regarding what it actually is, it still plays an imperative role in bringing in a broad range of resources and documents that are often not visible otherwise within the broader means of scholarly publishing and communication. It can be said that grey literature provides a peculiar way, a unique lens for exploring the research investigation at hand. Considering the healthcare industry, Hopewell et al. (2007) argue that not including grey literature might increase artificial estimates of the effects of treatment due to publication bias. Potentially relevant work might be omitted by exclusively relying on peer-reviewed literature (Pappas and Williams, 2011). This means adding the aspect of grey literature in a research investigation provides a less biased and more comprehensive set of reports to analyse.

It has long been a great challenge for collective services and libraries to collect grey literature (Luzi, 2000). Whether digital or print, a collection of grey literature might require specific strategies and skills that can be time-consuming to find and categorise. The reason is, grey literature does not fall into normal distribution channels and common categories of document classification. However, the Internet has provided researchers with a changed and easily accessible way of extracting grey literature thanks to the huge amount of online published research from a wide range of sources of knowledge, allowing a much greater level of participating and understanding of social policies and issues. Still, it is to be noted that locating grey literature can be a great challenge considering that this literature might not be distributed widely, might not be stable online or even published online, archival of older documents might be problematic, citation and format information can be inconsistent, it might contain an overwhelming volume of material, it might not have an international standard serial number (ISSN) or an international standard book number (ISBN) and is generally not peer-reviewed, making it potentially unauthentic (Ncu.libguides.com, 2021).

To conduct the searching and filtering strategy in the grey literature databases, Godin et al. (2015) argue the occurrence of a broad variance in search filters and functionalities to retrieve that data (the ability of searching by abstract and title). Thus, it is the job of the researcher to adapt search terms for fitting in the grey literature databases. For example, in the Canadian research databases, researchers included relevant terms as keyword fields and then exported the results to an excel sheet for further screening (Godin et al., 2015). Another strategy of research involves Google searches. Because Google searching can be pretty overwhelming due to the vast amount of available data, the researcher will need to create numerous search strategies comprising of more than one combination of search terms. The researcher might not be able to screen all extracted results, but rather he might need to depend on relevancy ranking within the search engine. To make it more relevant, the researcher might need to use a custom search engine within the Google search engine. For instance, the current research targets the UK market, therefore, the researcher relies on a custom search engine within Google that provides grey literature documents relevant to the UK only. This way, the researcher has been able to bookmark relevant results during the searching process to be entered later in the Excel spreadsheet. 'NGO Search' is one of the examples of the Google custom search engines that searches across hundreds of websites of NGOs. Another Google custom search engine is 'IGO Search' which primarily searches across the websites of international governmental organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Notably, Google also permits a search across a specific domain such as .gov or .edu. This kind of searching is also helpful to retrieve grey literature related to organisations instead of commercial ones. This can be used in 'Google's Advanced Search' in which the researcher can select the type of domain he would like to search. Another way of doing this is by adding the term 'site:.edu' or 'site:.gov' at the end of the search term. For example, if the researcher wants to find the information relevant to

Brexit and alcohol, he can enter in the search box 'Brexit relationship with alcohol' site:.edu. Additionally, when looking for grey literature, searching across different types of documents such as .xls, .ppt, .doc or .pdf can also be helpful. The researcher can achieve this through Google by adding filetype:xls at the end of the search term.

The researcher can also request content professionals who are experts in the topic of research synthesis for possible inclusion in the research. Depending on the scope and nature of the research topic, content experts might vary (Godin et al., 2015). To specify grey literature databases, institutional repositories have become one of the potential solutions because of their stability (Marsolek et al., 2018). Open access archiving is commonly supported by these institutions without requiring any subscriptions. For example, Schopfel et al. (2012) state that almost 18 per cent of all documents represents grey literature as per the survey of French repositories. Additionally, in Spanish repositories, 23 per cent of documents were full-text grey literature (Malero et al., 2009). Another factor is the nature of the discipline and whether it uses grey literature or not. For example, journal literature is normally focused by 'Medline' exclusively because health sciences researchers normally cite that journal type of literature. By contrast, the discipline of engineering such as 'Compendex' primarily indexes more than 20,000 series of technical reports and conferences. Scopus and Google Scholar are also used to find grey literature. For example, according to Bonato (2016), both Scopus and Google Scholar can be used for this purpose, while the superior search platform (as per Bonato) happened to be Scopus. Given these facts, multiple sources of grey literature can be used to investigate a research phenomenon. A comprehensive list of grey literature sources can be found in 'The handbook of research synthesis and meta-analysis' in the latest edition of Cooper et al. (2019).

3.4 Data analysis method

In the current research, the researcher subjectively interprets the content of text data through the systematic classification of coding and identifying themes. The findings of this research may also be interpreted differently depending on the researcher.

The researcher takes benefit from thematic analysis by using King's template (King, 2012). Notably, template analysis is a type of thematic analysis that stresses the use of coding in a hierarchical manner but provides a comparatively high degree of structure along with flexibility for adaptation to the requirements of a specific study (Brooks et al., 2015). Developing a coding template is central to this technique, normally based on revising and refining the subsets of data and its application to further data. King's template is dissimilar from other templates because it does not force the coding of data in advance; instead, it allows the researcher to extensively develop themes where (based on the research question) the richest data are retrieved. Additionally, there is no explicit distinction between interpretive and descriptive themes in King's template analysis, nor does the coding structure take a specific position against each of the themes (Brooks et al., 2015). Normally the template analysis revolves around examining interview transcripts, but it can include any type of diary entries or textual content.

According to King (2012), template analysis cannot be taken as a distinct and complete methodology, instead of a strategy that might be used with a broad range of epistemological positions. On one side, template analysis can be used in qualitative works that are of realistic types centred more on the traditional positivist position of mainstream quantitative research investigation. This is where the researcher uses his objectivity along with coding reliability to discover the underlying causes of human action (Kidd, 2008). By contrast, template analysis can also be employed in a 'contextual constructivist' position, in which the researcher is

allowed to assume that against any phenomenon, multiple interpretations can be made, which will depend on the research context and the researcher's position (Madill et al., 2000). Given these facts, it can also be said that coding reliability might not be relevant in template analysis, but rather that the key thing is the reflexivity of the researcher, such as how the researcher attempts to approach the research topic from the richness of the produced description and differing perspectives.

Template analysis can also be employed in the shape of thematic analysis as stipulated by Braun and Clarke (2006). In this case, template analysis is employed in a generic format without strictly embedding it to a specific theoretical or methodological position. This is why King (2012) also calls it a technique instead of a methodology that can be used from diverse philosophical positions.

This research study employs template analysis in the shape of thematic analysis as stipulated by Braun and Clarke (2006). The reason is, rather than focusing on a flexible coding structure, this research study prefers to work on a predefined and predetermined coding structure centred on use of a step-by-step method. Such a method seems to be useful for a novice researcher who wants to prefer a clear distinction regarding the structure of the coding practice. However, here the data has been analysed more extensively to construct themes where the data found is richest in relation to the research question at hand. Notably, in thematic analysis, a theme is precisely defined as a 'recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/or experience which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question' (King et al., 2018, p. 182). It is the theme that stresses the researcher's role to define what might be considered as relevant or irrelevant to the research question.

3.4.1 Thematic analysis

The current study applies thematic analysis as a core method of data analysis to examine documentary reviews to subjectively analyse contents in documents that are related to the research topic. The documentary review is comprised of the grey literature to explore the effects of Covid-19 and Brexit on the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands. Judger (2016) highlights that in qualitative studies where interviews are to be examined by the researcher, thematic analysis is the most widely applied and useful research approach. However, the current study will apply the same thematic analysis after extracting relevant documentary review documents, and not interviews. Notably, the conceptual framework of thematic analysis has been developed and formulated by Braun and Clarke (2006). Based on this method, the researcher holistically examines the retrieved data to identify and mark repeated patterns of themes within the data. This means the researcher will deeply analyse the retrieved data to extract repeated patterns or themes from that data, and then the researcher will critically analyse those themes, and possibly sub-themes under the main themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) have devised the following five steps of thematic analysis:

1. Familiarisation with data

In thematic analysis, the very first step is data familiarisation, in which the researcher tries to become familiar with the (documentary) data. Giving a thorough overview of the complete data is extremely important before the researcher digs more deeply into specific parts of the data. In all types of qualitative analysis, familiarisation with data is the first step: the key goal is to holistically read the overall data to establish a kind of familiarity with it. Vaismoradi et al. (2013) and Byrne (2021) argue that this step involves reading and then again reading the complete dataset. This is essential so that the researcher can identify and mark relevant information that might be associated with the proposed research questions. This stage allows

the researcher to get a profound immersion into the dataset. It is also possible that the data does not need to be transcribed (such as in the case of present study), in which case, the researcher will try to watch and read data to obtain a greater level of contextual understanding (Byrne, 2021).

Notably, familiarisation is the initial phase for the researcher to gather initial ideas necessary for the coding process later on. Reading and re-reading are helpful because it is possible that the researcher might get bored from the initial reading, but gather logical and reasonable points after reading it again. Based on the initial impression of reading, the researcher can note important points that he finds. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that great patience is required in this step because this phase needs considerable time and effort; however, the researcher should not intend to be extra selective about reading and must not completely skip over this stage.

2. Generating initial codes

Generating initial codes is the second most important step of thematic analysis. Important data features are marked with labels that relate to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It can be said that data is assigned with specific codes in this step where the code reflects a small description of the data that makes it unique and interesting among the dataset. Vaismoradi et al. (2013) highlight this step as ‘coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code’ (p. 402). Byrne (2021) argues that the fundamental building blocks of themes are codes. It is important that the researcher pays equal attention to each and every data code within the complete dataset. Codes should be brief but they should have adequate details to make them unique in addition to showing common ground among constituent data items based on the research subject under investigation (Braun and Clarke, 2012; Clarke et al., 2016).

The researcher should code any data item that might be useful in answering the research questions at hand. This is how the researcher will identify many codes and further familiarise himself with the data. This would help the researcher to accept or discard certain codes as well. Notably, it is extremely hard to mark a clearly distinguished line between the first stage (familiarisation with data) and the second stage (generating initial codes). The reason is, most commonly, the researcher also initiates coding in the first stage. Also, coding is not about dividing the data into many sub-branches or categories, but rather, coding reflects an analytical procedure, by which the researcher tries to critically understand both a semantic and conceptual reading of the data.

3. Generating themes

This is the stage in which the researcher has thoroughly identified repeated patterns through the created codes in the data, so he can now mark those repeated patterns as themes. Byrne (2021) highlights that after all relevant data items are coded, the phase of generating themes begins. Previously, the focus of the researcher was interpreting individual data items, but now the focus is changed for interpreting aggregated meaningfulness across the whole dataset. Notably, a coherent and meaningful pattern within the dataset relevant to research questions is called a 'theme'. Vaismoradi et al. (2013) define this step as 'collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme' (p. 402). This means the researcher will sort the documentary data into unique themes. It is probable that the researcher might have marked so many codes during the first two stages; thus, he will again systematically and thoroughly examine all those codes to ensure into which theme they can be categorised. This implies that generating themes will be a kind of iterative process, since the researcher will repeatedly identify, distinguish, recombine and group codes into relevant themes. Collapsing multiple codes and then rearranging them under a single code is common

in this step (Byrne, 2021). It is an active construction of relationships among data so that no specific theme resides within the dataset waiting to be found.

4. Reviewing themes

In this step, the usefulness of the selected themes is ensured by the researcher in the sense that they precisely represent the data. Braun and Clarke (2012; 2020) identify that a recursive process needs to be conducted by the researcher in this step, in which the main themes in relation to the entire dataset and the coded data items are reviewed. In this step, the researcher might conclude that a few themes might not be relevant to the research questions or they might not serve the purpose of meaningful inferences of data (Byrne, 2021). Therefore, the researcher might need to revise or reorganise certain codes that inform specific themes.

It can be said that two levels of review are required by the researcher in this step: first, reviewing the association among codes and data items that inform every theme or sub-theme. This is to ensure coherency among coded items as if they form a logical argument and contribute to the whole data narrative (Byrne, 2021). Second, reviewing the main themes with respect to the dataset helps to ascertain how these themes serve the purpose of providing appropriate data interpretation regarding the research questions.

5. Defining and naming themes

This is the stage in which the researcher has the final list of themes and is ready to present a detailed examination of the thematic framework. Now the researcher needs to ensure that every individual theme and sub-theme is relevant to both research questions and the dataset. According to Byrne (2021), this stage expects that every theme is internally a consistent and coherent account of the data that is separate from the other themes within the data. Vaismoradi et al. (2013) outline this step as an ‘ongoing analysis for refining the specifics of

each theme and the overall story that the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme' (p. 402). Notably, a deep critical analysis is needed in order to define and name themes. This is because the themes should provide a compelling and clear account of the arguments that the researcher is going to place by the respective theme in relation to the topic under investigation. Notably, naming themes is also an extremely important task because they provide the first impression to the reader of what has been captured from the dataset. Byrne (2021) favours that names should be memorable, informative and concise. Names should be descriptors of the themes.

3.5 Constraints

This research planned to collect data via semi-structured interviews. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has hit qualitative research as there is a sudden host of concerns and restrictions that negatively affect data collection methods. Researchers planning to collect data qualitatively have concerns related to the identification of participants, determining how to accurately collect data without a face-to-face meeting, dealing with time constraints as participants cannot be interviewed as a group, and conducting research equitably by ensuring that the participants are kept safe during data collection. Also, participants and researchers are displaced, working virtually, facing total lockdowns or restricted by travel limitations imposed by their respective countries to halt the spread of the virus. Researchers have been forced to look for alternatives to accurately collect data while minimising physical contact with participants as much as possible, usually by employing online methods of contact instead.

The online platform has provided a solution to generate data without physically being onsite, however. For instance, video conferencing or text-based instant messaging such as Telegram and WhatsApp are commonly used in place of face-to-face meetings and interviews. An

online platform can be a helpful way in which to collect data from different geographical areas, including during lockdown circumstances. Online questionnaires can be used to collect quantitative data, although they may be less rich and in-depth than face-to-face interviews. Also, there may be a lack of technology and poor Wi-Fi or Internet connection, which can mean that physical data collection is an unavoidable practice in qualitative research. Thus, due to challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic, in cases where semi-structured interviews cannot be undertaken, other data collection methods such as a literature review might be adopted.

3.6 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are the two most important concepts in the field of research. Mohajan (2017) highlights that validity relates to the representation of truthfulness of findings, whereas reliability refers to the stability of findings. Singh (2014) argues that reliability and validity improve transparency and the researcher's bias is also decreased with the presence of reliability and validity in a research study. In the case of secondary data collection, validity and reliability mean a careful examination of the appraisal of methods that are used for collecting data. This enhances and improves the assessment's accuracy and precise evaluation of a research study. If the researcher does not take validity and reliability into consideration, then the research quality of the research will be reduced. In this context, the researcher can focus on these two constructs to improve the credibility of the research study as a whole.

Scholars define validity as the 'degree to which an instrument measures what it asserts to measure' (Mohajan, 2017, p. 14). It means if an instrument is designed to measure something, then its validity can be observed by assessing the degree to which that instrument measures that 'something'. In other words, the extent to which the results are truthful is called validity. In the case of a quantitative research study that involves mathematical and statistical

measurements, validity can be described as something (a research instrument such as a questionnaire) that correctly and precisely measures the notions under investigation. Validity establishes the accuracy and acceptability of the entire experimental concept, and determines whether the obtained results are valid and can be accepted. By contrast, in the case of qualitative research, validity shows dependability, utility and trustworthiness of the research (Zohrabi, 2013). Validity will show the degree to which the research method's requirements have been followed by the researcher. Validity is important in all types of research studies, be it quantitative or qualitative.

A researcher can face issues in the context of validity. This is because measuring validity is not a simple concept to follow, which means the researcher cannot just determine validity in a simple instance of study. Rather, the researcher might need to analyse the process of data collection and then examine the results over different samples to determine whether his determined validity evidence is acceptable over specified areas (Lakshmi and Mohideen, 2013). Researchers have also lately expanded the notion of validity into four precise types, namely: content validity; construct validity; criterion validity; and consequential validity.

Here, 'content validity' means whether, in a given test, the items accurately represent all possible questions that can be asked in a specific domain that the researcher claims to measure. It is associated with a type of validity in which different behaviours, skills and elements are sufficiently and efficiently measured (Mohajan, 2017). Notably, content validity cannot be measured by some accurate statistical test to determine whether the content viably fits into the research domain because no such statistical test exists. Experts in the field are the professionals who normally judge content validity in a specific field. They can amend any ambiguous or unclearly stated questions by changing the non-functioning and ineffective content. For example, if the research study aims to discover the religious attitudes of people

living in Pakistan, then it is not fair to include most questions containing the capital Islamabad only. Similarly, Thatcher (2010) highlights in the case of quantitative research that the content in arithmetic research will be invalid if the researcher centres his attention on merely one aspect of the arithmetic such as subtraction, instead of covering all functions: addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

‘Construct validity’ means creating theoretical constructs to better comprehend, explain and predict behaviour (Thatcher, 2010). Construct validity is directly associated with a variable’s theoretical relationship to other variables, for example, a score on some scale.

‘Criterion validity’ is used to predict current or future performances by dealing with the relationship between some particular measurable criterion and scale scores. Mohajan (2017) explains criterion validity:

‘It deals with relationship between scale scores, and some specific measurable criterion. It tests how the scale differentiates individuals on a criterion it is expected to predict ... That is, when we are expecting a future performance based on the scores obtained currently by the measure, correlate the scores obtained with the performance ... For example, a hands-on driving test has been shown to be an accurate test of driving skills. The test can be repeated by the written test to compare validity of the test’ (pp. 16–17).

‘Consequential validity’ relates to the concept that not only should the original intention of the test scores’ social consequences and their resulting interpretations be considered, but these social consequences should also be considered based on cultural norms. This type of validity is associated with the negative or positive social consequences of a specific test. This validity was first introduced by Messick (1989), who proposed a unique dimension of validity based on consequential grounds (Iliescu and Greiff, 2021). Messick said that accurate

descriptions should be given to the test score labels so that the stakeholders are guided to have correct interpretations. This means that if a test should measure what it intends to measure, then the researcher should label all the test scores to achieve such measurements. This should not be covered under the coating of professional slang or oversimplification because it can induce misunderstanding in the audiences or stakeholders.

Scholars define reliability as the extent to which sampled results of research remain consistent over time and that when independent measures of the same phenomenon are taken repeatedly, consistency is observed at large (Olabode, 2019). Therefore, it can be said that the level of consistency determines the reliability of the research. It can also be said that reliability is not related to the collection of data itself, but rather to how consistent are the results obtained from that data over time. Scholars such as Tasic et al. (2012) and Flintermann (2014) argue that the extent to which a research process or research instrument consistently provides similar results, given that the conditions are similar and irrespective of how many times the research process has been repeated, is termed 'reliability'. This relates to the extent to which data sources can be taken as reliable, and therefore the data itself. Flintermann (2014) argues that, by increasing the internal consistency repeatedly, the reliability of the research can be improved by the researcher.

Similar to these potential issues in the case of validity, the researcher also faces issues of reliability when conducting a research study. Lakshmi and Mohideen (2013) argue that reliable measurement is always intended by the researcher so that he measures what he intends to measure. However, they face inherent issues of reliability when measuring specific behaviours or events. For example, in some research studies that are associated with investigating phenomena in natural settings, the researcher might have only one device to measure reliability, which is his own observation. This means the researcher might need to

rely on his personal interaction with human subjects or the reaction of human subjects to changing stimuli. Because these matters are not objective, but rather subjective in nature, reliability can be compromised and it is also possible that the researcher makes multiple interpretations. The inherent difficulties associated with reliability are well explained by Lakshmi and Mohideen (2013).

For example, ‘quixotic reliability’ refers to an inherent difficulty in reliability when the researcher uses a single way of observation consistently but erroneously and obtains the same result. When a researcher appears to be progressing well with research, this often becomes an issue. This means the researcher would be seeing stability reliability as being perfectly demonstrated, yet the case could be contradictory. For instance, in an athletics competition, if a measuring device always reads 100 metres against each throw of the discus, then apparently this would be observed as if the instrument is showing consistent results, yet erroneously.

Another reliability issue is referred to as ‘diachronic reliability’, which represents observational stability over time. This reliability can be assumed to be well and good if the researcher is observing phenomena that do not change over time, such as buildings, land and so on. However, while investigating a sociocultural phenomenon, this level of reliability is harder to achieve. For example, if a researcher is following up on the reading comprehension of schoolchildren, it would be harder to achieve diachronic reliability. This is because, if the children are given the test after one year, then it is possible that the researcher might be influenced by many confounding variables, thereby reproducing similar circumstances that were present during the first test a year earlier. Therefore, the final results would not show the extent of stability that researchers normally seek.

Rose and Johnson (2020) argue that by applying a broad number of rigorous and systematised nature of study protocols, reliability can be increased. For possible mistakes, transcripts

and/or recordings can be inspected. In the case of qualitative research projects in which human subjects and multiple researchers are involved, reliability can be increased by effective communication between members of the team (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). A kind of shared analysis can be created by conducting documented regular team meetings to clarify the questions (Saldana, 2021). If the coding and themes are standardised, then reliability will be increased in the sense that another researcher would be able to apply similar themes and codes while conducting a separate research study on the same subject. This is also referred to as ‘intercoder reliability’ in research studies (Rose and Johnson, 2020).

Secondary data collection has its own shortcomings. For example, Olabode (2019) argues that secondary data might be inaccurate or outdated and have validity problems. It is possible that the population under examination might not be suitable or relevant to the identified secondary data. It is also possible that the researcher collects the sort of information which was not produced mainly for the purpose of research and thus might not be available in general research formats or might be hard to analyse effectively to make interpretations. This gives credence to the view that the researcher might make errors, affecting the validity and reliability of the research quality itself. This means that, if the researcher fails to check the reliability of the extracted data, and still uses it to draw interpretations and resulting conclusions, this can lead to inaccurate research findings, analysis and conclusions. The same validity and reliability issue has been highlighted by Olabode (2019).

Priezkalns (2016) presents the opinion of a few researchers that trusted sources of data are only primary sources. However, in the present study, an attempt has been made to ensure validity and reliability by setting objectives that are understandable and clearly defined based on the purpose of the investigation at hand. Furthermore, attempts have been made to mitigate concerns of validity and reliability by applying standard techniques to improve

qualitative rigour, including triangulation (by applying theoretical perspectives and methods within and across documents) to ensure that sufficient engagement with documents was achieved at every stage. Dalglish et al. (2020) state that document analysis can also be combined powerfully with other methods for cross-validating and deepening the value of research by applying concurrent methods. Additionally, the researcher has also sought help from an expert supervisor while extracting and sorting specific documents for analysis.

Document analysis ensures validity and reliability in that it offers diversity in the way in which the topic under investigation is interpreted. This is because it provides the researcher and the reader historical perspective coupled with a discovery of insights and meanings relevant with the research topic (Ulin et al., 2005; Angers and Machtmes, 2005).

The authenticity and applicability of documentary review analysis can also be observed in the sense that it is a supplementary data collection method, such as in policy studies in the healthcare domain. Bowen (2009) also highlights that document analysis provides a credible way to trace change and development in any phenomenon, such as helping researchers in terms of identifying literature gaps and preventing repetition of past mistakes. However, a good documentary review analysis depends on the capability of the researcher and his access to all the documents relevant to the topic under investigation. The researcher should be able to make comparisons in order to interpret findings and accordingly draw valid conclusions. Yin (2009) argues that, when analysing different documents, any small discrepancy can be strong enough to make noticeable differences within a given period in any setting. This means the researcher should be diligent in how he extracts and uses documents to address research questions.

Sessions and Gotthold (1984) point out that quantitative and qualitative approaches should be trustworthy, consistent, applicable and neutral to improve the quality of research findings.

This study aims to promote truth by ensuring the data is rich and reflects information published in the sources. This research strengthens consistency through peer review of the sources and keeping a detailed log of all sources used. The applicability of research findings evaluates external validity (Sessions and Gotthold, 1984). The current research will be deemed as applicable if the researcher views the findings as applicable and meaningful in the Chinese alcohol industry and the UK market. Neutrality implies that the enquiry is free of bias or separated from the researcher's position, conditioning circumstances, perspectives or background (Sessions and Gotthold, 1984). Neutrality is achieved in this study by verifying data with more data sources, checking for alternative explanations and reviewing findings with peers.

Notably, qualitative research can be considered credible and trustworthy if it is shown that the analysis of data has been conducted in a precise, consistent and exhaustive way with adequate details (Nowell et al., 2017). This is to ascertain that the credibility of the whole process can be determined by the reader. This research is ethically viable and credible in the sense that the complete procedure of data analysis (thematic analysis of documentary review) is clearly presented. According to Malterud (2001) and Braun and Clarke (2006), if enough and precise details are not provided regarding the data analysis process, such as what assumptions informed analysis and what steps were taken, then establishing the reliability and validity or trustworthiness of the research become questionable.

3.7 Ethical clearance

An increasing number of studies employ different types of methodologies in research investigations that include but are not limited to qualitative analysis, as well as those that include the use of publicly available documentary reviews (and grey literature) archives (Sixsmith and Murray, 2001). Normally, in those qualitative studies in which the researcher

selects some participants as a sample to conduct qualitative interviews, the researcher needs to follow certain ethical conditions. According to Arifin (2018), such ethical considerations are vital when the researcher conducts human subjects-related in-depth interviews, when trying to infer their experiences, beliefs and perceptions. It can be said that ethical considerations are somewhat different in those types of qualitative interviews because of the complex interpersonal interaction of the researcher with the human subjects. Those ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent of voluntary participation from participants. This means participants should be freely provided with information sheets and consent forms so that they are fully aware of what the researcher is asking of them (Connelly, 2014). The researcher also needs to take the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants into consideration. This means the researcher might need to take care of the ‘right to privacy and confidentiality’ of the respondents if he has an agreement with them that he will keep their identity anonymous (Qu and Dumay, 2011). Qu and Dumay (2011, p. 254) state that ‘identities, locations of individuals and places are concealed in published results, data collected are held in anonymized form, and all data are kept securely and confidentially’. Additional protection in interview-based qualitative research investigations can include data protection, in which the researcher will be ethically obligated to store data in a password-protected encrypted device.

However, the above-mentioned ethical obligations do not apply in the present study because it does not involve human subjects. The present study uses documentary review of relevant grey literature to explore the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit on the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands. The current study follows the desk-based approach (secondary data collection methodology) as the key data collection method based on documentary review and grey literature with no human subjects. This means that ethical obligations will not be based on protecting respondents.

One question that arises is whether it is ethically appropriate to use documents without the consent of their authors or whether, before using those documents, the researcher should always seek consent. This issue is somewhat contentious. This is because some researchers say that researchers are ‘only participating in the electronic equivalent of hanging-out on street corners ... where they would never think of wearing large signs identifying themselves as “Researcher”’ (Theodosiou and Green, 2003, p. 392). However, it is an open secret that the information that is readily accessible online can be used without consent as a common practice. While investigating documentary review and grey literature research, Starovoitov et al. (2007) argue that it is impractical to attempt to get permission or engage in an agreement with every author of every published document. However, ethical obligations might be considered in the sense that the researcher does not copy them for commercial purposes or for gaining profits. The researcher is also obligated to use them in quotations and acknowledge them if he needs to provide direct citations from the original source.

Section 4: Results and Discussion

This study has selected documentary review data collection methodology including a review of grey literature to analyse the topic under investigation (Ahmed, 2010; Brewis et al., 2017; Tight, 2019). In this regard, this results and discussion chapter lists the final 23 documentary resources identified by the researcher. It is noteworthy that these documentary resources were not chosen randomly, but rather by carefully deliberating over relevant factors (by applying King's template, a keywords research process and applying thematic analysis) concerning new international changes during the Covid-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom (Braun and Clarke, 2006; King, 2012) that should be taken into consideration when analysing the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands in the UK market.

This results and discussion chapter has used King's template and filtered out the final 23 documentary review sources to be deeply analysed to answer the research topic at hand (King, 2012; King and Brooks, 2016). Around 80 sources during the pandemic year (specifically from February 2020 to January 2021) were filtered out to deeply study in view of the current topic. Based on King's template, thematic analysis has been applied that involves a hierarchical way of coding along with the flexibility to change that coding during the analysis procedure. This coding technique is principally based on a structured mechanism of revision and refinements of data subsets so that it can be applied to the data as a whole in the shape of different themes. This process of data analysis is normally conducted by deeply reviewing the extracted data and the information contained within that data, and that is how the researcher takes a particular position with respect to the identified themes contained within the data. This template is best suited in the current study because it can be suitably applied to an extensive contextual data. By using this template, a few key themes have been explicitly identified due to their strong relevance to the topic under investigation. These themes were

identified by repeatedly reading the documentary sources and marking the repeated patterns of text within them. These repeated patterns of texts are marked as themes and sub-themes and these themes are also flexible because they can be modified during the process of repeatedly and thoroughly examining documentary data.

All the themes and sub-themes were included based on some inclusion and exclusion criteria. For example, as an inclusion criterion, a check was made to see whether these repeated patterns of texts were found to be related to the core topic of the study or the proposed research questions. Additionally, the researcher based English language documentary analysis to be included in the list given that the English language remains one of the most important worldwide languages for academics. All the documentary data included falls within the chosen time period, i.e. from February 2020 to January 2021. As an exclusion criterion, the researcher checked whether the identified themes can be associated with the current topic under investigation, and if not, they were excluded. Similarly, all documentary data that fell outside the selected timeline (from February 2020 to January 2021) were excluded.

This study aims to investigate the key factors that play an important role in the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands. The study recognises that the internationalisation trend is rising day by day due to broad-based advancement in Internet technology. This is the reason that in various online resources, a great deal of published data is easily accessible. Furthermore, when the research was first considered, there were no signs of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, as the pandemic emerged, the world realised the issue of overreliance on globalisation-based supply chains and internationally connected systems of e-commerce. It is not the case that globalisation is going to end after the pandemic; however, businesses have had to become aware that they will need to operate their internationalisation strategies by aligning themselves with the changed circumstances that have arisen from the

Covid-19 pandemic. Aiyar (2012) and Doidge et al. (2020) also indicate that globalisation has faced many challenges in the past twenty years, therefore, unpredictability of global finance is an open secret these days. Furthermore, global supply chains, economies and societies have been badly disrupted due to the pandemic. This is the reason that the present study purposefully considers the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic while observing the internationalisation of Chinese brands. A host of factors that influence internationalisation have been changed or disrupted since the pandemic, significantly influencing former international trends.

The Covid-19 pandemic remains an important factor in the decision made during this study to undertake secondary data analysis through documentary review and grey literature methodology. Otherwise, primary data collection methodology would be likely to consume much time and energy, and still primary data methodology is not trustable in the present times when meeting with participants (human subjects) is problematic due to social distancing measures and lockdowns all across the globe.

This study considers that the UK retail market faced an unprecedented crisis due to the pandemic because it has significantly influenced households, companies and financial markets in numerous ways. Additionally, the UK government has taken several measures to control the spread of pandemic and consumer spending has also been changed significantly. Therefore, it becomes extremely important for Chinese alcohol brands to deeply study and analyse the outlook for the UK retail and consumer market during the first year of the pandemic in order to successfully promote and sell their alcohol products. Given these facts, the following chronological map contains data of the four main themes, as well as seven sub-themes relevant to the topic under investigation. These themes were conceived by repeatedly reading the documentary review literature and by applying the thematic analysis steps

stipulated by Braun and Clarke (2006). The thematic analysis steps have been discussed in the methodology chapter in detail and include familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, generating themes, reviewing themes and defining and naming themes steps. For example, by reading the chosen documentary review papers, a theme of ‘changes in the international business environment’ was noted to be present in numerous papers. Therefore, a rough code against those articles was conceived as ‘business environment changes’. Then by repeatedly reviewing the written codes, a main theme was denoted as ‘changes in the international business environment’. Because thematic analysis is a reiterative process, therefore, by repeatedly reading the documentary review, some other important sub-themes were discovered (seven sub-themes to be precise) which were related to either one or more main themes. The key discussion in this study revolves around these seven sub-themes.

4.1 Main themes

- 1) Changes in the international business environment
- 2) Countrywide cultural changes
- 3) Governmental attitudes
- 4) Historical issues

4.2 Sub-themes

1. UK international retailing studies
2. The study of the UK wine market
3. UK consumer spending changes during the Covid-19 pandemic
4. Differences between Chinese and UK drinking culture
5. Governmental attitudes towards Chinese trade and food products
6. Movement of international trade and goods after the Brexit deal
7. Developing means of better communication and transport

It should not be assumed that the researcher has made pre-set assumptions of how to tell the story or how to answer the research question. In fact, it is important for a researcher's to be reflexive during the research process, enabling themes to be modified, changed or even erased based on the extracted data (Schon, 1989; Kinsella, 2007). However, any personal viewpoint, reflexivity and position would be shown throughout the coding process and subsequent analysis. One should not take this approach as the researcher's bias or a less valid approach merely because the researcher would be discussing and analysing facts from his own perspective. By contrast, this study claims this as a valid method, in which case, the technique is not faultless, however, it offers the representation of data through constant analysis, reflexivity and self-scrutiny.

One of the most common ways of applying King's template is using a generic form of thematic analysis. King (2012) also emphasises that template analysis is a technique but not a methodology; therefore, template analysis can be applied by using various philosophical positions and methodologies. Given these facts, this study has principally applied the methodology of thematic analysis stipulated by Bruan and Clarke (2006).

A chronological map is the visual representation or arrangement of events in the shape of a timeline. It is generally used to show historical events and arrange the timeline in order of the occurrence of those events. For example, the chronological map used in the current study uses a monthly timeline to display the occurrence of events. The table below shows a chronological map of the chosen documentary review dataset arranged by month of publication. The filtered dataset starts from February 2020 to January 2021, this period of time being the prime months of the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. Given this fact, the documentary review dataset is highly likely to reveal the building of knowledge on the chosen topic during the Covid-19 pandemic.

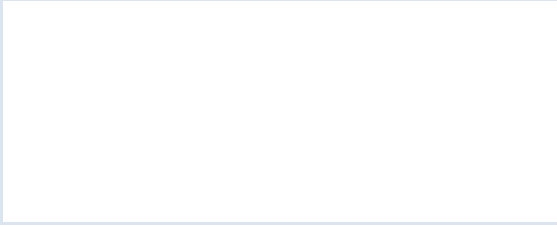
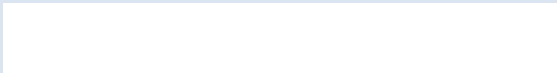
The table below illustrates a chronological map of the documentary review sources used in this study. King's template was applied by using a 'contextual constructivist' position as explained by Madill et al. (2000). Based on this methodology, the researcher can devise that to any phenomenon, there can be multiple interpretations to be made, in which the context of the research and the position of the researcher play important roles (Symon and Cassell, 2012, p. 427). This means that the reflexivity of the researcher will also play an important role in terms of examining the data from different perspectives, the richness of the produced description and the overall themes development in the template analysis (Symon and Cassell, 2012, p. 427). Therefore, it is to be noted that what sets template analysis apart from other analysis techniques are: a) the researcher has defined the codes that involve his reading from theory, text or research; and b) the philosophical perspective of King's template analysis differs in the sense that the coding recognises the interpretive nature of the researcher that is different from the perspective of open coding, recommending that the coding involved in the template analysis is more conducive to the position of the researcher. It can be said that the King's template analysis in this study offers an analytical insight, in which relevant data does not speak at the researcher, but rather through the researcher. It was ensured that the relevant data was appropriate to emphasise and answer the topic at hand; however, interpretation of the data through coding themes is intended to give it a clear voice along with a structured shape.

	Month In the year 2020	Brief description	Source
	February	This source highlights that Brexit will influence the global alcohol market as it	org/article/beverage-market-disruptions-and-their-

	will reduce the world trade in wine.	<u>trade-consequences</u>
March	- This source finds that demand and supply of world economies took a hard blow. In China, manufacturing activities sank to the lowest level ever and the economy as a whole shrunk by an alarming degree. Other rich countries including the US were trying to calm the financial markets. Although health remained the primary concern, economic concerns were also rising. - The latest trends in young people are no or low-alcohol substitutes. - This source explains that Britain's NHS was well-equipped to deal with the Covid-19 crisis but it was a historical crisis.	https://www.economist.com/briefing/2020/03/05/what-the-world-has-learned-about-facing-covid-19 https://www.theguardian.com/food/2020/mar/11/young-drinkers-thirst-for-no--and-low-alcohol-beer-sets-new-trend https://www.economist.com/britain/2012/03/31/on-the-floor

April	- This source explains that alcohol sales rose despite retail sales being at a record low. - This source shows that UK alcohol sales were rising during the Covid-19 pandemic. People were also stockpiling alcohol. It also highlights the UK government policies on alcohol	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/apr/24/uk-lockdown-sends-retail-sales-to-record-low-but-alcohol-sales-rise https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/coronavirus-alcohol-drinking-pubs-off-license-smoking-lockdown-a9478461.html

	consumption.	
May	This source highlights that the Covid-19 pandemic has hurt the drinking business due to social distancing and economic hardship. The reason is that this business was over-reliant on bars, nightclubs and duty-free shops. Secondly, this article highlights that drinking habits of young people changed as they were more inclined to smoke cannabis and imbibe. It can be said that the Covid-19 pandemic might have led to an increased consumption of cannabis rather than alcohol.	https://www.economist.com/business/2020/05/23/farewell-for-now-to-a-golden-age-of-drinking
June	- This resource sheds light on the drinking culture of people in the UK, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. - This resource highlights the culture of British drinkers, especially binge drinking	https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/news/early-a-third-of-uk-public-drinking-more-alcohol-than-usual-during-the-pandemic https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jun/02/half-of-

	resulting in poor health outcomes in the UK.  This source explains that post-Brexit full control on UK imports will include full customs checks and tariffs on tobacco and alcohol. 	<u>british-drinkers-starting-earlier-in-the-day-during-covid-19-crisis</u> <u>https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/jun/12/brexit-full-border-controls-on-goods-entering-uk-will-not-apply-until-july-2021</u>
July	Consumer spending responses to the Covid-19 pandemic: An assessment of Great Britain: it highlights the unprecedented negative impact on the current and future prospects of households, businesses and the macro-economy in Britain.	<u>https://cepr.org/content/covid-economics-vetted-and-real-time-papers-0</u>
August		
September	This source describes the increase in digitisation, i.e. adoption of online services all over Britain.	<u>https://www.economist.com/international/2020/09/01/covid-19-is-spurring-the-digitisation-of-government</u>

	This source shows the timeline of key events during the UK lockdowns from March to September 2020.	https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-uk-timeline-lockdown-boris-johnson-pubs-test-and-trace-vaccine-b547630.html?r=44915
October	- This source explains that digitisation has shifted people towards banking and making payments online, thereby reshaping finance. £261 million more has been spent on alcohol by UK shoppers as the government's 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme came to an end and a 10pm curfew on pubs and bars started. - UK drinking habits changed in October 2020, with a sharp increase of 30% on low	https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2020/10/08/how-the-digital-surge-will-reshape-finance https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/13/uk-shoppers-alcohol-covid-pub-curfew-supermarkets https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/31/low-and-no-alcohol-sales-soar-30-in-lockdown-as-uk-drinking-habits-change

	and no-alcohol sales.	
November	This source shows that Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic have influenced UK retailers to make more products locally. This points to the concept of reshoring, which is the opposite of globalisation-based offshoring.	https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2020/11/16/covid-19-forced-businesses-to-experiment
December	- This source shows that British people consumed more alcohol and unhealthy snacks during Covid-19 lockdowns compared to other EU member states. - This source explains that UK pubs experienced £50 million losses, with sales down by 90%. - This source explains that alcohol sales in the UK fell despite its increased usage in homes thanks to the prolonged closure of pubs and bars. The increment in online orders failed to offset the closure impact	https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/dec/01/britons-were-the-lockdown-bingers-of-europe-finds-study https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/dec/14/uk-pubs-covid-december-sales https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/dec/19/uk-alcohol-sales-fall-despite-rise-in-home-drinking

	of pubs and bars. - Unlimited alcohol allowances are now ending, so UK shoppers will face Brexit duties on online and holiday purchases. - The post-Brexit scenario is not going to lead to a shock rise in the retail market because new import taxes on everyday goods have been avoided. However, it is still to be seen how post-Brexit will affect retail, including alcohol.	https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/dec/28/brexit-customs-duties-to-apply-to-eu-goods-worth-more-than-390 https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/dec/31/sector-by-sector-are-british-firms-ready-for-post-brexit-trade
Jan 2022	During 2020, closure of almost 6,000 licensed premises is observed in more than 100,000 venues having a license to serve alcohol.	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jan/22/britain-lost-almost-6000-licensed-premises-in-2020-pubs-covid

4.3 Defining the initial codes

Codes have been defined by way of a label attached to sections of texts so as to relate it to an issue or theme within the data that has been identified as vital to analysis (King, 2012). One of the key features of template analysis is the hierarchical organisation of codes, in which a

cluster of similar codes can be classified into fewer overarching general codes. It is vital to note that the initial stage of template development is not a separate stage from its actual use in text analysis. This is because the coding is itself revised in view of ongoing content analysis. When the researcher started to define initial codes after reading some informative data, it was necessary to create at least a few initial codes in order to start the process for ongoing analysis. It was also noted that it was not necessary to make an extensive template showing too many predefined codes. This is because it might confuse the overall analysis, in that the researcher might be overly advocating his own point of view without considering the richness of data that conflicts with his assumptions. On the other hand, if very few codes were used, then it might result in an unclear direction given the complexity of the subject and the range of factors that influence it.

While defining the initial codes, the researcher took help from the topic and research question itself (King, 2012). This helped with identification of a set of question areas, prompts and probes encircling the topic. In this way, it was possible to define a short list of highest order codes as follows:

- 1) Changes in the international business environment
- 2) Countrywide cultural changes
- 3) Governmental attitudes
- 4) Historical issues

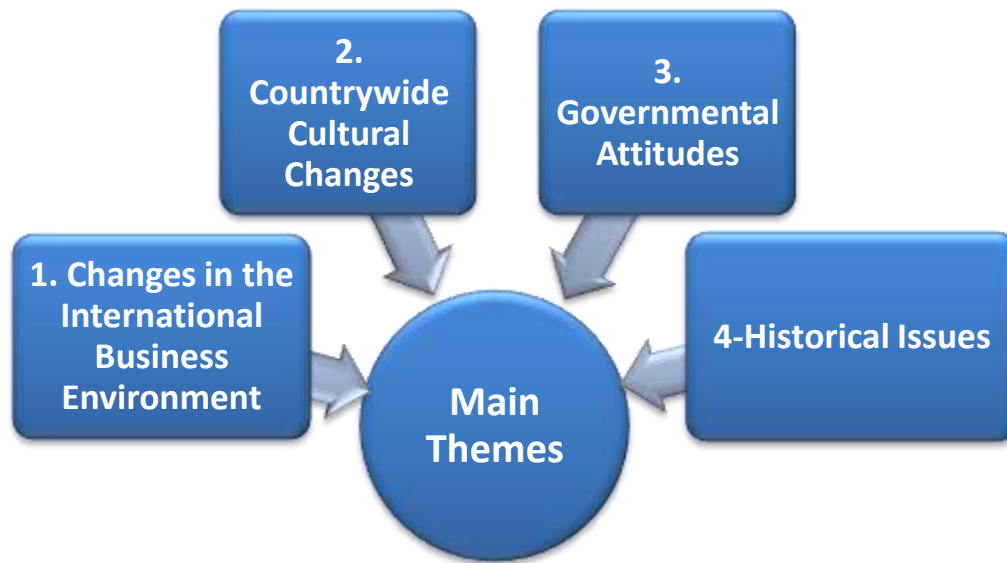


Figure 3 Main themes

These four codes were based on the researcher's interpretations and his reflexivity based on the chosen topic of alcohol internationalisation in the UK market. These four initial codes illustrate the parent or key themes identified in relation to the topic under investigation. Notably, all the other listed sub-themes fall under one of these main themes. The researcher had these points already in his mind before undertaking template analysis procedural steps. At the same time, he knew that template analysis would provide an opportunity to rethink and re-adjust interpretations during the execution of procedural steps. This is because template analysis is a systematic approach, while also being a flexible technique that allows a researcher to re-adjust the themes if differing facts come to light during analysis of the data (King and Brooks, 2016). This is how the template analysis procedure can justify the choices the researcher made or the choices that he altered later. Kings and Brooks (2016) highlight that central to the technique of template analysis is developing a coding template by using hierarchical coding, in which generally the subset of data is used. This is then made applicable to more data before data revision, refinement and reapplication takes place (p. 25).

4.3 Template analysis steps:

It has been explained that the principal method followed by the researcher in this process revolves around using thematic analysis based on King's template. This is going to provide the coding use in a hierarchical way but with a relatively high extent of understandable structure, as well as the flexibility to adapt to the requirements of this study. Here, thematic analysis is selected as the main method of data analysis so that the data extracted from the documentary review can be related to the research topic and the proposed research question.

1. Data familiarisation

After defining high order codes, data familiarisation is the first step, in which the researcher repeatedly reads the relevant documentary review data in detail in order to become familiar with the contained information. The researcher digs deep into relevant documentary literature including grey literature in an attempt to go through the overall data holistically and establish a sort of familiarity with it. So, for the purposes of this study, I read the grey literature again and again in order to become familiar with the complete dataset (Vaismoradi et al., 2013; Byrne, 2021). This is how it was possible to carefully note and mark information relevant to the research topic and how it relates to the proposed research questions. A contextual level of understanding was achieved by deeply immersing in the dataset.

After getting familiar with the data, pitchy labels were added to the dataset, especially to the contextual information that seemed relevant to the enquiry. Specific codes were assigned to different pieces of data, thereby highlighting data with a small description and making it an interesting and unique point within the dataset. Below are the key pitchy coding labels that helped with the definition of the different themes.

1. UK international retailing studies (Changes in international business environment main theme)
2. The study of the UK wine market
3. UK consumer spending changes during the Covid-19 pandemic (relevant to first two themes)
4. Differences between Chinese and UK drinking cultures (Countrywide cultural changes main theme)
5. Governmental attitudes towards Chinese trade and food products (Governmental attitudes main theme)
6. Movement of international trade and goods after the Brexit deal (Changes in the international business environment main theme)
7. Developing means of better communication and transport (Relevant to main themes 1 and 3)

2. Generating themes

These themes were explicitly named after a thorough check to see if they showed repeated patterns of explicit information within the documentary dataset. In fact, these repeated patterns of information have been marked as themes. Thus the generation of themes began by giving a code to all relevant data items (Vaismoradi et al., 2013; Byrne, 2021). It can be said that, while defining the initial four highest order codes, the focus was to code general data items based on an understanding of the topic and research questions. However, now the focus was purely based on interpreting individual data items; where meaningful repeated patterns were found, they were given a code and marked with a theme. This is how the researcher reviewed and sorted the documentary data into unique themes. Notably, these themes are not static; they are flexible and can be changed during the process of thoroughly and repeatedly

examining documentary data to ensure how each theme fits into a particular category. Generating themes involves active construction of associations among data so that no specific theme is missed from the documentary data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; King, 2012).

As different sub-themes were found during analysis of documentary review data, each sub-theme was grouped into the parent themes (initial high order codes). This was to determine which of the sub-themes belonged to main themes previously marked, while also determining whether the early defined main themes happened to be relevant to the themes generated by documentary review analysis.

3. Interpretation of themes: What were the ‘themes’?

As previously explained, themes essentially represent repeated patterns of data, whereby the researcher marks these patterns for identification, calling them themes (King, 2012). The stage of ‘generating themes’ starts by coding, numbering or marking these themes. These themes represent a meaningful, coherent pattern within the dataset that can be associated with the topic under investigation and the research questions. It is noteworthy that themes are constantly reviewed by the researcher to ensure their relevance and usefulness, and it is possible that the existing themes and sub-themes can be modified and new themes created if the need arises.

Identification of themes for this study was not a random process. The key stimulus behind identifying themes within the documentary review was to repeatedly read the data to identify a common pattern of meanings, ideas and topics that come up regularly in the text. The researcher knows that thematic analysis contains the flexibility of applying either deductive or inductive methodologies (Alhojailan, 2012). Here, a deductive approach involves approaching the data with some preconceived themes. The inductive approach means that

themes are not assumed in advance, but rather that examining the data would render the themes.

The researcher did not have any preconceived ideas to determine those repeated patterns of data that would determine the themes (Braun and Clarke, 2012). This means the researcher has not adopted a deductive approach to examine data by using preconceived themes based on some existing knowledge or theory. By contrast, the researcher applied the inductive approach, in which the data itself determined what the themes would be. The main stimulus behind using the inductive approach was to neutrally check what lies in the data. This helps avoid bias and preconceived thoughts and allows a neutral examination of the data. Moreover, preconceived ideas or assumptions could not be applied in this study due to the changed circumstances of internationalisation during the Covid-19 pandemic. Rather it was necessary to check new data relevant with internationalisation, especially during the pandemic years.

Regarding the reflexivity of the researcher, a latent approach was preferred, in which people's stated opinions in the article (semantic approach) is not preferred (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This is because in a semantic approach, identification of themes only involves surface meanings of the data, which restricts the researcher's reflexivity. The researcher does not think beyond the explicit views provided in the data. By contrast, a latent approach involves identifying and examining the underlying conceptualisations, ideologies, assumptions and ideas (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) indicate that if one considers the data as a three-dimensional droplet of jelly, then the surface of the jelly will be investigated by using a semantic approach, whereas the actual formation of the jelly, how it formed in a specific shape and its different features will be explored by using a latent approach.

Below are the names of themes along with brief explanations of each theme to illustrate their numbers, why these themes were chosen and what is their relevance with the topic under

investigation. First, the names of the themes along with their sources are provided in the table below:

Names of themes	Source month	Source links
1.UK international retailing studies	April 2020	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/apr/24/uk-lockdown-sends-retail-sales-to-record-low-but-alcohol-sales-rise It explains that alcohol sales rose despite retail sales being at a record low.
	November 2020	https://www.economist.com/the-world-ahead/2020/11/16/covid-19-forced-businesses-to-experiment It indicates that Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic may influence UK retailers to make products locally. This points to the concept of reshoring, which is the opposite of

		globalisation-based offshoring.
2. The study of the UK wine market	February 2020	https://voxeu.org/article/beverage-market-disruptions-and-their-trade-consequences This source highlights that Brexit will influence the global alcohol market as it will reduce the world trade in wine.
3. UK consumer spending changes during the Covid-19 pandemic	July 2020	https://cepr.org/content/covid-economics-vetted-and-real-time-papers-0 Consumer spending responses to the Covid-19 pandemic: An assessment of Great Britain. It highlights the unprecedented negative impact on the current and future prospects of households, businesses and the macro-economy in Britain.
4. Differences between Chinese and UK drinking	June 2020	https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/nearly-a-third-of-uk-public-drinking-more-alcohol-than-usual-during-the-pandemic

cultures		This resource sheds light on the drinking culture of people in the UK, especially during the pandemic. https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jun/02/half-of-british-drinkers-starting-earlier-in-the-day-during-covid-19-crisis This resource highlights the culture of British drinkers, especially binge drinking resulting in poor health outcomes in the UK.
5. Governmental attitudes towards Chinese trade and food products	April 2020	https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/coronavirus-alcohol-drinking-pubs-off-license-smoking-lockdown-a9478461.html It shows that the UK alcohol sales rose during the Covid-19 pandemic. People were also stockpiling alcohol. It also highlights the UK government policies on alcohol consumption.

	September 2020	https://www.economist.com/international/2020/09/01/covid-19-is-spurring-the-digitisation-of-government It describes the increase in digitisation, i.e., adoption of online services all over Britain.
	October 2020	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/13/uk-shoppers-alcohol-covid-pub-curfew-supermarkets £261 million more has been spent on alcohol by UK shoppers as the government's 'Eat Out to Help Out scheme came to an end and a 10pm curfew on pubs and bars started.
6. Movement of international trade and goods after the Brexit deal	February 2020	https://voxeu.org/article/beverage-market-disruptions-and-their-trade-consequences This source indicates that Brexit will have an impact on the global alcohol market as it will reduce the world trade in

		wine.
7. Developing means of better communication and transport.	March 2020	https://www.economist.com/briefing/2020/03/05/what-the-world-has-learned-about-facing-covid-19 This source indicates that demand and supply of world economies was strongly hit. In China, manufacturing activities sank to the lowest level ever and the economy as a whole shrunk by an alarming degree. Other rich countries including the US were trying to calm the financial markets. Even though health remained the primary concern, economic concerns were also rising.

Theme 1: UK international retailing studies

‘UK international retailing studies’ is a relevant theme for this study because it strongly influences the internationalisation process of Chinese alcohol during the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK market. This is because changes in the process of internationalisation can be understood by studying retailing processes within the UK. For example, retailing studies would clarify whether the sale of alcohol during the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK fell apart, remained normal or increased (Inman, 2020). Study of retail records will offer insights into how these records can be interpreted in order to formulate assumptions of the Chinese alcohol internationalisation process in the UK. The ‘UK International retailing studies’ theme will

shed light on the positive or negative effects on alcohol from an economic point of view (The Economist, 2020). This theme can also help Chinese alcohol producers to know the after-effects of Brexit in the UK retail market due to internal and external barriers at both the entry and growth levels. This theme can also be beneficial in terms of investigating SME retailers and international retailers. It can also point towards retailers' reactions and adaptations to digital infrastructure, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Theme 2: The study of the UK wine market

The theme 'The study of the UK wine market' is relevant to the topic under investigation because wine is an integral part of the cultural and social norms in both the UK and China. This indicates that the Chinese alcohol companies trying to tap into the UK wine market can take help by studying the social and cultural differences between China and the UK. This theme is also relevant because, statistically speaking, it can offer valuable insights into alcohol consumption trends in the United Kingdom, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit (Anderson, 2020). If the wine market became uncertain, then it would point towards the adverse effects of the pandemic. By contrast, if the wine market showed a high rising trend, then it might show the positive effect of wine consumption in the UK market. Both these trends are highly likely to help Chinese internationalisation brands that want to tap into the UK market. Additionally, the internationalisation process of Chinese alcohol brands can also be studied from the perspectives of UK wine culture based on ethnic differences. This can offer important insights into the target audience for the Chinese alcohol brand and the potential for the Chinese brand against each audience.

Theme 3: UK consumer spending changes during the Covid-19 pandemic

The theme 'UK consumer spending changes during the Covid-19 pandemic' can be associated with the topic because the future prospects of macro-economy, businesses and

households are directly affected by changes in consumer spending behaviour during the pandemic. For example, it can offer insights into how consumer spending trends changed, whether consumers showed panic buying, steady buying or low buying behaviour and what were the effects of age, gender and income level on these trends. This theme is relevant to the research questions in that it can reveal valuable statistics of consumer spending behaviours during the pandemic, based on which the Chinese companies can direct their marketing strategies and internationalisation tactics to enter into the UK market. Additionally, this kind of data can be used by Chinese alcohol companies to gain insights into what kind of alcohol products have the most value in the UK economic marketplace. They can also use this data to find those consumer needs that are still unmet. They can determine which alcohol products are the most sellable among the many in the UK market.

Theme 4: Differences between Chinese and UK drinking cultures

The theme ‘Differences between Chinese and UK drinking cultures’ is relevant to the topic because culture is one of the most important attributes that can positively as well as negatively affect the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands (KCL, 2020). This theme is important to deeply understand how UK drinking culture can be exploited to yield profitable selling in the UK market. This theme can offer valuable insights into whether an increased or decreased consumption of alcohol was observed during the Covid-19 pandemic, and how far culture contributed to that trend. Notably, Chinese companies might need to match their drinking culture with that of the UK drinking culture in an attempt to determine how much and to what extent it should match with the UK culture to succeed in the UK market. Notably, this theme can be correlated with the health of UK citizens because a greater consumption of alcohol can lead to bad health scenarios. Additionally, Chinese companies can also study the UK drinking culture in order to invoke cultural elements in their branding and marketing strategies to successfully tap into the UK alcohol market.

Theme 5: Governmental attitudes towards Chinese trade and food products

The theme ‘Governmental attitudes towards Chinese trade and food products’ is relevant to the research topic because the attitudes of the UK government can significantly influence the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands. This theme offers insights into the increased digitization of the UK government, as well as government’s schemes to ease out the impact of Covid (The Economist, 2020c; The Guardian, 2020). This theme signifies that trade between the two countries has already been conducted on a large scale. However, it can be important to note how much the UK government is willing to encourage Chinese alcohol products to be promoted within their territory. If governmental policies are encouraging and the resultant trade policies are not strict for Chinese products, Chinese companies can benefit from it. By contrast, if the UK governmental attitude is discouraging and restricts Chinese companies, then the new companies should find the places within the policies from where they can maximise the promotion of their alcohol products. Given these facts, Chinese wine suppliers can use governmental attitudes as a benchmark to further explore opportunities to tap into the new UK market.

Theme 6: Movement of international trade and goods after the Brexit deal

The theme ‘Movement of international trade and goods after the Brexit deal’ is relevant to the research topic because the UK withdrew from the European Union (EU), which is highly likely to influence its relationship with international countries and especially EU member states (Gibbins, 2020). Internationally speaking, the Brexit deal can highly influence the UK’s international relations with other countries including China. The Brexit deal is likely to influence the country’s trade with other nations due to regulatory and productivity issues on the economy, trade-related changes and the impact of foreign direct investment (FDI). These new relationships are strong enough to negatively affect Chinese economic circumstances.

Because there have been continuous debates on the topics such as ‘soft Brexit’ and ‘hard Brexit’, a range of uncertainties and possibilities can occur regarding Chinese international trade and goods with the UK, including the alcohol trade (Anderson, 2020). Notably, these economic effects can be both positive and negative; therefore, this theme becomes vitally important in order to study and understand the movement of international trade and goods after the Brexit deal. For example, Chinese alcohol companies can suffer trade impacts due to an increase in tariff barriers. The reason is, if alcohol products are given an increased tariff, then the unit price of that alcohol product will increase in return. This increase in price affects not only the pricing mechanism, but also the impact on consumers’ purchasing behaviour for these products.

Theme 7: Better means of developing communication and transport

The theme ‘Better means of developing communication and transport’ is relevant to the topic because the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly altered former ways of communication and transport. This source indicates that demand and supply of world economies was strongly hit (The Economist, 2020b). Therefore, an internationalisation company might need to develop new and resilient ways of both communication and transport given the current circumstances. Another reason is that the pandemic has disrupted global supply chains of food and beverages. As a result of lockdowns and social distancing measures, communicating to the consumer and transporting the right product have turned into a debatable issue. Therefore, this theme is likely to explore and present new ways of resilient communications and transport needed in the present times. Better communication and transport can be developed by using appropriate technologies. What type of technologies can be exploited by Chinese alcohol companies and how they can develop better and resilient means of communication and transport need a detailed explanation. The reason is, in order to sell an alcohol product to the potential customer, a Chinese company must communicate its products to the target consumer (which

is harder during the pandemic). Secondly, the company must support this communication with a better transportation system which can react to any untoward or uncertain situation.

4.4 Discussion of themes from sources

It was planned to take documentary data from many sources in the first stage. A range of recognised and legitimate documentary review sources were selected, such as *The Economist*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, KCL and CEPR. These sources were selected because they are globally recognised sources and have a large fan-base across the world. Moreover, they not only provide people with opinions, but also present research-based evidence. This is to ensure the reader receives the latest reliable pieces of information. Each source was queried by using 'keywords research' so that only Covid-19 data relevant to Chinese alcohol brands' internationalisation in the UK market for the year 2020 and 2021 was obtained. This is the point where a collection of around 100 articles was retrieved which were relevant to Covid-19 and Chinese alcohol brands' internationalisation in the UK market. The researcher filtered 2020 documentary data because 2020 happened to be the year when the pandemic started. Therefore, how internationalisation companies reacted to the changing circumstances and how internationalisation was affected can be reliably examined by analysing the documentary review data of 2020.

The researcher read their headlines and opening pages to ensure they were relevant to the topic under investigation. A few inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to make this possible. Establishing these criteria in research studies is extremely important to design high-quality research protocols (Patino and Ferreira, 2018). In the first stage, around 100 relevant articles were found. Then the researcher started reading their abstracts to get an overview of every article. For example, as an inclusion criterion, only those articles that were published in the English language were included. As an exclusion criterion, articles that were not relevant

to alcohol brands' internationalisation were filtered out. The core idea behind applying these inclusion and exclusion criteria was to produce the most relevant list of articles which could be thoroughly examined as documentary review data.

The stage of theme identification comes after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, in which a total of 23 articles were selected for review. The researcher read each article repeatedly, not only to get an overview of the article, but also to make a note of repeated patterns of data which were discussed in the chosen articles. These repeated patterns of data in the articles are called themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The researcher read these articles many times because themes identification is an iterative process, in which the researcher needs to make a note of every detail, including the hidden meanings in articles, to identify themes. This process ensured that no key idea was missed.

The key factors that play an important role in the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands in the UK market are numerous. For example, economic disruption due to the Covid-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom has had deep impacts (Puri et al., 2020). This economic disruption has not only changed the earning potential of consumers but it has also altered their consumption patterns. Some people appear to have been consuming more alcohol than before, in which case, they might be looking for cheaper products. At the same time, some alcohol consumers would still like to pay more for good-quality alcohol. Additionally, this consumption of alcohol would be changed with variables such as age, occupation, gender, and so on. This means that the economic disruption triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have had deep potential impact on luxury alcohol products in the UK market. The next most important factor to consider is the differences between the UK and China drinking cultures because alcohol drinking is strongly associated with the drinking culture. Understanding the drinking culture is important because it can have negative effects on

internationalisation but companies can also exploit underlying opportunities if they study the drinking culture. The attitude of the UK government regarding the promotion and branding of Chinese alcohol products is noteworthy because governments ought to have authority to influence foreign brands in the marketplace. Positive governmental attitude will favour certain brands or vice versa. Also, the impact of Brexit in the UK market regarding its trade associations with the EU member states and the rest of the world can influence the internationalisation of alcohol brands (Anderson and Wittwer, 2017). This is because the Brexit deal is likely to significantly influence the movement of international trade and goods. Brexit is very important in the context of UK because, after withdrawal from the European Union, the UK's international relations and trade agreements with other countries will change. This will also affect the UK's relationship with China and its products. Therefore, this change is highly likely to affect Chinese alcohol brands that Chinese international companies plan to sell within the UK market. Lastly, historical issues regarding the changing nature of the UK drinking market are also important (Hawkins and McCambridge, 2020; Anderson and Pinilla, 2021). This is because understanding historical issues and privileges between the two countries is vital to predict issues that might be faced by Chinese alcohol brands. Similarly, a historical perspective can also offer valuable insights into how past opportunities and challenges have been exploited by foreign companies within the UK (Berridge, 2005; Nicholls, 2015; Hawkins and McCambridge, 2018).

By carefully analysing the grey literature through the lens of King's template, many noticeable insights have been obtained in this study. The study acknowledges that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused major economic and social disruptions in the United Kingdom, including its direct and indirect impacts on the alcohol industry. This shows that the Covid-19 pandemic remains one of the significant factors that principally play a key role in the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands. Although a great deal of data is available in

the published literature on this topic, there has been a noticeable gap in terms of analysing this phenomenon through the lens of documentary review. Analysing this documentary review data by applying King's template, this study has identified some main themes and sub-themes that are relevant to the topic under investigation, and they also offer important insights into understanding the internationalisation factors and related strategies of Chinese alcohol brands in the UK market.

1. UK international retailing studies

By critically scanning the grey literature to identify the key factors affecting the internationalisation process of Chinese alcohol brands in the UK market during the Covid-19 pandemic (March 2020 to March 2021), it is observed that an in-depth study and observation of UK international retailing studies is needed to understand the process of internationalisation. This is because it seems that the internationalisation of a brand involves internal as well as external barriers. External barriers can include distribution difficulties, exchange rate fluctuations, cultural differences, political instability, economic instability and government regulations, for example. By contrast, internal barriers can include inadequate knowledge of foreign markets and conditions, perception of risk, attitude to foreign expansion, uncertainty and lack of resources, and so on.

For example, the chosen April source from *The Guardian* shows that retail alcohol sales in the United Kingdom during April were at a record low due to lockdown; however, the overall sales of alcohol significantly increased. The key reason appeared to be the situation in which citizens were restricted to their locations. Economic analysts were predicting the biggest contraction in many centuries with an expectation of a 4 per cent decrease in retail sales during the month of March 2020. However, retail fell more sharply than expected, i.e. 5.1 per cent. The source highlights that the biggest slump would be observed in the month of April

because citizens already purchased lots of food and household goods in panic during the month of March 2020. The source also argues that retailers' profits were already hard hit before lockdowns because of high rents, rising business rates and severe market competition. In the middle of all these uncertainties, retailers were not sure of after-effects of Brexit in the business market. Notably, online sales of other items surged to 22 per cent compared to 18 per cent in the past month, whereas in volume terms, alcohol sales rose to 31.4 per cent.

Another grey literature source from *The Economist* (2020) indicates that, due to strong digital infrastructure in Britain, it is expected that the consumer shift towards online shopping might prove permanent. At the same time, the source also sheds light on the fact that this probability greatly varies by market and industry. In this regard, it cannot be assumed that all consumers using online sources are fully satisfied with the service and delivered products. Therefore, companies need to better prepare themselves for delivering good service and products if they need to sustain themselves in the long run. Given these facts, when Chinese companies will try to internationalise their alcohol brands within the United Kingdom, then they should be aware that their internationalisation decision might need organisational changes in addition to an increased exposure to risks. Retailing across borders might prove to be far from easy, perhaps including fluctuations in exchange rates and distribution issues, cultural differences, political and economic instability, and government regulation (Evans, 2008). This study observes that other factors such as different tastes of consumers, different competitive conditions in comparison to their native country, the difference in language, staffing and recruiting, and site acquisition can be problematic and noteworthy for the Chinese company. The most important among them can be listed as inadequate knowledge of foreign markets and conditions. This point has been significantly argued by Alexander (1995), who states that even if the retail experience of a company in its domestic market is long, this might even hinder its internationalisation. This is because those retailers who have conferred an

institutional status in their native markets were unexpectedly unsuccessful in carrying forward the same success rate to international consumers. For example, success can turn into failure due to cultural differences, including a lack of cultural bond between the product produced by China and the consumer native to the UK. Similarly, evidence shows that larger retailers in the UK market can come under great pressure due to the pandemic crisis (Sharma et al., 2020). They might find challenges in offering a personalised experience to consumers (Angus and Westbrook, 2019). They can face challenges related to adopting corporate environment sustainability (CES) strategies and actions (Naidoo and Gasparatos, 2018). These facts show that Chinese alcohol brands would need to have sufficient retailing studies in order to successfully market their products in the United Kingdom.

Summary of theme 1:

Theme 1 'UK international retailing studies' was identified as being relevant to this study in that retailing studies strongly influenced the internationalisation process of Chinese alcohol during the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK market. Pre-pandemic research indicates that most of the retailer-based studies in the UK were centred on large retailer processes and activities (Alexander, 1990; Williams, 1992). By deeply analysing the grey literature, it was found that, during the month of April 2020, the UK retail market showed a record low because of lockdown (Inman, 2020). However, the source also pointed out that the profits of retailers were already hit before the imposition of lockdown since the UK retail market was already facing sharply rising rents, rises in business rates, fierce competition and uncertainties due to Brexit. It was found that retailers in the UK face internal and external barriers at both entry and growth levels. However, these barriers have not been fully understood, especially those faced by UK SMEs that show an increasingly international behaviour. Given these facts, it

becomes extremely important for Chinese alcohol companies to study those barriers from the perspective of internationalisation. While critically analysing this situation, it can be said that the new Chinese alcohol companies should also account for changes in digitisation in the UK, how digitisation can act as a barrier or an opportunity for them, what kind of consumer-related knowledge they should have before they tap into the UK market and what are the competitive internal and external conditions they might face from the internationalisation perspective.

2. **The study of the UK wine market**

Wine is considered an integral part of UK social and cultural norms. A source from CEPR (2020) indicates potential evidence-based disruptions in the wine market and the corresponding trade effects. The source highlights that global alcohol consumption trends have decreased to one-seventh to the present day. It is also observed that taxes on wine have increased in high-income countries. Also, for beverages, uncertainty in trade policies is making international trade more difficult. From the UK perspective, the resource highlights:

‘The Brexit vote in June 2016 had an immediate impact on the British pound that has persisted, its value having declined by more than 10% against all pertinent currencies, and UK income and household consumption growth have slowed.’

Therefore, it can be assumed that UK citizens might be looking for low-cost wine and other beverages available within their market. Due to taxes and uncertainty in trade policies, it is highly likely that foreign products might not do well considering that more taxes might be placed in the UK to protect local wine producers.

On the other hand, the UK accounts for only 11 per cent of the world’s wine product imports, with most of these wines coming from EU countries. This can be a barrier for Chinese wine

exporters because they will be tapping into a market which is not familiar with Asian wine imports. By contrast, China might take this as an opportunity, given that they would not need to compete with other Asian wine exporters in the UK. The literature also highlights the success of foreign brands in the UK in the post-World War II era. For example, Bower (2018) highlights that the brewing industry successfully thrived in the UK by the initiative of Babycham, the UK's answer to champagne during the 1950s, followed by another initiative from Le Piat d'Or (a specially developed French wine). This shows that the UK has a history of welcoming outside brands to successfully thrive within their territory. It can be assumed that if the UK citizens are short of Asian wine brands within their country, then they might be looking for and welcoming Asian alcohol brands to satisfy their needs.

Additionally, there are around 18 ethnic groups living in the UK, including Asians such as Chinese, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians (Gov.uk, 2022). This means Chinese brands would not be selling alcohol to an entirely new community. They can also target the Asian community to get a hold of those consumers and then tap into the native UK citizens. Also, greater importance should be given to the branding strategy. This is because in alcohol-buying decisions, the importance of a brand name in the UK cannot be ignored. In this context, Bruwer et al. (2014) highlight that UK consumers who are more involved in alcohol drinking make use of different sources such as word of mouth, information from wine books, the Internet, magazines and newspapers. Therefore, it can be said that the UK consumers can show the propensity of adjusting their buying power based on the knowledge that they gain about alcohol. This means if Chinese alcohol is marketed through proper means and it is backed up by a particular branding strategy, then it can gain its space in citizens' minds to make them ready to pay the asked price.

The literature also highlights the growing influence of UK women as alcohol consumers (Bower, 2018). The reason might be that women are continually entering into the workplace in great numbers and they have become financially independent, thus they can use their own money to buy alcohol of their choice. The next theme discusses changes in consumption patterns among UK consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Summary of theme 2:

Theme 2 ‘The study of the UK wine market’ reveals that wine is an integral part of the UK’s cultural and social norms. The UK has a history of welcoming outside brands to successfully thrive within their territory (Bower, 2018). At the same time, disruptions in the UK wine market such as putting taxes on wine products can have significant trade effects (Anderson, 2020). If UK policies are strict or uncertain in terms of wine trading, then Chinese international companies would face more hardships in their trade. It can be said that Brexit is likely to have uncertain effects on the UK alcohol industry because UK policymakers might try to protect their local wine companies by putting higher taxes on international wine products. At the same time, Chinese alcohol companies can exploit this situation as an opportunity if they are to promote market-competitive products. The study also found that, from a historical perspective, the UK wine market has welcomed outside wine producers; therefore, Chinese companies can exploit and fill the gap of Asian wines’ availability in the UK wine market. While critically analysing this situation, the Chinese companies might also need to study and target ethnic groups living in the UK and their wine consumption habits.

3. UK consumer spending changes during the Covid-19 pandemic

The grey literature published by CEPR in July 2020, as shown in the above table, highlights the unprecedented negative impact on the current and future prospects of households,

businesses and the macro-economy in Britain. It is observed that, since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in the early months of 2020, significant changes have been observed in relation to the political, social and health landscape. During those months, the consumer spending situation in the UK during lockdown seemed to show a strong increase in panic-buying and stockpiling behaviours. Notably, consumer spending was not the same in every country and this is the case with the UK. It is also observed that consumer spending changes with income level, gender and age.

This CEPR grey literature resource thoroughly examines UK consumer spending behaviour during the beginning months of the pandemic. Notably, by the end of June 2020, the UK witnessed more than 43,500 deaths in addition to more than 313,000 cases of Covid-19 (Chronopoulos et al., 2020). Examining the Covid-19 impact in relation to consumer spending shows considerable challenges because it was not possible to collect accurate data during the panic-buying months. For example, regarding the period from April 2018 to March 2019, the 'Family Spending in the UK' report was made public in March 2020 by the UK Office of National Statistics. By contrast, positively speaking, recent advancements in financial applications and technologies have made it possible to see in real time consumer data such as consumer spends through different technology platforms using financial institutions, supermarkets, and so on. This is how the latest reliable consumer spending data is available and examined in the current grey literature (Chronopoulos et al., 2020). This data can be used by policymakers, as well as foreign companies such as Chinese alcohol companies, to analyse and accordingly strategise their branding and marketing. To make it possible, one of the most famous financial applications 'Money Dashboard' was used to collect consumer spending data. This application is helpful because it captures all linked bank accounts including debit and credit cards and aggregates all transactions throughout the UK. In this way, the period from 1 January 2020 to 18 June 2020 was analysed, consisting of

101,059 individuals completing 23 million transactions (Chronopoulos et al., 2020, p. 145). Thus, specific spending categories such as dining and drinking expenses at a national level, regional level and individual level were obtained. The report shows that grocery spending considerably declined at the beginning of pandemic lockdown, whereas spending on drinking and dining was found to have increased during the onset and early weeks. Interestingly, the lowest values of drinking expenses were shown the week before the lockdown period.

Notably, more spending was observed in young people compared to the elderly, and women were observed to have spent less compared to males (Chronopoulos et al., 2020, p. 150). Low-income consumers were spending less than those with high incomes. What is interesting in this whole observation was that the spending behaviours of young individuals during these six months declined, whereas the spending behaviours of elderly individuals gradually increased. However, regarding the overall observation on UK consumer spending behaviours, it is obvious that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused a significant halt in consumer spending. It is also obvious that the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in significant social and economic impacts on UK businesses and households.

Given the above-mentioned facts, it can be said that Chinese alcohol companies should pay attention to UK consumer spending data to analyse how UK consumers have responded to the pandemic by reducing spending. Chinese alcohol companies can also take help by examining large retail spending datasets to analyse impacts of the pandemic on large businesses. This analysis can be further refined by examining how different policies from the UK government influence consumer spending. This relates to how consumer spending data correlates with government-imposed policies. Lastly, it is possible to analyse how this spending culture differs based on family structure, gender and age of consumers. The next theme discusses the impacts of cultural differences between China and the United Kingdom.

Summary of theme 3:

Theme 3 'UK consumer spending changes during the Covid-19 pandemic' illustrates that the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted UK consumer spending habits starting from the early months of 2020 (Chronopoulos et al., 2020). During the first few months of 2020, consumers showed panic buying spending behaviours in order to stockpile products. However, this consumer spending changes with age, gender and level of income. Because accurate consumer spending data was not available during the early months of the pandemic (as is usual in the UK, these reports are published after a year), Chinese companies need to take help from certain financial technologies and applications to extract that data. Then the Chinese alcohol companies can use that data to strategise their marketing and branding campaigns. This study also highlights onesuch useful applications. The study also offers important insights into consumer spending in the UK during the pandemic.

4. Differences between Chinese and UK drinking cultures

The grey literature sources presented by KCL and *The Guardian* in June 2020 illustrate the drinking culture in the UK, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, it is revealed that compared to most other nations, many UK people would start drinking early in the day during the Covid-19 pandemic (Grierson, 2020). According to a survey, in Greece, 23.3 per cent of people used to start earlier in the day, whereas in the UK this percentage was 47 per cent. An increased consumption of alcohol was observed in more than half of UK drinkers due to having more time to drink coupled with boredom. Therefore, as a result, more than 40 per cent of British people reported poorer physical health followed by decreased work performance and mental health problems. Another resource from KCL (2020) agrees:

'There is extensive evidence that the population level of alcohol consumption is highly correlated with health harm. So with a substantial increase in alcohol consumption

during the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown in the latest Ipsos MORI survey, we can expect in due course a surge in alcohol related ill health including alcohol-related liver disease admissions and deaths.’

Given these facts, it can be said that wine culture is a culture between spirit and material. For example, wine takes the human body material as a carrier and bring changes in its spirit. Wine culture is also considered to be an ingrained culture of humans in different societies. One needs to understand first that China has its own drinking culture, its own liquor kingdom. Drinking culture represents its own expression for some mood, sentiment, atmosphere or ambience. Jiang (2011) highlights that in the west, wine drinking rituals also illustrate the respect for the wine itself. A good wine is appraised based on its fragrance, feel and colour to each individual sense organ of the drinker. There is also a drinking order to be followed such as initiating with white wine followed by red; the short-time storage wine first and then the one with long storage; first light wine followed by the rich one; and so on. By contrast, Chinese people see wine as a tool beyond just communication, i.e. to enable the human body to function more wonderfully than before. This means if western cultures enjoy drinking wine for the sake of enjoyment and to relax, Chinese people take it as a somewhat necessary part of their functioning. When it comes to drinking more than the desired limit, in the UK this is something of an extreme situation. The UK culture allows citizens to enjoy drinking anytime in bars, the alley or in the street. Jiang (2011) says that if a bottle of nice wine and delicacies are put before British people, it is highly likely that they will choose alcohol without hesitation. From a cultural standpoint, wine is normally considered and served along with food, both during and after the meal. What British people normally want is the feeling to drink, the feeling to taste. Often they will go to drink in a bar during free hours. During happy times, they will give the invitation to friends to join them. Similarly, during sad times, they will use wine to drown their sorrows.

From a cultural standpoint, Chinese people drink with other people, and once they start drinking, until everybody else stops drinking, one cannot stop drinking (Jiang, 2011). If he does so, then he might be known as having 'lost face'. Chinese people are afraid of losing face; they consider it as a loss of reputation. By contrast, the British culture has no such thing as losing face. They are more likely to drink alcohol to relieve stress and to relax after they are done with a tough day's work.

The above-mentioned opinions articulated by Jiang (2011) show that wine is not only a physical product in Britain, but rather a cultural symbol. While in China, people drink wine to promote their human functionality, in the UK people drink a lot depending on the type of alcohol to drink to fully enjoy the experience of drinking wine. The grey literature additionally shows that the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted many British people's drinking habits. There has been a substantial increase in alcohol consumption in the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic. Consistent with previous findings, compared to older drinkers, young drinkers reported more changes in their drinking behaviour amid the pandemic (Garnett et al., 2021). This change might have occurred because young drinkers felt more lonely and mentally ill due to lockdown. Similarly, women were found to consume more alcohol than usual compared to men. One can interpret that due to heavy downsizing of companies during the Covid-19 pandemic, women might be more affected in terms of losing their jobs. Therefore, they consumed more wine in reaction.

Summary of theme 4:

Theme 4 'Differences between Chinese and UK drinking cultures' revealed important insights into drinking behaviours during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, UK citizens showed a high percentage (47 per cent) of drinking early in the day and more than half among them have increased their drinking habits due to boredom and having more time

thanks to lockdowns (Grierson, 2020). As a consequence, many citizens (more than 40 per cent) reported poor mental and physical health followed by decreased performance at work (KCL, 2020). From a cultural standpoint, the UK has a wine culture in line with much of the western world that has respect for wine itself (Jiang, 2011). However, this theme observed that during the pandemic, more behaviour changes in drinking were found in young people (Garnett et al., 2021). These findings necessitate the idea to study the drinking culture in the UK from a historical perspective, as well as the changes it experienced during the pandemic. The study also found that this wine culture in the UK often starts with different types of wines in the early day followed by a different variety throughout the day. In this context, the Chinese alcohol companies can compare their own wine culture with that of the UK and try to exploit the opportunities found between the two cultures.

5. **Governmental attitudes towards Chinese trade and food products**

A few grey literature resources show the UK government's policies amid the Covid-19 pandemic such as those from *The Independent*, *The Economist* and *The Guardian*.

The governmental policies also point towards attitudes about how the UK deals with the products of other countries. Notably, trade between China and UK accounts for £81.1 billion during the year 2020 (Gov.uk, 2021). Trade between the two countries has increased in the past decade, i.e. from £42.3 billion to £86.1 billion, which shows an increase of 104 per cent. It is also in the news that UK is set to showcase its drink and food at the China International Import Expo 2020 (Gov.uk, 2020). In this show, both the UK and Chinese audiences experience a selection of the finest UK drinks, food and goods. Such types of occasions and governmental attitudes show that the two countries are willing to open up their boundaries for each other, giving companies operating in both countries a chance to investigate and explore how they can develop and nourish their trade relationship. This showcasing also has a new

technological platform www.ukbusinessinchina.com that houses a function to match businesses between two countries. It allows the UK and Chinese companies to virtually connect with each other, so that Chinese companies will be able to directly connect and interact with UK companies in both online and offline modes.

In order to increase brand equity and sales of Chinese alcohol products in the UK market, Chinese alcohol suppliers need to take these governmental attitudes and policies as opportunities to tap into the new UK market. One of the most famous Chinese alcohol products, named ‘Maotai’ or ‘Moutai’, has already begun to explore overseas markets so that their market share can be increased. It can be assumed that the penetration levels for Chinese alcohol products in the UK market are highly feasible even though the consumption of alcohol in the UK might be slowed down due to the pandemic. This scenario might act like a double-edged sword for a new Chinese company as well. This means it can easily introduce its alcohol product, but if the company does not respond to the UK market quickly, the advantages might not last in the long run.

Summary of theme 5:

Theme 5 ‘Governmental attitudes towards Chinese trade and food products’ illustrates different types of UK policies for alcohol products in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. During the year 2020, around £81.1 billion of trade occurred between the UK and China (Gov.uk, 2021). These governmental attitudes are important to understand and study how the UK government deals with international products produced and promoted by other countries from the internationalisation perspective. Statistically speaking, the grey literature shows that China and the UK have significantly increased their trade during the past ten years, and that the UK governmental attitude is generally positive towards Chinese products. This positive attitude can also be realised in the shape of the China International Import Expo 2020 and

other similar initiatives. It can be said that the UK is willing to open its boundaries for Chinese products, including alcohol products.

6. Movement of international trade and goods after the Brexit deal

The February 2020 source from CEPR indicates that the aftershocks of Brexit are strong enough to disrupt beverage markets, as well as their trade consequences. From the perspective of internationalisation, this source identifies that international countries such as the US will impose tariffs on the global alcohol market and these tariffs can be discriminatory. This internationalisation perspective can also be visualised in the UK economy. The UK pound suffered an immediate impact as it declined by more than 10 per cent thanks to the uncertainty of Brexit. There can be several reasons behind such a decline; however, the cost of transportation and the ease and cost-effectiveness of the movement of international trade and goods after the Brexit deal might matter a great deal. It can be said that the effect of trade will depend on how expensive UK goods and services are when they are transported internationally from other countries into the UK market (Tetlow and Stojanovic, 2018). Additionally, when Brexit influences transportation costs, it will influence trading costs in turn, which also includes the transportation costs of alcohol products. This transportation cost can be multiplied if the UK imposes non-tariff barriers such as regulatory differences for Asian countries, border control measures and rules of origin checks. All these factors can affect trade.

While critically analysing this situation, Chinese companies might need to check upon some non-tariff barriers such as customs checks and regulatory barriers (Protts, 2016). Here, the former occurs if the UK changes its regulations on health protection, safety and environment. Customs checks refer to the border-related paperwork which can also result in extra transportation costs and delays. The economic relations of the UK can also be influenced due

to the factors such as rules of origin checks, border controls and regulatory differences (Dhingra et al., 2016; Hagemejer et al., 2020). These facts prove that Brexit can affect the transportation costs of international imports to the United Kingdom, therefore, Brexit can also be the decisive, or at least one of the major factors that can affect the movement of the Chinese wine trade. While critically analysing this theme, it can be said that the trade agreements between the UK and other international countries such as China can play a major role in the Chinese internationalisation of alcohol products. The consumer attraction towards Chinese alcohol products can be negatively affected if these transportation costs are increased. This is because the transportation costs will increase the unit price of the products, in which case, the increased price can affect consumer behaviour.

Summary of theme 6:

By critically analysing theme 6 'Movement of international trade and goods after the Brexit deal', it was found that the beverage market was disrupted in the UK due to Brexit aftershocks (Anderson, 2020). The theme indicates that Brexit has brought uncertainty of movements of international trade and goods, with different types of impacts in the UK. For instance, the UK currency declined; however, it is yet to be seen how uncertainty in the costs of transportation can affect goods when they are internationally transported in the UK (Tetlow and Stojanovic, 2018). Additionally, transportation costs due to Brexit can be multiplied due to non-tariff barriers.

7. Developing means of better communication and transport

The March resource from *The Economist* indicates that that demand and supply of world economies were hit hard. In China, manufacturing activities sank to the lowest level ever and the economy as a whole shrunk by an alarming degree. It is a fact that all spheres of the

global supply chain have been adversely affected, including packaging and distribution of non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages (Choudhury, 2020). It is common to witness some industries closing for many days to clean up their processes. Communication set-ups and transportation of products have also been disrupted due to capacity constraints and rules of social distancing in the workplace. These factors show that manufacturing, communicating and transporting activities have been weakened due to the lockdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Because of these challenges, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the international alcohol industry point towards resilient communication and transport systems (Telukdarie et al., 2020). In this context, the resilience of alcohol supply chains can be improved by using digital technologies that assist in optimising outputs (Telukdarie et al., 2020). In this context, transparency in communication operations can be provided through Automation, Robotics, Cloud Computing, Internet of Things (IoT) and Big Data technologies. The key to surviving the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic is using e-commerce platforms. At all levels of the supply chain, a company might need to increase the process of Automation. In this case, digital technologies can significantly help to produce contactless delivery right from the manufacturing facility to storage in the marketplace.

Additionally, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, consumers will need to have more information about alcohol products compared to previously (Telukdarie et al., 2020). This is because most of the time they are restricted to their own places due to lockdowns. Therefore, they need more communication about the products they are going to purchase. In this regard, companies can take help from strategising their marketing campaigns, such as targeting potential customers' online searching behaviours. Smart devices deliver knowledgeable information about consumers and consumers are also digitally savvy. In this context, the

product indirectly communicates with consumers through providing ingredients information, nutritional content of alcohol, potential side-effects, shelf life, ripeness, freshness and authenticity of the product. This means that the concept 'better means of communication' also points towards intelligent and fair packaging techniques because it incorporates a communicative intelligent aspect to the packaging, thereby providing real-time information to the consumer. Kalpana et al. (2019) indicate such types of intelligent packaging that detect, sense and record any alterations to the product. This theme of developing means of better communication and transport is extremely important because consumers also heavily rely on technology to get advice on which products to purchase.

The aspect of better transportation also includes the need for a responsive workforce (if not totally automated) (Keeble-Ramsay and Armitage, 2019; Accenture, 2020). As a matter of fact, companies which manufacture beverage and food products must operate by adapting to the complex, uncertain and volatile environment. Therefore, they need to be prepared in advance for any untoward happenings or changes in their operations. An agile, elastic or flexible transportation mechanism is required that is properly connected in real time with digital platforms and provided with necessary training accordingly. The key to develop means of better transportation is to develop a team with quick and appropriate responses in emergency situations across the supply chain.

Summary of theme 7:

Theme 7 'Developing means of better communication and transport' indicates that the pandemic has heavily affected supply chains around the globe. Therefore, both non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages' packaging and distribution were negatively affected (Choudhury, 2020). Due to lockdowns and social distancing measures, both communication and transport mechanisms were disrupted. Therefore, internationalisation companies need to overcome

these obstacles by increasing transparency in communication through Automation, Robotics, Cloud Computing, the Internet of Things (IoT) and Big Data technologies. Customers should be provided with appropriate information on different online media, intelligent packaging techniques and flexible transportation mechanisms during the uncertain pandemic environment.

Summary of the themes

This study observes that Chinese companies can have positive as well as negative experiences when they try to promote their alcohol products in the United Kingdom. Chinese companies can experience internal and external barriers; however, it is a matter of exploiting the opportunities within these barriers and making the most of the UK market by carefully strategising marketing and branding campaigns. It is up to the Chinese companies how they take help by understanding the key factors that have influenced the UK alcohol market or alcohol consumption trends and consequently strategise their alcohol products.

On a critical node, getting familiar with the UK drinking culture (which is somewhat different than that of the Chinese) could be a major key to business success. Why and how Chinese companies can take benefit by better understanding drinking culture in the United Kingdom is a matter of great interest. For example, if the company targets middle-aged men in the UK, then they can strategise their marketing campaigns and advertisements to openly lure them to drinking thanks to the strong social norms and drinking culture in the UK that supports such type of marketing. For example, research indicates that drinking in the UK is governed by strong social norms among the male middle-aged group, whereby alcohol drinking is seen as a symbol of masculinity (Parke et al., 2018). Further, their drinking in the UK is referred to as being ‘by choice’ rather than any reference to being ‘problem drinkers’. These facts illustrate that how important it is to understand drinking culture and

correspondingly strategise marketing campaigns. Another aspect relates to how the drinking culture is associated with food consumption in the UK. If that is correct, then Chinese companies can make a strong connection with restaurants and food deliverers who serve alcohol beverages to customers when they deliver food items. These facts point towards the extreme importance of understanding drinking culture in the UK so that Chinese companies do not blindly follow their native drinking culture of China.

A source from Gov.uk (2021) indicates the factor of the 'Governmental attitudes towards Chinese trade and food products', in which, during the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK government applied different types of policies for alcohol products. For example, it was found that between the United Kingdom and China, around £8.1 billion worth of trade was conducted during the year 2020. This type of UK governmental attitude offers noteworthy insights in terms of understanding and studying how foreign products are dealt with by the UK government and how the United Kingdom promotes the products of foreign countries from the perspective of internationalisation. From a statistical standpoint, the referenced grey literature reveals that, in the past ten years, trade between China and the UK has significantly increased. This clearly indicates the positive attitude of the UK government towards Chinese products. The initiation of Expo 2020 and other similar activities also indicate the steps towards the realisation of this positive attitude (Gov.uk, 2020). Therefore, China should take this positive attitude as an opportunity to market its alcohol products in the UK. This is because the UK has shown its will for opening its boundaries for Chinese products. These findings relate to the second and third research questions.

Critically speaking, Chinese companies should not take the positive governmental attitude for Chinese products for granted. This is because positive governmental attitude is one thing, and the way in which domestic institutions work within the UK is another. Literature also

highlights this aspect that the aspiration of Chinese companies for internationalisation across borders is also affected by the domestic institutional framework (Voss et al., 2010). The actual playing field for companies is determined by the working mechanism of different domestic institutions such as bureaucracy, judiciary and institutions. This can be understood in the sense that even when governmental attitude remains positive for foreign companies' products in the UK, domestic institutional intervention in the shape of domestic market protectionism (to protect local companies within the UK) can affect the smooth operations of foreign Chinese companies. This means that positive governmental attitude can only be exploited by Chinese companies if domestic institutions also back this attitude. This necessitates the idea of thoroughly investigating the UK's governmental support in relation to the domestic institutions' policymaking scenarios. Another reason for investigating this situation is that the UK's and China's domestic institutional environments are different. In China, the home country's institutional development is weak due to a high degree of government ownership (Wu and Chen, 2014). This is not the case in the United Kingdom; therefore, Chinese companies need to keep a check on the domestic institutional environment in the UK while internationalising their products.

Anderson (2020) unpacked the factor of 'Movement of international trade and goods after the Brexit deal'. This factor can significantly influence Chinese alcohol brands' internationalisation. It was observed, that due to Brexit uncertainty and aftershocks, there had been great disruptions in the beverage market in the United Kingdom. This resulted from movements of international goods and trade in the United Kingdom. These impacts can be significant because foreign goods transportation can be immensely affected due to the rise in the costs of transportation, especially when goods are transported internationally to the UK market. Also, the non-tariff barriers due to Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, such as changes in the regulatory differences for Asian countries, border control measures, rules of

origin check, and so on, can affect transportation costs. This finding answers the first and second research questions and also aligns with this study's aims and objectives.

When critically analysing the factor of 'Movement of international trade and goods after the Brexit deal', it can be said that Chinese internationalisation companies would be exposed to numerous business uncertainties due to uncertainties regarding trade policy post-Brexit. This can reduce profit margins from international selling (Handley and Limao, 2015). By exiting the EU, the UK is poised to trading uncertainty in relation to future tariffs between the United Kingdom and other foreign countries including China, so it can adversely affect the trading prospects of Chinese companies internationalising in the UK market. This means that Chinese companies will need to better investigate how other international companies are coping with these uncertainties, including the UK's domestic companies. This is because Brexit-based uncertainty also influences the UK's domestic companies. This investigation would give Chinese companies the knowledge of and ways in which to tackle uncertainties about the movements of international goods and trade in the United Kingdom post-Brexit. This study argues that this investigative knowledge will be beneficial for Chinese companies because, by changing trading dynamics with EU countries, the UK might want to strengthen its trading relationships with non-EU countries such as China. At the same time, Chinese companies should also cater for some concerns in this context. For example, if Chinese companies were using the UK as a main bridge or hub by establishing R&D set-ups within the UK and further supply their products to the EU market, then this situation might suffer post-Brexit (Zhang, 2018). All these facts show that the theme of 'Movement of international trade and goods after the Brexit deal' is the first step towards further investigation and more knowledge acquisition regarding changed trading scenarios post-Brexit.

Lastly, *The Economist* (2020b) highlights the factor of ‘Developing means of better communication and transport’ that can significantly influence the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands. It was found that there had been a hard hit on the demand and supply of world economies due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a consequence, global supply chains have been significantly disturbed, or, more accurately, disrupted. This is a clear indication of its impact on the packaging and distribution of both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. This necessitates the idea to improve both transport and communication mechanisms due to social distancing measures and lockdowns imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, Chinese companies can take help from this factor and overcome these internationalisation hurdles by using the latest technologies such as the Big Data technologies, the Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing, Robotics and automation to increase transparency and speed in their internationalisation services. This would help customers with the fastest and most accurate provision of information via numerous online media and better services through flexible transportation mechanisms and intelligent packaging techniques. This finding answers the first research question, regarding how the concept of internationalisation can intelligently work during the Covid-19 pandemic. This finding also answers the third research question because it signifies those strategies that Chinese internationalisation companies can adopt to successfully market their alcohol brands in the UK market during the pandemic.

Critically analysing this finding points to the fact that Chinese companies should not ignore the possibility of building and promoting their business through digitisation. The theme ‘Developing means of better communication and transport’ indirectly points towards the importance of digitisation in the process of internationalisation because better communication and transport cannot be achieved if the business is not digitised. This is where information and communication technologies (ICTs) play a vital role. The reason for this is that the term digitalisation itself means extensive adoption of advanced ICT that includes but is not limited

to using broadband Internet services, connected mobile devices, software, artificial intelligence and other digital technologies (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014). Chinese companies should adopt ICT-based digitalisation for better communication and transport mechanisms because intra-day company coordination costs can be decreased by using advanced ICT. Similarly, ICT also decreases communication and transaction costs. Without needing any essential FDI, Chinese companies can adopt digitalisation to provide various internationalisation services remotely (UNCTAD, 2017). Digitalisation is also necessary for internationalisation companies because they need real-time, precise and accurate information regarding foreign markets to reduce internationalisation barriers. Similarly, Chinese companies can better promote and market their alcohol products over the Internet specifically to their targeted customers. Chinese companies should also improve their physical logistics and transport services so that their customers receive alcohol products in time.

4.5 Summary of the chapter

This chapter sheds light on the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic has factually changed or even disrupted the dynamics of internationalisation (Puri et al., 2020; Di Gessa et al., 2022). This is because the pandemic has caused major implications for the global mobility of people, as well as products. Global supply chains have been heavily disrupted. In this context, international alcohol companies have also been subjected to unprecedented challenges. This chapter has focused on different types of challenges that the alcohol industry is facing, and will face in the future. This is because these unprecedented challenges brought by the Covid-19 pandemic are not expected to be resolved in the short term, but rather the alcohol industry will need to live with them and deal with them accordingly. For example, the literature concerning risk and disruption management has faced an entirely new and novel scenario where people are restricted to their homes who happened to be the major source of income for suppliers, retailers and distributors (Irizar et al., 2021; Fitzgerald et al., 2022; Rodrigues et

al., 2022). Most of the previous literature has focused on humanitarian issues, i.e. how food and medications can be provided to citizens during pandemics (Aman and Masood, 2020; Haines et al., 2020; Marmot and Allen, 2020). However, there is a dearth of literature on how international alcohol companies can distribute their products efficiently and effectively in another country such as the UK. Because the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are severe, and there is a literature gap in this area, the current chapter fills this gap by critically analysing documentary review data. This is how this study investigated and brought forward a few noteworthy themes found in documentary review data to solve this issue.

Moreover, this chapter highlights that the former concept of internationalisation that was common in the past three decades has been phenomenally changed. For example, from an economic standpoint, industries can no longer count on offshore production facilities because the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed severe weaknesses in these kind of internationalisation tactics (*The Economist*, 2020). Maintaining global supply chains might be an old concept unless these supply chains are appropriately updated and enhanced to make them resilient to a pandemic. Similarly, socially speaking, people's daily routines, their freedom of movement, income and lifestyles, all have been disruptively changed. These facts necessitate the idea that old methods of internationalisation for alcohol companies might not be simply replicated to the new changed internationalisation. In the context of the United Kingdom, Brexit has itself brought such changes in the dynamics of economics that internationalisation companies who are already in the business or those planning to tap into the UK market will face severe challenges. This chapter sheds light on these facts that the old shape of globalisation is completely changed; therefore, new techniques of internationalisation must be adopted by companies in order to survive. Companies would need to readjust their internationalisation strategies and rethink the economics of production and consumption accordingly.

Given these facts, this chapter highlights a few major themes to appropriately deal with the challenges. These themes are important because they have been extracted from the grey literature after critically analysing the data. It is not that the themes were explicitly listed in the grey literature, but critical analysis and reflexivity were used to extract these themes. These themes have offered valuable insights into issues associated with the Chinese alcohol international companies that are currently supplying alcohol to the UK or those that are planning to export and distribute alcohol products within the UK marketplace. This chapter identifies some important aspects of the UK international retailing studies that influence the internationalisation process of Chinese alcohol during the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK market (Alexander, 1990; Williams, 1992; Bhattacharya et al., 2018; Stockwell et al., 2021; Bray et al., 2021). The chapter offers valuable insights into different aspects of the wine industry in the UK marketplace. Investigating and understanding the UK wine market would help Chinese internationalisation brands that want to tap into the UK market. The chapter sheds light on important factors such as UK consumer spending changes, differences in drinking culture between China and the UK, the effects of the attitude of the UK government towards Chinese alcohol products, the impact of Brexit on the movement of international trade and goods and the development of better communication and transport strategies.

However, the process of internationalisation is still not easy to understand, apply and achieve business targets. One reason is that internationalisation is an extremely complex, broad and multifaceted concept that is influenced by a host of factors. This is because, when companies intend to do their business globally, they are exposed to new opportunities as well as new threats (Albaum, 2008). Even a well thought-out and carefully executed business can be exposed to unexpected threats. Critically speaking, by focusing attention on only one country (such as the UK in the present situation), the process of internationalisation can also render unpredictable results due to increased economic integration between global countries. In this

context, the process of internationalisation might need to be evaluated on the basis of supranational regions such as the EU, NAFTA and ASIAN. What companies can do is learn about the factors that influence the process of internationalisation and work on weak areas so that more feasible options can be explored and employed when conducting cross-border business operations. Nevertheless, it is still not possible for companies to master their business operations and counter all the visible and invisible threats that they might face while operating outside their native countries. Moreover, the broad-based acknowledgement and application of digitalisation have also changed situations both for companies and for consumers. This is because customers can extract the desired information about the product that they are interested in, and they can place orders with a click of mouse. On the other hand, companies also digitalise their products so that customers can enjoy precise and timely information about foreign products and companies can target more customers than they would normally target through physical stores (Wittcop et al., 2018; Herve et al., 2020; Monaghan et al., 2020). All these factors critically point to the fact that learning and applying internationalisation-related business strategies is an ongoing learning process. Therefore, the themes extracted in this chapter can be proven to offer helpful insights into internationalisation, but companies might need to develop in-depth understanding of these themes, as well as go beyond them to cater to the unique needs and internationalisation circumstances.

This chapter sheds light on the fact that although this pandemic will finally come to an end, the new form of globalisation and subsequent internationalisation practices are here to stay. Given the current situation, globalisation will never return to the 'old normal'. Therefore, internationalisation companies will need to adapt to the 'new normal' in order to survive. For example, UK customers might expect high standards of hygiene, they might focus more on digital technologies and they might prefer to have some more advanced communication

mechanism centred on contactless service (*The Economist*, 2020a). This is where this chapter achieves the target of determining the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on alcohol companies' internationalisation strategies through the eyes of the stakeholders. Furthermore, this chapter makes a significant contribution to the existing literature by filling those gaps that might not have been explored to such an extent before. All these extracted themes point to the fact that the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol within the UK market during and after the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit is not as simple as it seems. The reason is, the process of internationalisation of alcohol products is a multifaceted issue and multiple factors are associated with dealing with and resolving this issue. Therefore, extracting these themes is an achievement because different and novel aspects related to the issue have been highlighted which can be of great help to Chinese international alcohol companies.

Critically speaking, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the process of internationalisation goes beyond the extracted themes. This is because these themes, as well as many other factors, were cumulatively influenced by the pandemic. First, the historical benefits of internationalisation have been called off due to weaknesses exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic (Kersan-Skabic, 2022). Secondly, the indirect influence of the pandemic can be observed through transportation and border control issues. Thirdly, the spread of the virus in different industries, putting employees at risk, shows the direct influence of the pandemic. A great degree of international investment and trade has been affected differently in different countries around the globe. This means that the extracted themes in this chapter are beneficial for companies; still, they need to cater for other factors that can influence their business operations. These factors include but are not limited to the rise in trade costs, transportation and travelling issues and the effects on international trade policies (Kumano, 2020; Wiwoho and Kukab, 2020; Vo and Tran, 2021). Not to mention that the effects of the pandemic, as well as the specific effects of Brexit can also affect the internationalisation and business

relationship of the United Kingdom with other Asian countries such as China. Therefore, apart from these themes, a critical evaluation of these factors is required for those Chinese business companies that intend to promote their businesses through the process of internationalisation in the present times.

Section 5: Conclusion

This study aims to explore the key factors that play important roles in Chinese alcohol brands' internationalisation. The key research question is: 'What are the key factors that play an important role in the internationalisation of Chinese brands of alcohol?'

5.1 Research questions

The following research questions have been framed for this study:

- What is the concept of internationalisation and how did it manifest during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- What are the key factors that can play important roles in Chinese alcohol brands' internationalisation in the UK market during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- Were there any strategies that Chinese internationalisation companies can adopt to successfully market their alcohol brands in the UK market during the pandemic?

5.2 Objectives

- To study the concept of internationalisation and the corresponding strategies of business companies.
- To investigate the key factors that affect the internationalisation of products.
- To explore the key factors that influence the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol products in the UK market.
- To explore suitable strategies that Chinese companies can adopt to achieve seamless internationalisation in the UK market.

Any predictive study is intended to explain what is happening and what can happen on specific occasions. Therefore, the objective of this study is to propose those solutions that the

Chinese alcohol industry can apply when they try to market their alcohol brands in the UK. In this context, the key objective of this study is to help Chinese international alcohol brands to check upon and forecast certain factors for their alcohol business to be successful in the United Kingdom. Another objective of this study was to assist the Chinese alcohol industry by providing them with a list of key factors that can influence the internationalisation of their alcohol brands during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. This was to ensure that the Chinese alcohol industry can employ appropriate branding strategies by carefully analysing the factors which can affect their internationalisation in and after the changed circumstances of the pandemic.

5.3 Reflections on the Findings

The study intended to conduct this investigation by selecting documentary review data as the main methodology. Documentary review methodology has been selected primarily due to the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic. During these times of lockdown and social distancing, conventional research methodologies are not appropriate. For example, primary data collection methodology cannot be selected because this would require interaction with human participants, which has not been possible due to the pandemic. By contrast, documentary review methodology uses a desk-based approach by using published articles, which can be useful to generate reliable data for research. This is because the type of information that is not available and cannot be extracted from the published literature can be extracted from documentary review. Goldstein and Reiboldt (2004) favour the opinion that document analysis can be used as a principal method to complement research investigation. This is because document analysis can generate new interview questions and documents also provide additional supplementary data. The initial plan of this study was to investigate the topic by using primary sources. However, it became necessary to use documentary review because,

due to the pandemic, the selected topic could not be investigated through primary data collection methodology. Otherwise, it would have been a frustrated enquiry where face-to-face interviews and interaction with participants (in the case of primary sources) would be extremely difficult. Furthermore, the historical data can still be used for reference purposes, but it cannot be used to find relevant answers to the research questions. Only the documentary data available for the year 2020 can be reliably used to check those factors that played important roles in the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands. Therefore, the research sampling included sample documents regarding the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the business market published between March 2020 and March 2021 (one-year window). Documentary review methodology also includes the collection of grey literature and other sources of documentary research evidence. Because grey literature is not published in academic media and this is not generally presented to the world of academia, this literature has brought a unique lens to explore the topic under investigation.

In the documentary review analysis of the grey literature, it was found (P.150) that there is a great need for internationalisation companies to study UK international retailing studies. Understanding the UK's international retailing processes can greatly help Chinese companies to understand the concept of internationalisation. This answers the second research question where UK retailing studies can be considered as a key factor for Chinese alcohol brands' internationalisation.

The grey literature cited by Inman (2020) found that a record low was experienced by the UK retail market in the month of April 2020. Nevertheless, it was also observed by the source that the UK retail market was already hit before Covid-19 lockdowns due to Brexit uncertainties, fierce market competition, rising business rates and the issue of sharply rising rents. This shows that lockdown rules in April 2020 surely hit retail profits; however, the

Covid-19 pandemic cannot be the only reason for the record low of the UK retail market. There were plenty of internal market barriers that also affected the retail market. Inman (2020) also highlighted that retail fell more than expectations in April because citizens conducted panic buying in the month of March, and therefore did not buy much in April.

Critically speaking, the findings related to the UK retail market are noteworthy; however, the impact of Covid-19 on UK retail businesses had been evolving over several decades due to developments in digitisation. It can be said that the pandemic also affected the already influenced retail sector. Afterwards, during the pandemic months, those retail platforms which were powered by digital technology had more absorption capacity than those which did not switch to digitisation. While lockdowns and social distancing disrupted the retail market and had devastating effects on businesses, digitisation allowed UK retail businesses to react by switching towards digital retail channels more readily than others. Overall, the findings related to retail market situations during the pandemic are useful for marketers in improving retail market strategies based on changed consumer behaviours. Chinese companies would also get to know that the impact on the UK retail market is not only due to the pandemic, but rather other evolving factors, such as digitisation, Brexit uncertainties and sharply rising rents and business costs have also influenced the retail market. That means the findings of this study substantiate the benefits of understanding and knowing the UK retail market from multiple angles rather than merely examining it through the changes brought by the Covid-19 pandemic. This is going to broaden the strategies of Chinese companies when they try to tap into UK businesses.

The grey literature source from *The Economist* (2020) indicated that online shopping might be proved as permanent due to the strong digital infrastructure in Britain. Nevertheless, this probability will not be similar in different industries and markets. Since consumers might

experience dissatisfaction with online services, companies must prepare to deliver good products and services through the online medium. Therefore, in addition to other retailing barriers, as discussed above, Chinese companies might need to consider different consumer tastes and cultural differences to offer them a more personalised experience. Retailing studies can help investigate these phenomena by comparing variations in sales such as variations between different retailers and beverage types (Bhattacharya et al., 2018). The factor of retailing studies answers all three research questions because retailing studies help understand the concept of internationalisation, become the key investigating factor that can play an important role during the pandemic, and can offer numerous retailing strategies to Chinese internationalisation companies to successfully market their alcohol brands in the UK.

The grey literature referenced by Anderson (2020) reveals that the UK wine market is the second key factor which can influence Chinese alcohol brands' internationalisation. The source indicates that the UK's social and cultural norms are strongly associated with the wine market since wine is an integral part of UK society. It was found that, on historical grounds, foreign goods have been welcomed in the UK. However, noticeable trade effects have been observed in the UK wine market due to the imposition of taxes on wine products. This means that Chinese companies should also be ready for such taxes, especially due to Brexit effects, in that policymakers might give protection to their local wine industry compared to foreign brands. By contrast, Chinese alcohol companies can turn this restriction into a market opportunity by promoting market-competitive products. Additionally, since UK consumers have a variety of local beverages, Chinese brands can fill this gap by providing them with a new variety of Asian beverages. Lastly, Anderson (2020) also indicates that the UK wine market should be explored by critically analysing different ethnic groups in relation to their consumption patterns. This finding relates to the objective of this study because it proposes solutions that the Chinese alcohol industry can apply when they try to market their alcohol

brands in the UK. It also answers the third research question, as it offers wine market-relevant strategies which can be used to successfully market foreign alcohol brands in the UK market and which are intended to be helpful both during and after the pandemic.

Critically speaking, this finding suggests that Chinese companies can target different ethnic groups. In that case, they can use social media platforms to target specific customers. For example, a research study conducted by Ross-Houle and Quigg (2019) indicates that the UK's student population shows elevated levels of alcohol consumption practices. Here social media remains an important factor in promoting alcohol drinks within this population. In that case, Chinese companies might need to promote corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices through social media posts to attract targeted customers. Atkinson et al. (2021) also highlights such initiatives in social media alcohol marketing campaigns during the initial UK national lockdown. The alcohol brands opted for CSR initiatives in their marketing campaigns by signifying philanthropic donations to help prevent the transmission of Covid-19.

While critically analysing this finding, it can be said that Chinese companies can use ICT technology and investigate customer data to figure out when their consumption habits changed, what are the consumption habits of specific customers (such as students, adults, old aged and so on) and how that data can be used to strategise their marketing campaigns. On critical grounds, the company can also save customers' experience data to strategise their marketing campaigns. The experience of the customer to which the company has delivered its alcohol products is an extremely important source of competitive advantage. If customers have a positive experience, then it can result in a broad favourable outcome such as brand preference, attitude, loyalty and satisfaction (Mathayomchan and Taecharungroj, 2020). The company can record customer experiences through numerous methods such as taking online

reviews and data from applications such as Google Maps (it has a distinct feature referred to as 'Local Guide' that allows users to rate businesses and places and write reviews). Chinese companies can also take customer reviews by using various social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and so on. Whether the reviews are positive, neutral or negative, this exercise would help Chinese companies to refine their alcohol products, as well as their marketing strategies. If the company sees a rise or decline in sales, then this customer data would be of great help to refine their products. The task is to use the obtained data in favour of the alcohol products that the company sells in the UK market.

Grierson (2020) outlines that the factor of the 'Difference between Chinese and UK drinking culture' during the Covid-19 pandemic can influence the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands. For instance, UK consumers' drinking culture experienced a drinking habit of early in the day with a high percentage of 47 per cent. The key reasons for this were found to be having more time thanks to lockdowns, as well as the boredom the pandemic entails. KCL (2020) also offers noteworthy insights into poor physical and mental health conditions by more than 40 per cent of UK citizens accompanied by a decreased performance at work. Although the drinking culture of China is similar to the UK, young people in the UK exhibited more behaviour changes compared to people of other ages (Garnett et al., 2021). These findings answer the first research question, signifying how the 'Difference between Chinese and UK drinking culture' worked during the pandemic to analyse its influence on the concept of internationalisation. Analysing wine culture can also offer help in understanding the UK retailing sector because both are strongly related to each other and variation in either of them can translate into significant variation in the other.

5.4 Contribution of the study

The key contribution of this study relates to understanding, presenting and critically analysing the current and contemporary internationalisation marketplace, especially during times of uncertainty brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit in the United Kingdom. The study acknowledges and highlights numerous aspects of the internationalisation process that have been influenced and can further influence the successful promotion of Chinese alcohol products and businesses within the UK. Because this study relies on recent data, particularly immediately after the emergence of the pandemic, it is a unique study that presents current trends in the contemporary internationalisation marketplace.

This study contributes to providing the latest documentary review data during the Covid-19 pandemic which is not available in published literature. Examining this data is critical because the globally connected system of governance and e-Commerce has taken a hard hit during the Covid-19 times, thereby weakening globalisation opportunities due to overdependence on global value chains. These changed circumstances across the globe necessitate the idea of deeply understanding how businesses have worked with and reacted to the changed pandemic situation and how they might work after the pandemic is over. This study contributes to acknowledging the fact that globalisation has now become vulnerable to different obstacles such as the 2008 global financial crisis (Aiyar, 2012; Doidge et al., 2020), and impacts of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic situation since it emerged in 2020. Because the pandemic is responsible for disrupting global value chains, it is also responsible for disrupting internationalisation processes. This is where the current study contributes to a gap in the research, because it helps examine deeply embedded internationalisation processes during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as key factors that can influence these

internationalisation processes and meaningful contribution towards those factors that play a critical role in the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands.

This study contributes to realising the idea that the world is not the same as it was before the pandemic, and it might never be in the future. From an economic standpoint, Chinese internationalisation companies can no longer depend on global value chains and offshore production facilities unless they proactively plan for factors that can influence their internationalisation processes (Javorcik, 2020; Roscoe et al., 2020; Gupta, 2020).

Additionally, this study also provides practitioners with appropriate advice regarding different factors which play a vital role in Chinese alcohol brands' internationalisation. For example, the factors related to economic disruption in the UK have deep impacts, especially during the pandemic (Puri et al., 2020; Di Gessa et al., 2022). The UK was already struggling with the impacts of Brexit before the pandemic; however, its effects have been deepened after the outbreak of Covid-19. Therefore, member states and the rest of the world can influence alcohol brands' internationalisation in these times (Anderson and Wittwer, 2017). By reading this study, practitioners can deeply examine the economic factors which play a critical role in the internationalisation of alcohol brands. For example, Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic can significantly influence trade agreements and international relations of the UK with foreign countries, including China. Thus, this change is highly likely to influence Chinese alcohol brands in the UK. Similarly, practitioners can have appropriate guidance regarding the changing nature of the United Kingdom's drinking market, especially during the pandemic (Hawkins and McCambridge, 2020; Anderson and Pinilla, 2021). This includes the historical and present trend of the UK government's attitude toward Chinese products (Gov.uk, 2021) and developing better means of communication and transport (Choudhury, 2020; Telukdarie et al., 2020).

5.5 Contribution to practitioners

Practitioners have limited knowledge so far because they largely depend on past data, including historical privileges and issues of the UK market with Chinese alcohol brands. However, the changed circumstances during the pandemic mean it is necessary for practitioners to have the most recent knowledge and data obtained right after the emergence of the pandemic in 2020. In this context, practitioners can benefit from understanding and studying changes in UK retail, the impact of policies imposed by the UK government to reduce the impact of alcohol on citizens' health (Stockwell et al., 2021) and the importance of subscription retailing in these situations (Bray et al., 2021). Practitioners can gain valuable insights from the changing landscape of digital infrastructure in Britain, as a result of which citizens might largely move towards online shopping (*The Economist*, 2020). Giving personalised experiences to consumers becomes challenging due to immense pressure on the retail industry in the UK during the pandemic crisis (Angus and Westbrook, 2019; Sharma et al., 2020). Insights have been offered regarding changes in the UK's consumer spending patterns during the pandemic in relation to different variables such as age, gender and occupation, for example. (Chronopoulos et al., 2020). This data can greatly help in strategising and marketing their alcohol brands to the preferred target community. Drinking culture is another factor that practitioners should consider while internationalising Chinese alcohol brands (Grierson, 2020; KCL, 2020).

The contribution of this study is unique because most of the published literature depends on old data (before the pandemic), including historical privileges and issues of the UK market with Chinese alcohol brands. However, this study presents the most recent data (right after the emergence of the pandemic in 2020) by employing documentary review data analysis, including grey literature. Otherwise, it has been discussed that, in UK premises, report data is

generally delayed. In this context, this study uniquely contributes to understanding and studying the most important and recent pandemic-based factors that can influence the internationalisation of Chinese alcohol brands.

5.6 Limitations of the study

Although this study is useful in numerous aspects, it is not without limitations. The first limitation relates to the use of grey literature, which is defined as unpublished work not available through conventional academic sources, as mostly it is not widely indexed or disseminated (Turris and Lund, 2017). A lack of indexing is the first weakness of grey literature, which means that it is still possible that many additional reports might exist on the Internet which are not located or extracted by the researcher. Briggs et al. (2012) argue that many relevant documents of grey literature can also be unavailable for the researcher due to protection, and, if they are not correctly catalogued, they might not be available at all. Secondly, it is also possible that certain grey literature links of online media reports would go blank as time passes, unlike published literature which is available in academic databases (Turris and Lund, 2017).

Moreover, this documentary review depended on the transparency and reliability of the information provided on sites that were publicly available (Lee and Hammant, 2022). Even though the researcher has tried his best to be as neutral as possible and minimise his subjectivity, still, it might be possible that surface opinions of the grey literature might have influenced the researcher's opinion. Lee and Hammant (2022) argue that the researcher's prior interests, readings and interpretations, such as what should be included, can affect the analysis. Briggs et al. (2012) further argue that documents themselves can be subjective. They also argue that documents might not present accurate or precise data or opinions because they might have been created to show a specific point of view, activities or events.

Another limitation of the documentary review is the methodological analysis involved, which can be time-consuming (Briggs et al., 2012). This is because reviewing grey literature might be difficult for an ordinary researcher. The reason is that the researcher is required to deeply read into the grey literature to uncover hidden meanings behind those surface meanings shown by the author. This means that the research context, as well as the researcher's position, plays a vital role in interpretation of the data (Symon and Cassell, 2012). On the one hand, this equates to the researcher's neutrality and creativity, while on the other hand it can also trigger the researcher's bias or prior interests and interpretations, which should be avoided. Reflexivity of the researcher is desirable in the documentary review analysis; however, it can be a limitation in the study if it goes against the required neutrality while interpreting data.

Lastly, this study was only designed to review internationalisation processes relevant to the UK market in relation to the key factors that play important roles in Chinese alcohol brands' internationalisation. By contrast, the demographics, economic indicators and social and cultural factors in other countries are different from the UK. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalised to other countries. Simply put, the validity and reliability of this study are limited to the UK region only. Similarly, Asian countries other than China might have to review their indicators when they plan to internationally strategise and market their alcohol brands in the UK market.

5.7 Reflective journey of doctoral enquiry

The researcher did not have any preconceived assumptions, ideas or interests while investigating the factors that play important roles in Chinese alcohol brands' internationalisation. Indeed, the researcher was continually guided by his reflexivity throughout the process of documentary review analysis (including themes identification and

modification or even deleting undesired themes) (Schon, 1989; Kinsella, 2007). The researcher principally applied King's template to set up a 'contextual constructivist' position (Madill et al., 2000). This methodology itself endorses that the researcher can make multiple interpretations by using the research context as well as his own position (Symon and Cassell, 2012). Here, the reflexivity of the researcher plays a vital role, by which the researcher can analyse data from multiple perspectives. This process invokes the reflective journey of the researcher, in which the researcher will analyse data not only from the surface, but also through his analytical insight.

The researcher's reflexivity has been underlined by Schon (1987) who says that 'In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp' (p. 42). The research is conceptualised as a straightforward linear process on that high, hard ground. Although the research process involves complex steps and is not a linear process per se, it is shown with a logical and coherent plot and presented in a clean manner. It can be said that the research findings are unproblematically and simply shown as a way of best practice, which Schon calls 'technical rationality'. This technical rationality is indeed developed due to positivism, which became popular during the nineteenth century due to the rise in technology and science (Schon, 2002). This technical rationality has its own benefits, such as establishing a hierarchy between research and practice. However, it is underpinned by a presumption that as soon as the paper is published, the research ends. Therefore, just by reporting findings, the research will be magically transformed into further enquiries. It can be said that technical rationality is a one-way street where research findings are reported as a non-problematic and simple phenomenon.

By contrast, Schon (1987) emphasises a new design based on a reflective practitioner that is centred on practice-based disciplines. For example, simple research-based prescriptions

cannot be applied to the nursing profession since it is context-dependent and complex and depends on daily situated practices. It is thus essential to relate the practitioner's own practice to the contextualisation of the research findings (Freshwater and Rolfe, 2001). It can be deduced that the researcher should not be bound to use the surface knowledge provided in the data and he must not remain aloof from the world of multiple interpretations. This is where the researcher's reflexivity or reflective research approach becomes necessary while analysing extracted data. This means the researcher should be a fully integrated individual with an insider perspective, in which his reflexivity investigates his own perspective.

The reflective journey of the researcher in the current study provided him with an extension of analysis into the deeper domains of his experience. The reflective journey allowed the researcher to go beyond the surface knowledge provided in the data to consider wider political and social contexts. The researcher analysed documentary review data, which is secondary data collected in the past: this type of qualitative data analysis revolves around investigating current debates and themes through that data which was previously published (Goodwin and Connor, 2005). In order to meaningfully analyse such secondary data, it is useful to check the interviewer's personal expectations, knowledge and experiences (Wolfinger, 2002). This also points to the fact that, in secondary data analysis, without experiencing the researcher's reflexivity, his own ideas, feelings and thoughts, if not impossible, would at least be difficult to translate into meaningful data analysis.

In the current study, when the researcher started a documentary review analysis of grey literature data, that secondary data had no extra notes to get to know the context or stance from which the data was written in the first place. This might be because that data was not intended to be used in research, but rather just opinions to be presented before a readership. This means that the researcher had an incomplete understanding of the data collection process,

such as whether the data was biased and whether it was written on the basis of preconceived ideas or the like. Additionally, some of the grey literature sources were written by more than one author. Therefore, it was hard to evaluate the opinions reflected within the sources. Another issue was that opinions were provided in the grey literature and people were made subjects of the data many times but that data did not resemble the traditional type of secondary data such as that described by Goodwin and O'Connor (2006), where a researcher interviews participants, takes notes and then analyses their responses. At the same time, it is argued that the main objective of secondary data analysis is not to pinpoint any research design or implementation issues; instead, the intention is the use of old data to explore new ideas rather than replicating the ideas represented in secondary data (Corti et al., 1995). The researcher in the current study intended to do likewise. The main aim of the study was to understand the whole background context within which the grey literature was written, such as Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, people's psychological conditions, governmental concerns and attitudes, for example.

While reading the grey literature, the researcher experienced two types of reflexivity. The first of these concerned a largely introspective meta-reflection, or a deeper-level analysis (Freshwater and Rolfe, 2001). The second was beyond a simple deeper-level analysis as it considered the political and social contexts within which the grey literature was written. Richardson (1994) also favours this stance in that we are encouraged by post-modern thought to reflexively think about research and reality by unfolding complex political and ideological agendas that are not visible in writing and practice. This stance helped the researcher to be more critical during analysis and open to new ways of examining data. This type of reflexivity helped the researcher in not only presenting the grey literature data as one precise truth, but also in deepening his understanding of the external reality. Secondly, the researcher's reflexivity ensures that secondary data analysis does not present merely a general

theory or a general view about the world; instead, it should offer an opportunity to tell the story from the researcher's eyes. The researcher does not see this process of reflexivity as some 'fiction', but rather that the process of secondary data analysis cannot be 'controlled for' and stated out as a static scientific paradigm where the researcher discovers the epistemology/ontology through a fixed set of elements of the research process including secondary data findings, methodology and the whole research process.

The most important aspect of the researcher's reflexivity-based doctoral journey is the fact that he was able to uncover hidden meanings behind the text in relation to their social and political contexts. This means that the interpretation of the researcher goes beyond simple opinions or surface meanings shown in the grey literature. This is how the researcher was able to extract particular themes from the grey literature such as wine drinking cultures, retailing studies in the UK, political and social cultures, governmental attitudes and other similar concepts. The grey literature did not explicitly specify these concepts; however, these concepts were interpreted by the researcher's reflexivity-based doctoral journey.

From an ethical standpoint, the researcher found no issues in terms of analysing the data. There were no specific ethical notes attached to the grey literature data signifying any copyright issues when using the data for research purposes. There were no audiotapes or visual recordings associated with the data that were to be systematically analysed. Goodwin and O'Connor (2006) indicate that recorded interviews can also create distortions and some unexpected interactions in traditional secondary data analysis.

The researcher understands that qualitative secondary analysis is a relatively understated method in social sciences, mostly because the secondary data analysis procedure lacks trustworthy, relevant, easily accessible and complete data (Sherif, 2018). Regarding ethical issues associated with qualitative secondary data analysis, it is argued that, although the

researcher has not undertaken face-to-face meetings with any intervention and/or participants, challenges of subject agreement and confidentiality are still associated with it (Corti and Thompson, 2004; Moore, 2007). However, this ethical challenge does not apply to the grey literature used in the present study because the grey literature did not involve any such traditional interview-related qualitative data nor did it entail any confidentiality agreements between authors and interviewees. There were no anonymity or confidentiality guidelines provided in the grey literature; therefore, the researcher was not obligated to face that ethical challenge as well. Most of the ethical challenges associated with secondary data analysis are due to the risks of anonymity, confidentiality or copyrights of using secondary data (Ruggiano and Perry, 2019). However, the grey literature had no such ethical obligations or additional types of measures to protect human subjects. Although human subjects and their opinions were involved in the grey literature, there were no such ethical obligations listed to protect or show their confidentiality.

Regarding methodological concerns, the researcher was faced the issue that secondary data extracted from the grey literature for documentary review analysis was not specifically targeted towards answering the chosen research questions. Therefore, the researcher felt as if some control over the data had been relinquished. The researcher thinks that these issues might not be faced in the case of primary data collection because that data would be collected by specifically targeting the chosen research questions. Weston et al. (2019) similarly argue that it is often the case in secondary data analysis that the data was designed to answer a different question from the currently selected research questions. Therefore, the researcher might grapple with analysing that data. Another methodological challenge that the researcher experienced in this study was the feeling that he would not be rewarded for this investigation considering that he based his analysis on someone else's data. Longo and Drazen (2016) refer

to secondary data analysis as ‘research parasites’ because the researcher does not produce new data, but rather relies on simply analysing the data collected by other researchers.

However, the researcher believes that these methodological challenges have been countered in the present study because the secondary data is not replicated in the investigation. But rather, some new striking themes have been developed from the data that was not specifically categorised for containing such themes. In this sense, despite analysing secondary data, the researcher was able to produce new high-quality findings.

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