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DISSERTATION

**POST-COVID trade barriers and global strategy in
the UK manufacturing sector: an analysis of tariffs,
protectionism and their impact on international
business growth**

**Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation
Declaration Form.**

I, Pratik Mukeshbhai Prajapati, declare that this dissertation has been composed by myself, that the work contained herein is entirely my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification, in whole or in part, except as specified.

Signature: ...P.M. PRAJAPATI.....

Date: ...01/02/2026.....

Acknowledgement

I'd like to thank the professors at University of Wales Trinity Saint David, particularly module leader for their encouragement and support of this research endeavour. This research would not have been possible without the students who volunteered to collect datasets. Furthermore, friends and family contributed to the project's success by providing ongoing support and proofreading the work throughout the project.

Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the implication of post-COVID trade barriers on the international business strategy and development in the UK manufacturing sector. The purpose of the study was to determine the effect of higher tariffs, protectionism, and export related constraints on the internationalisation strategies as well as competitive positioning of firms.

For evaluating the results, a mixed-method research design was chosen, which involves primary quantitative data and secondary qualitative analysis. The primary data were gathered using a structured questionnaire which was filled by 100 executives and managers of the UK manufacturing companies. The questionnaire contained 12 close-ended questions covering the perceptions of tariffs, protectionist policies, export issues, and strategic response in the post-pandemic trade setting. The descriptive and inferential statistical tools were used to analyse quantitative data in order to find out the major trends and associations. The analysis of secondary qualitative data was based on a systematic review of the academic literature, industry reports, and policy documents to help in interpreting the results of the quantitative analysis.

The findings revealed that high tariffs and protectionist policies had a major impact of limiting access to the global market by UK manufacturing companies. These obstacles not only disrupted supply chain designs but also escalated operational expenses as well as diminished global competitiveness forcing companies to re-evaluate market entry options, sourcing options, and growth priorities.

The research concludes that post-COVID trade restrictions had an adverse impact on the internationalization and strategic development of the UK manufacturing companies. It established that the companies were more focused in adjusting their international strategies in reaction to the pressure of protectionism, and the adaptive strategic planning to remain international competitors within a limited global trading system.

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List of Abbreviations

AI: Artificial Intelligence

CPTPP: Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership

COVID-19: Coronavirus Disease 2019

EU: European Union

FDI: Foreign Direct Investment

FTA: Free Trade Agreement

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

IoT: Internet of Things

ONS: Office for National Statistics

RBV: Resource-Based View

SME: Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

UK: United Kingdom

WTO: World Trade Organization

Glossary of Key Terms

Trade Barriers

International trade restrictions that are in form of tariffs, quotas, and regulations imposed by the government.

Tariffs

With the aim of raising prices of imported goods and protecting domestic industries, taxes are levied on imported goods.

Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs)

Other forms of trade restrictions those that are not in the form of tariffs such as the delay of customs, regulatory requirements and technical standards.

Protectionism

The economic policy was directed at protecting local industries against international competition by using trade barriers.

Trade Environment after Covid-19

The disruptions, the changes in policies, and the economic recovery that followed the COVID-19 pandemic formed the global trade in its new form.

Internationalisation Strategy

Business plans that companies use in the expansion of their business and competition in foreign markets.

Supply Chain Resilience

Supply chains are capable of anticipating, adapting and recovering to disruptions.

Market Diversification

Diversification to other geographical markets so as to avoid reliance on one region or trading partner.

Nearshoring

Subcontracting to the home country to lessen the supply chain risks and barriers to trade.

Digitalisation

The digital technologies that are used to enhance business processes, efficiency and international trade activities.

Institutional Theory

A theory that explains the influence of the formal rules, regulations and norms on organisational behaviour.

Resource-Based View (RBV)

A strategic management theory emphasized on internal resources and capabilities as competitive advantage sources.

Trade Policy Uncertainty

A lack of stability in government trade policies that raises risks on companies that are in international business.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

According to the picture below, the tendencies in industrial manufacturing and trade indicate the effects of the external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic. As can be seen in the graph, industrial production and trade volumes have sharply decreased in the initial stages of the pandemic, and since then, they have steadily increased, the two indices were on an upward trend as economies started to adapt. The interdependence between industrial production and trade is highlighted by the similar trends highlighted. Due to the reduction of industrial production, trade was also reduced, highlighting the global supply chain disruptions caused by the pandemic.

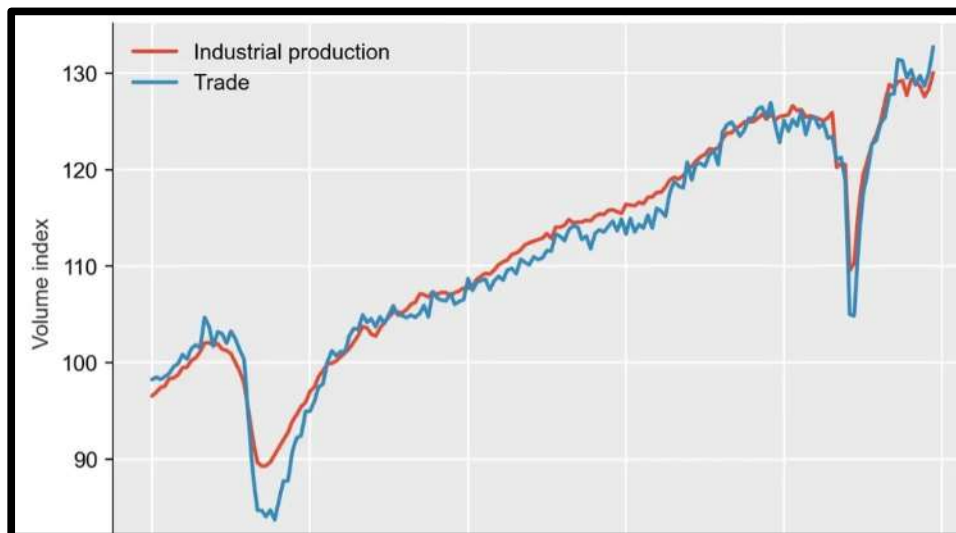


Figure 1.1: International Trade In COVID-19 Pandemic

(Source: oecd, 2022)

The international trade environment has witnessed massive changes over the last few years, and the manufacturing industry of the UK has been affected immensely by these changes. The COVID-19 pandemic that occurred in the world on an unprecedented scale has brought a row of challenges that have changed the nature of international trade. This has caused a scenario where tariffs, protectionism, and trade barriers have become the point of focus (Salsabila et al., 2025). With its manufacturing sector being one of the pillars in its economy, the UK has had a significant problem of negotiating these trade restrictions and acclimatizing with the new dynamics of international trade. The pandemic did not only initiate an economic recession but also re-examined the

vulnerability of global supply chains compelling governments to rethink their trade policy (Mishra et al., 2025).

1.2 Problem Statement

The research question that examined in the study is how trade barriers and protectionist policies that have emerged following the COVID affect the development of international business in the UK manufacturing industry. The pandemic has caused a lot of disturbance in the global trade which has been increased by the increase in tariffs and protectionism policies practiced by different countries. This has created a complicated landscape for the UK manufacturers who are currently being faced by a myriad of trade barriers which were not as numerous in the past before the pandemic (Ghazalian, 2025). The ambiguity of these obstacles has ensured that such factors have not made it easy as the UK manufacturers find their way to the international markets; they have found it hard to cope with the new regulations and how to continue to grow despite these challenges.

Although there is extensive literature on the macroeconomic trade shocks experienced because of COVID-19, few studies have formally investigated the direct effect of post-pandemic trade barriers and protectionism policies on the UK manufacturing industry. Specifically, the nature of effects of these constraints on international competitiveness, strategic decision making and business expansion lacks sufficient clarity. This disjunction limits effective policy-making and informed managerial reactions in the post-COVID trade country. The study aims to investigate the impact of these trade barriers on the international trade of the UK and the manufacturing sector and how business firms can plan to address them and promote growth in the post-COVID era.

1.3 Aim and objectives

1.3.1 Aim

The study is aimed at examining the impact of post-Covid trade volatility and protectionist policies associated with international business expansion strategies focusing on the UK manufacturing sector.

1.3.2 Objectives

RO1: To test the effect of trade barriers that come after COVID on the competitiveness of the UK manufacturing sector in the global markets.

RO2: To address the question of how protectionist policies influence the trade policy of UK manufacturers in the post-pandemic period.

RO3: To evaluate how the current policies made by the UK government are effective to meet challenges of trade barriers and protectionism in the manufacturing industry.

RO4: To assess the tactics used by the manufacturers in the UK to meet the new trade restrictions and their effectiveness in maintaining long term expansion.

1.4 Research Question

RQ1: What effect have trade barriers following the COVID had on competitiveness of the UK manufacturing sector in the global markets?

RQ2: How have protectionist acts affected the UK manufacturer trade strategies since the pandemic?

RQ3: To what extent have UK government policies been effective in addressing the post-COVID threats of trade barriers and protectionism in the manufacturing industry?

RQ4: How have UK manufacturers adjusted to the new trade environment, and which strategies have been used and how effective have they been in capability of supporting long-term growth?

1.5 Relevance of Research and Its Contribution to Existing Knowledge

The study is very applicable to the post-COVID global economy where the manufacturing industry is important in the process of the national economic recovery and growth. This new wave of trade restriction and protectionism and geopolitical uncertainty of the post-pandemic period have begun to define the international trade environment (Capello et al., 2025). The manufacturing industry is conventionally one of the major industries in the country, and the UK is currently grappling with an array of challenges in dealing with this changing environment. The study add to the existing body of knowledge by offering an in-depth analysis of the specific effect of these trade barriers on the manufacturing industry in the UK, the manner of how protectionist policies have been used in shaping the business strategies and the efficiency of government intervention. Also, by shedding

light on the approaches the UK manufacturers are undertaking to address these issues, the study environment. Enable information on how companies can capitalize on the world and survive in a more protectionist environment002E.

The research also added to the general scholarly discussion of international trade, especially regarding the post-pandemic recovery. Most studies have been done on the macroeconomic effects of COVID-19, and little has been done on how trade barriers and protectionism can affect the UK manufacturing industry (Kumar, 2025). Through these issues analysed in terms of strategic management, the research bridges an urgent gap in literature and offers policymakers, business leaders, and scholars with a better perspective of the complexities that are confronting the UK manufacturers in the global trade setting.

A great change in the global manufacturing industry and the UK has been experienced because of a combination of many interdependent variables including changing geopolitical dynamics, technology, consumer needs, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Sikiru et al., 2025). These changes have put even greater strain on manufacturers who are seeking to adapt to the globalized market. The fact that many trade barriers, including the protectionist measures, have been aggravated during and after the pandemic has yet again complicated the ability to successfully launch the UK manufacturers on the international scale. The research attempts to aid the strategic management practice by addressing these issues in the context of the post-COVID trade barriers and providing an understanding of how companies can adjust to and mitigate the impact of these barriers.

The strategic management theories that focus on the inside and outside forces that influence the performance of an organization play a key role in deciphering how UK manufacturers are responding to these forces. Strategic management traditionally has given the companies tools to analyse the competitive environment, arrive at sound decisions, and allocate resources to optimized results that maximize their long-term objectives (Sangare, 2025). Nevertheless, the emergence of protectionism and the imposition of trade barriers after the pandemic constitute new challenges which demand new models and frameworks. The study can, hence, help in creating new strategic management paradigms that would be more responsive to the prevailing economic environment of the UK manufacturers. It assist in insight into how the companies can change their strategies considering the changing trade policies and economic uncertainty.

To the policymakers, the study presents evidence-based suggestions on how to maneuver around the increasing protectionist trends that have been witnessed in the world. With the UK government having been accused of misunderstanding its approach to post-Brexit trade relations and the lack of understanding of the actual nature of the hindrances that its manufacturing industry encounters, a better insight into the particular obstacles help the government gain a clearer picture of the types of problems it has to address (D'Ambrosio and Lavoratori, 2025). Moreover, the study can be relevant to the larger discourse in global trade policy by mentioning the possible trade-offs between protectionism and global market integration.

The UK manufacturing sector also gained a lot in terms of business leaders through the insights given in this research. Manufacturers must re-strategize to stay afloat in the global trade world. Protection is also cost adding and can restrict access to foreign markets, as well as supply chain dynamics. With such insights, the UK manufacturers are able to streamline their plans to be agile, competitive and be flexible as this economic uncertainty sets in (Sabila, 2025).

1.6 Structure of the dissertation



Figure 1.6: Structure of the dissertation

(Source: Self-Created)

The outlay of this dissertation is aimed at a comprehensive study of the research subject by first explaining in detail the available literature on post-COVID trade barriers and protectionism and their effects in the UK manufacturing industry (Jaswal et al., 2025). The second chapter, the Literature Review, is a critical assessment of past studies on the impact of trade barriers and protectionism on international trade and the manufacturing sector with reference and attention on the UK. It also looks at how governmental policies have influenced trade strategies and the strategies that the businesses have followed to penetrate the post-pandemic trade environment.

Chapter 3 also describes the research methodology, including the secondary qualitative research method, particularly thematic analysis. The process of data collection, that includes the selection of relevant data and documents and methods of analysis, be described in this chapter.

The 4 chapters are an explanation of the results of the data analysis, and the key themes which have been identified during the thematic analysis are presented. These findings are interpreted in Chapter 5 in the Discussion section in terms of the research questions and what they mean to the UK manufacturers and a recommendation on how to overcome the challenges detected. Lastly, Chapter 6 includes a Conclusion that presents the main findings and comments on the research procedure and provides future research recommendations.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical model of this research relies on three fundamental theories that can be used to elucidate the relationship of post COVID trade barriers and its effects on the UK manufacturing industry. These theories are:

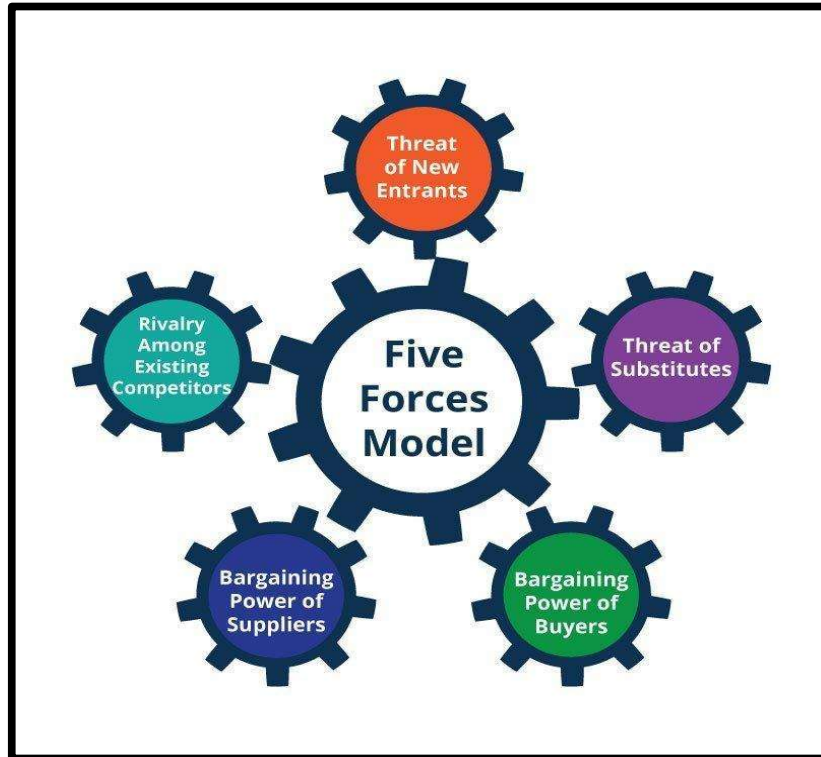


Figure 1.7.1: Porter's Five Forces Framework:

(Source: Mishra et al., 2025).

Porter's Five Forces Framework: This model applied to evaluate the competition forces in the global trading environment and how trade barriers after COVID impact the competitiveness of the manufacturers in the UK (Mishra et al., 2025). It aids in investigating the bargaining power of suppliers and buyers, the threat of new entrants, the threat of substitute products, and the level of rivalry in the industry under the trade protectionist environment. Moreover, Porter's Five Forces is incorporated within this study to evaluate how post-COVID trade barriers recalibrate competitive intensity, supplier power, and market entry conditions impacting the global competitiveness of UK-based manufacturers.

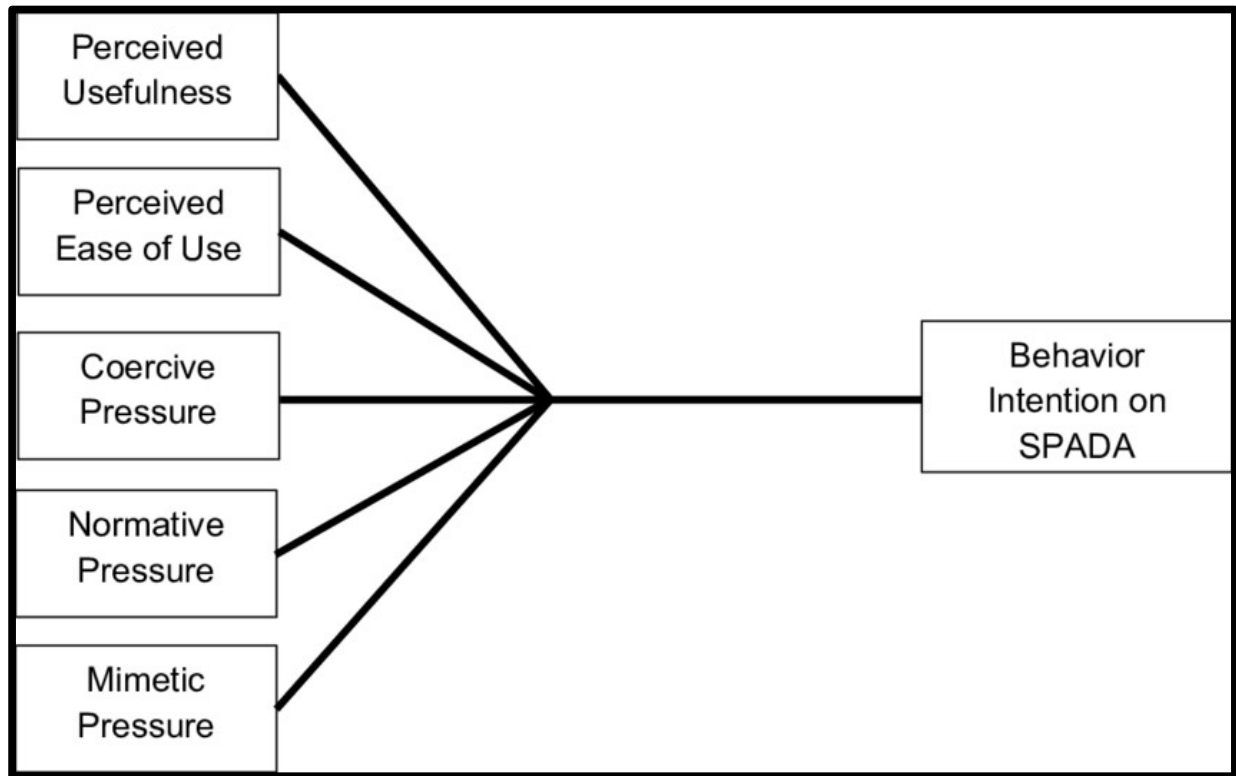


Figure 1.7.2: Institutional Theory

(Source: Ghazalian, 2025).

Institutional Theory: This theory used to investigate how institutional pressures, including government regulations, international trade agreements and protectionist policies influence the strategies of the UK manufacturers (Ghazalian, 2025). Institutional Theory is integrated for examining how post-COVID regulatory changes, tariffs, and protectionist policies influence internationalisation behaviour and strategic decision-making of UK-based manufacturing firms.

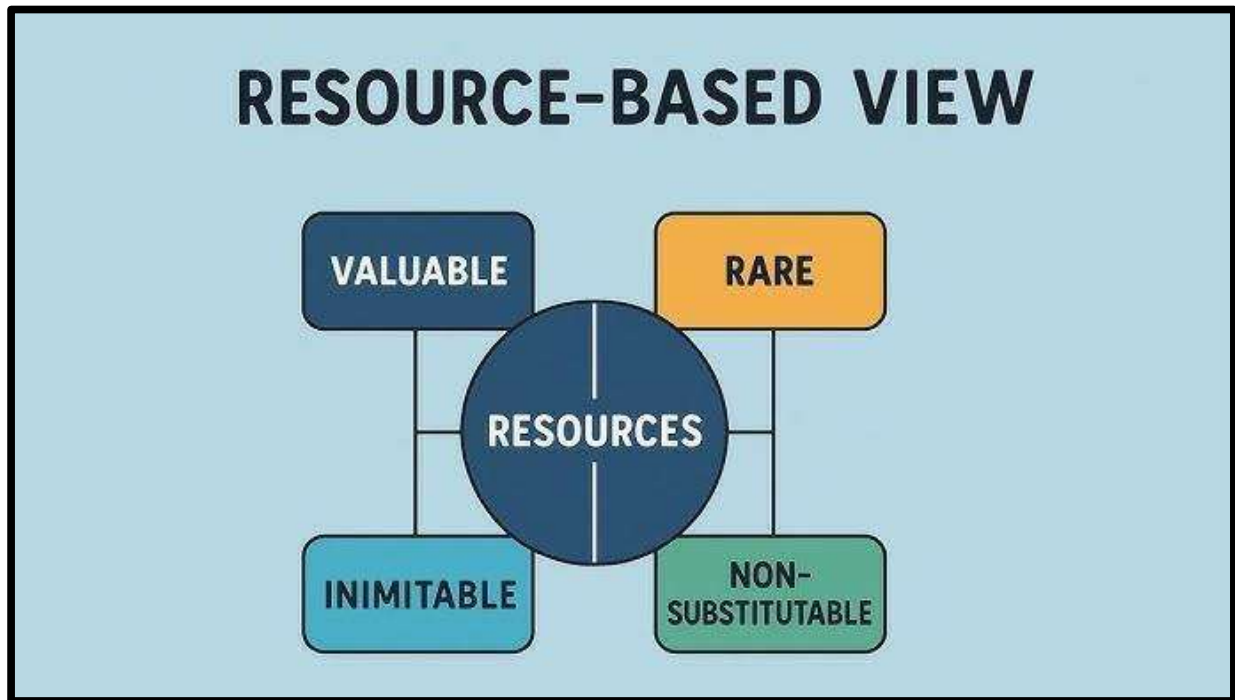


Figure 1.7.3: Resource-Based View (RBV)

(Source: Capello et al., 2025).

Resource-Based View (RBV): RBV utilized to determine the relationship between the internal resources and capabilities of the UK manufacturers and how these resources and capabilities can be utilised to meet the challenge of post-COVID trade barriers (Capello et al., 2025). It examines how strategic resources in the form of technology, innovation and human capital can help in maintaining competitive advantage in the name of protectionism. However, RBV is applied for assessing how firm-specific capabilities, such as innovation and digital resources, allow UK manufacturers to alleviate trade barriers and obtain long-term growth. Collectively, the theories give a detailed framework of how the relationship involving post-COVID trade barriers, protectionism, and the strategies used by the UK manufacturers in the global market can be understood.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Chapter introduction

Literature review is defined as a review of relevant literature published on a topic. The chapter is a critical review of the available literature on the consequences of post-COVID and post-Brexit upheavals on supply chain strategies in the UK manufacturing industry. In the form of key debates, Su and Svetlicinii (2021), argues that governments imposed tariffs to prioritise economic security in the post-COVID period where Contractor (2021), refers towards high global inflation in the post-pandemic era as resulting into increased volatility in global trade.

2.2 Global trade in the post-COVID era

According to Setyadi *et al.*, (2025), global trade in the post-COVID era has gone through a lot of structural changes, characterised by a focus on resilience and supply chain reconfiguration. Diversification of the supply chain has been a key change observed from businesses in the post-pandemic period. This has been done to ensure businesses no longer remain vulnerable to supply chain shocks led by similar types of crises in the future. On the other hand, Gigauri (2021) argued that businesses have increased their focus on digitalisation in the post-pandemic era to become more efficient and competitive. Therefore, diversification is largely focusing upon supply chain risk through spreading of operations and sourcing against any disruptions. Contrasting to this digitalisation has been found in improving competitiveness and visibility through technologies like data analytics and e-commerce.

2.2.1 The shock of the pandemic on global trade

As opined by Vo and Tran (2021), the COVID-19 pandemic delivered a shock to global trade, halting production as well as cross-border trade activities. Uncertainty over the pandemic resulted in a drastic drop in demand in the global market. On top of these, restrictions imposed by governments across the globe led to a halt in global trade. As per the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the volume of global merchandise trade dropped by 5.3% in 2020 (World Trade Organization, 2021). The temporary shutdown of factories was a factor in such a drastic fall in global merchandise trade. Besides, disruption in transportation also contributed to the fall in global trade.

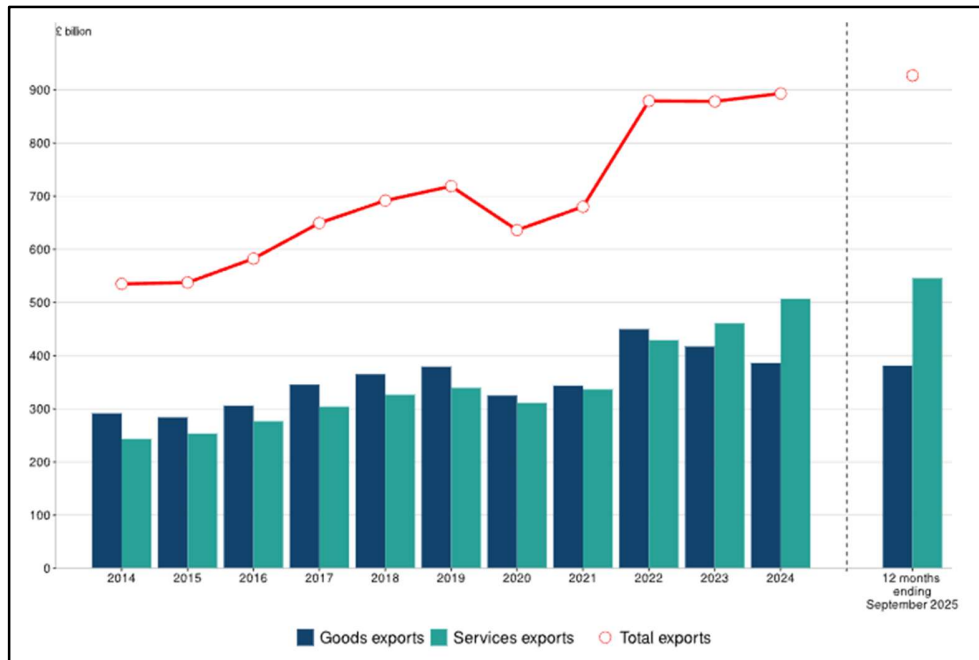


Figure 2.2.1: Export of goods and services from the UK

(Source: UK Government, 2025)

It can be seen in the above figure that both goods and services exports dropped in 2020 for the UK (UK Government, 2025). However, it is also evident that exports of the country started to recover from 2021 onwards. A major jump in the exports of goods and services was seen in 2022. Resulting to this shifted trade patterns, UK policy responses had been encouraged into supply security and strategic investment through digitalisation. Here HMRC's digital tax system, EU Settlement Scheme can be exemplified.

2.2.2 Recovery in global trade practices

Recovery was seen in the global trade in 2021, following rollouts of vaccination and a slight increase in market demand. WTO, in a report, claimed that the global merchandise trade was projected to grow 10.8% in 2021 (World Trade Organization, 2021). Multiple factors, such as supply chain diversification and near-shoring, resulted in such a rebound after the pandemic. As stated by Meyer *et al.*, (2023), supply chain disruption was a major impact of the pandemic on businesses. Resulting in this, firms are increasingly found in adopting near-shoring, supplier diversification strategies which directs towards new trade realities more than a restoration of previous globalisation patterns.

2.3 Trade barriers in the international business in the post-COVID era

In the post-COVID era, countries across the globe imposed many trade barriers to secure national interests. Bown (2023) claimed that countries started pushing for supply chain resilience, leading to the imposition of trade barriers. Rising economic nationalism was also a factor behind such growing trade barriers globally. Regarding uneven trade barriers trade intensity has been found as varied in all across sectors where health-related goods found stricter control than non-essential type. Hence, this uneven barrier shows the weakness of WTO governance as well as public health concerns which create asymmetric trade impacts across industries.

2.3.1 Rising tariffs as trade barriers for trade after the pandemic

In the opinion of Su and Svetlicinii (2021), governments imposed tariffs to prioritise economic security while ignoring trade liberalisation policies in the post-COVID period. Countries increased tariffs while putting restrictions on exports for critical items. These steps were taken on a temporary basis in the aftermath of the crisis. However, such measures have now been embedded into national policies of countries even after the pandemic is over. Song and Agarwal (2023) argued that countries have moved to protectionist strategies from trade liberalisation in this post-pandemic era. Consequently, there is an increase in the cost and uncertainty over global trade and commerce activities. In some contexts tariffs are applied as short-term tools in protecting domestic industries like as in acute trade disputes. But, in many countries or cases tariffs are found as a long term strategic instrument which advances geopolitical objectives and influences global market outcome too.

2.3.2 Effects of non-tariff barriers on trade

Non-tariff barriers in the form of delays in customs practices and changes in regulations led to restrictions on global trade activities. In the words of Alazzam (2021), non-tariff barriers are impeding global trade among countries. There is a rising cost for meeting compliance in trade activities. However, countries are negotiating non-tariff barriers with one another to boost trade. As articulated by French and Zylkin (2024), there is signing of free-trade agreements (FTA) between countries for the purpose of increasing trade. Nonetheless, small firms may find it tough to negotiate non-tariff barriers with regulators in a country. Larger firms are found in getting advantage from FTA regulations due to greater resources and higher productivity. Contrastingly, SMEs are found in getting increased entry chances into newer markets with greater export growth if trade costs decline. This also limits the breadth of export in comparison with lodge firms.

2.3.3 Volatile trade policies across the globe

In the post-COVID era, there are higher levels of volatility in the global trade environment. Multiple factors, such as geopolitical tensions, rising inflation and supply chain issues, have contributed to volatility in global trade. As opined by Contractor (2021), high global inflation in the post-pandemic era has resulted in increased volatility in global trade. High inflation translated into weakening demand in the market. On the other hand, Góes and Bekkers (2022) cited geopolitical tensions that lead to constant changes in trade policies. As per this literature, disruptive factors are stated as reduced diffusion of technology and ideas, increased trade barriers and fragmentation of global economic blocs.

2.4 Increased protectionism in global trade practices

In the post-COVID era, countries focus on protectionist policies to safeguard their domestic businesses. According to Yang and Chan (2023), trade wars between countries have escalated after the pandemic. As a result of trade wars, the global supply chain has faced disruptions. The trade war between the US and China has caused disruptions in the global supply chain (Hayat *et al.*, 2024). Imports and exports of goods between these two countries were impacted, strengthening protectionist policies worldwide. Apart from the US-China trade conflict, the EU-China trade issue over EVs is another prominent example of growing trade protectionism. In 2023, the EU launched an anti-subsidy probe China's exports of EV into Europe to assess if tariffs should be imposed on such exports (Reuters, 2025).

2.4.1 Protectionist policies

In the words of Cherif and Hasanov (2024), protectionist policies refer to the imposition of tariffs, quotas and subsidies for the purpose of restricting trade activities. Tariffs are taxes charged by governments on imported goods. This can influence imports in a country; high tariffs discourage importers from importing goods. On the other hand, the government's setting limits on the import of certain goods is called a quota (Schaefer and Wolf, 2025). Apart from these, as part of protectionist measures, governments often offer subsidies to domestic firms so that they can boost their production. The goal behind this is to reduce dependencies on the import of goods from foreign countries.

2.4.2 Growing emphasis on national interest

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments across the globe have focused on protectionist policies over safeguarding national interests. According to Cherif and Hasanov

(2024), governments introduced protectionist measures to cut reliance on overseas suppliers. Additionally, there was a focus on protecting jobs by implementing such protectionist measures. Similar to this view, Chen *et al.*, (2022) argued that the reshoring strategy was applied by businesses in the post-COVID era to create jobs in the domestic market. Nonetheless, as countries started to adopt a reshoring strategy, they tend to lose the benefit of specialisation that can be gained from receiving supplies from overseas markets. Each market has specialisation in different areas. For example, Taiwan has expertise in developing high-quality semiconductors at a large-scale. Hence, switching to other suppliers may lead to compromise on quality of such items.

2.4.3 Fall in multilateral trade agreements

Since there has been a growing emphasis on trade protectionism, multilateral trade cooperation has been impacted. Caballero and Arbiol (2022) mentioned that there were fewer multilateral business agreements after the pandemic was over. In addition to this, countries signed agreements considering their national interests and domestic needs. As opined by Alam *et al.*, (2021), most countries in the post-COVID era have adopted the resolve to become self-reliant. There has been a focus on domestic production, making trade agreements with overseas countries redundant. Contrary to this, Harada and Nishitatenno (2021) argued that countries are signing FTAs (Free Trade Agreements) to avoid issues of frictions over trade. FTAs offer countries free access for their goods to other markets.

2.5 Impact of trade barriers on the manufacturing practices in the UK

Manufacturing practices in the UK were affected due to trade barriers introduced in the post-COVID phase. Being operated in an international value chain, manufacturing firms in the UK are vulnerable to trade protectionism, characterised by tariffs and quotas. According to Bailey *et al.*, (2023), trade barriers increased the cost of operations for manufacturers located in the UK. Apart from an increase in the operational cost, export plans of the manufacturers were disrupted because of trade barriers. In the UK, SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) dominate the manufacturing sector (Office for National Statistics, 2024). Therefore, increased trade barriers have made such SMEs vulnerable to such trade barriers. On the other hand, on a sectoral level, automotive and engineering industries in the UK have faced the most impact of tariffs. On the contrary, companies operating in the pharma sector have been least affected by tariffs.

2.5.1 Export from UK manufacturers

There has been a decline in exports from UK manufacturers in the post-COVID era. In January 2021, there was a fall of 2.3% in monthly manufacturing in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2021). In the view of Handley *et al.*, (2025), high tariffs have restricted exports and imports of countries. There is a fall in profits of manufacturers in the UK due to declining exports. Referring to the study of McCann *et al.*, (2023), the study evaluates how the industrial and regional policy of the UK has been reformed due to the twin effects of COVID-19 and Brexit. The paper demonstrates the constraining influence of policy fragmentation, inadequate local capacity and absence of joined-up governance, which are facilitating the UK to implement targeted interventions in the industrial sector as a response to regional need differentials and sectoral exposure to international trade shocks. Tracing of policy changes helps convincingly to support this diagnosis, and it is useful because it places the post-pandemic trade friction (tariff and non-tariff burdens) in a wider framework of governance failure. The strength of the literature is in the connection of the macro policy structure with the results of firms at the level and in the provision of viable priorities to enhance the regional capacity and coordination. Although the study focuses more on institutional reform, which weaker treatment of firm heterogeneity. Therefore, Harris (2021) refers to a complementary problem, such as firm-level productivity distribution and how the pandemic could change the frontier/laggard relationships behind aggregate productivity. The study found that COVID-19 has dramatically changed the pre-existing divide between high productivity frontier firms and less productive laggards, but rather, the pandemic seems to have increased the selection pressures that favour flexible and digitally capable firms and temporarily retain less productive incumbents through support mechanisms. This micro-level reading concentrates on the mechanisms of trade and health shock transformation to productive results, the mechanisms of different ways of survival, reallocation of resources and the use of digital technologies.

2.5.2 Access to the global market

Manufacturers in the UK faced a lack of access to the global market in the post-COVID era. According to Norouzi (2021), there were restrictions on imports from overseas markets. Consequently, manufacturers from the UK found it challenging to maintain their operations in overseas markets. High tariffs increased the cost of finished goods in overseas markets, discouraging manufacturers in the UK from exporting their goods. In the opinion of Su and

Svetlicinii (2021), quotas were introduced by countries to block imports. These were limiting access to UK manufacturers in the international market. As a combining effect of tariffs, non-tariffs and regulations, there has been a drop in trade activities of the UK in the post-COVID era. Moreover, there has been a switch in the trade destinations of the country due to such increased levels of restrictions.

2.6 Supply chain issues in the manufacturing sector of the UK

Referring to Moradlou *et al.*, (2022), the study offers a history-driven investigation of UK manufacturing about post-Brexit back-shoring plans. Based on the experience of earlier reshoring waves, the authors state that UK companies must not implement reactive and short-term relocation decisions, but develop the ability-based back-shoring based on long-term competitiveness. The study contribution, summarised as reshoring, is not always the surety of resilience, but should be backed by investment in skills, technology, and integration of suppliers. This is an objection to naive accounts, according to which localisation is a panacea for supply chain risk. Nevertheless, this study is somewhat restricted by Brexit and, therefore, is less involved with pandemic-specific operational disruptions, including unexpected demand shock and international logistics lockdown. As Brexit and COVID-19 are interconnected in practice, Moradlou *et al.*, (2022) perceive them as discrete structural shocks to a large extent. This generates a gap in concept because the encounter between the change of trade policy and uncertainty caused by the pandemic is the core of modern UK manufacturing problems. However, the paper has a solid strategic background as it focuses on path dependency and the lessons learnt on industrial restructuring in history.

Contrasting this, Hasan, Islam and Ishrat, (2022) concentrate specifically on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on multinationals based in the UK in the industrial sector. Their research points out that border closures, labour shortages, and transportation delays affected the schedules of global sourcing and production. The major strength of this paper is that it takes a firm-level approach to show how multinational enterprises suffered the trickle effects of interconnected supply networks. The authors emphasise that the supply chains of firms that had been highly globalised and optimised in costs were over-exposed to disruption. Although Hasan, Islam and Ishrat, (2022) list the vulnerabilities, the analysis is rather descriptive rather than prescriptive. The research identifies the issues but does not offer much theory combination or strategic approaches to reduction. It has less focus on long-term structural change, such as supply chain redesign or

industrial policy alignment, than Moradlou *et al.*, (2022). This undermines the contribution made by the paper to the strategic supply chain theory; however, it is useful in the context of providing a perspective on the operating realities of UK manufacturers during the pandemic.

Therefore, Raj *et al.*, (2022) provide a more detailed and theoretically based analysis of supply chain mitigation measures during and after COVID-19. Their work summarises the evidence in several industries and offers an organised table of resilience strategies, such as diversification, digitalisation, collaboration, and flexibility. One of the contributions that can be noted is the transformation of efficiency-driven supply chain models to resilience-oriented models. The authors believe that post-COVID supply chains should be cost-effective and, at the same time, be robust, visible, and flexible.

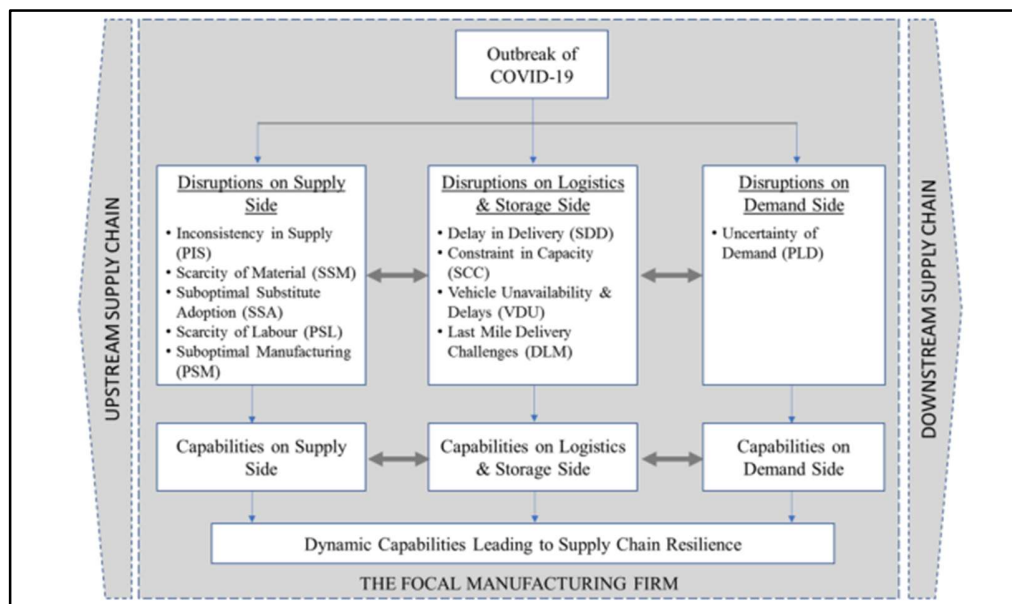


Figure 2.6.1: Framework of supply chain challenge

(Source: Raj *et al.*, 2022)

The study is in integrative nature, which transcends theory and practice. The paper clearly acknowledges that disruption is no longer an exception but a chronic situation, and that it has to be systemically redesigned, but not fixed in an incremental way. Nevertheless, the international nature of the study is also a weakness because it does not give specific attention to the UK institutional, regulatory, or post-Brexit trade constraints.

Supporting this, Alabi and Ngwenyama (2023) explore the food supply chains, which have gone through an acute shock in the COVID-19 pandemic. In spite of the fact that the area of study is mainly on food security, the research has transferable implications to the manufacturing chain of supply in general. According to the authors, COVID-19 demonstrated the visibility of the existing inefficiencies in global supply chain governance and especially the dependence on linear and centralised systems. They promote a smarter supply chain that is defined by digitalisation, decentralisation, and real-time information exchange. The main advantage of the research is that the focus is on systemic change instead of the firm-level reactions. The authors expand the scope of data analysis by connecting supply chain disruptions to such social outcomes as food insecurity to examine societal resilience instead of the operational performance. Collectively, these studies indicate that UK manufacturing strategy should move beyond cost-driven globalisation into long term resilience. It requires digitalisation, supply chain redesign and supplier integration under intertwined pandemic and Brexit uncertainties.

2.7 Obstacles faced by UK manufacturers

Manufacturing firms in the UK focused more on making structural adjustments as part of responding to trade barriers. These structural changes include diversification of markets, adopting risk management approaches and restructuring of operations. Du and Shepotylo (2022) claimed UK manufacturers focused on diversifying their markets in the post-COVID period to tackle the challenges of trade barriers. On the other hand, Martínez-Muñoz (2025) cited that nearshoring and supplier diversification strategies were employed by businesses to minimise the threats of trade barriers. Apart from market diversification and restructuring of operations, UK manufacturers adopted risk management approaches to mitigate the challenge of trade barriers. Based on the strategies suggested in the studies, market diversification seems to be most effective for UK manufacturers to manage the issues of trade restrictions and protectionism. This is because manufacturers may avoid high tariffs with this particular strategy.

2.7.1 Market diversification

In the post-COVID era, UK manufacturers focused more on non-EU (European Union) markets. This was also because of trade frictions as the UK left the EU through Brexit.

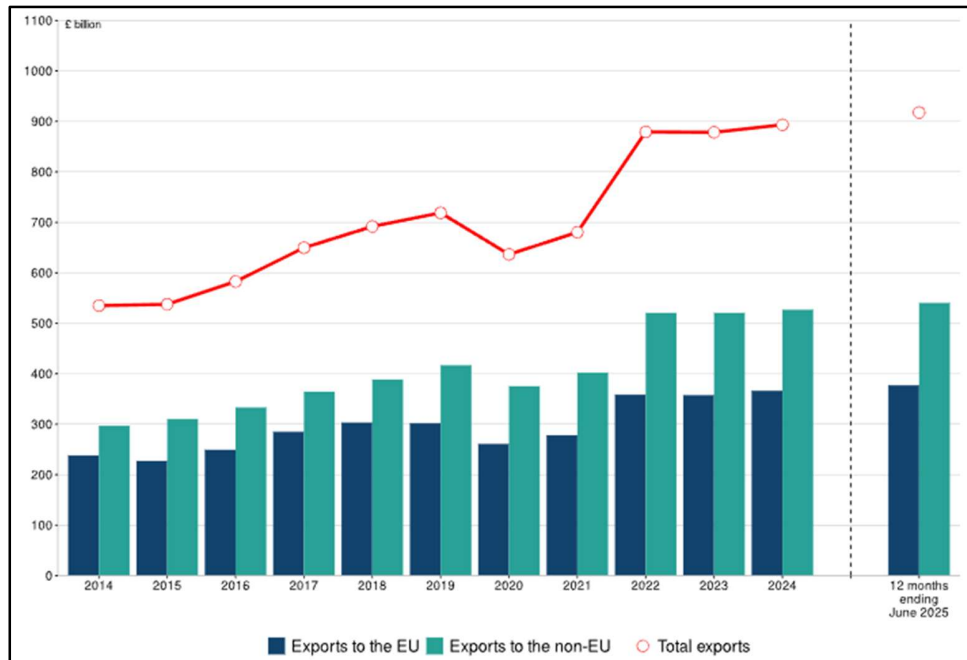


Figure 2.7.1: Growing UK exports to non-EU countries

(Source: Department for Business and Trade, 2025)

As shown in the above figure, there has been steady growth in UK exports to non-EU countries. Particularly, in 2021, exports from the UK to non-EU countries were worth £400 billion (Department for Business and Trade, 2025). Next year, in 2022, the exports directed to non-EU countries rose to over £500 billion. During the same period, exports to EU countries rose to £358 billion from £278 billion.

Nonetheless, such a transition may not be smooth, considering regulatory pressure and lack of knowledge in new markets. As stated by Hasan *et al.*, (2024), entering into new markets may require brands to adapt to the preferences of local customers. In addition to this, businesses need to comply with the regulatory norms in new markets to operate smoothly. Harel (2025) shared another view that small firms may face difficulty in expanding into new markets in comparison to large firms. Managing compliance and adapting to the preferences of local customers may be difficult for small firms due to a lack of resources, especially financial resources. However, in the long-run, the UK manufacturing companies may lose their competitiveness on the EU market. Instead, they may need to focus on dealing with higher degree of market competition in non-EU markets.

2.7.2 Restructure of operations

Restructuring of operations was done by manufacturers in the UK to reduce the impact of post-COVID trade barriers. This restructuring was primarily done in the domain of supply chain management. UK manufacturers focused on a buffer inventory strategy to ensure they can keep up their production. In the words of Mwangola *et al.*, (2024), buffer inventory refers to having additional stocks so that supply chain issues and sudden rises in market demand can be managed. In a survey, it was found that 84% of manufacturers in the UK emphasised effective supply chain planning as their response to the pandemic (University of Warwick, 2020). On the other hand, 55% of manufacturers in the country used their inventory as a primary buffer against supply chain disruption created because of the pandemic. Apart from focusing on the strategy of maintaining buffer inventory, UK manufacturers prioritised seeking alternative suppliers for supplies of necessary raw materials. However, UK manufacturers may need to make trade-offs as they restructure their operations. Trade-offs may happen between efficiency and resilience. As opined by Attah *et al.*, (2023), it may be expensive for businesses to restructure their business. Besides, UK manufacturers may witness an increase in their cost of operations because of focusing on restructuring. The study highlights emerging tools such as cloud computing, AI and digital ecosystems along with the role of transformational leadership in fostering adaptability and innovation. Although the study has lack of empirical evidence or sector specific examples.

2.7.3 Adoption of risk management approaches

In the post-COVID era, UK manufacturers have adopted risk management approaches to manage the issues raised due to trade barriers. According to Georgiou and Pantos (2022), scenario planning is concerned with the creation and analysis of plausible future situations to strengthen resilience. UK manufacturers applied scenario planning to identify risks and design strategies to manage them. However, small firms in the UK may lack the resources to utilise risk assessment. In case of identifying risks, small manufacturers may have less to do to mitigate such risks.

2.8 Role of technology and innovation in the adaptations of trade practices

In the post-COVID period, manufacturers in the UK emphasised adopting technology and innovation to maintain their trade practices amid volatility. Adoption of digitalisation was central to responding to trade barriers from manufacturing firms. Tripathi (2021) argued that there has been rapid digitalisation in the post-COVID era. Businesses adopted digital technologies, such as AI, cloud computing and IoT, to improve their operations and processes. In this regard, Margherita

et al., (2023) claimed that the use of digital technologies can help businesses to respond to market changes. Nonetheless, cost and lack of skills may be some barriers for small manufacturers in embracing digitalisation and innovation in their business practices. Particularly, SMEs may find it challenging to integrate technology for higher degree of efficiency in trade practices amid a volatile environment because of lack of resources.

2.8.1 Embracing digitalisation

In the words of Obikhod *et al.*, (2023), digitalisation refers to the use of digital technologies to transform business processes. In the post-COVID period, supply delays, enhanced compliance and increased complexities have forced manufacturers to adopt digitalisation. Purnomo (2023) mentioned that there has been an increased use of e-commerce platforms by businesses to reach international customers in the post-pandemic period. E-commerce is perceived to be a cost-effective means for businesses to expand into the global market.

Apart from e-commerce, the use of electronic documentation is another example of UK manufacturing firms embracing digitalisation in the post-COVID era to manage the challenges of trade barriers. As opined by Vukman *et al.*, (2024), the use of an electronic data interchange system can help fast-track customer processing while keeping records. These efforts were made to streamline processes to avoid delays in the supply of goods. Countering this viewpoint, Telukdarie *et al.*, (2023) asserted that the lack of skill is a challenge to embracing digitalisation in business operations. This may be a challenge for small manufacturing firms having a lack of skilled workforce. Moreover, financial constraints may be an issue for such small manufacturing firms.

2.8.2 Use of emerging technologies to make trade efficient

Emerging technologies in the 21st century have facilitated the digitalisation efforts of UK manufacturing firms. Bharadiya (2023) affirmed that businesses are adopting AI to improve their organisational processes. With the utilisation of this technology, businesses can optimise their inventory management through forecasting. In addition to this, the use of AI can help businesses to improve their decision-making processes. Prasad *et al.*, (2023), on the other hand, commented on the use of IoT and cloud computing as emerging technologies from businesses to make trade activities efficient. The application of these emerging technologies helps businesses to have data and information in real-time. Thus, there is a higher degree of visibility in the supply chain operations of manufacturing firms. However, Saeed *et al.*, (2023) countered that the rising threat of cybersecurity is a challenge for businesses as there is growing adoption of digital technologies

to run business operations. Small manufacturing firms may struggle to deal with the challenge of cyberattacks. The literature studies such as Bharadiya (2023); Vukman *et al.*, (2024) explains that digital technologies increase decision making, supply chain visibility and market access. Contrasting this, Saeed *et al.*, (2023) explains about structural limitations of SMEs due to skills shortage or higher implementation cost. Moreover, digitalisation is considered as a strategic opportunity for all kinds of firms.

2.9 Effects of Institutional and regulatory influences on the strategy of trade

Institutional and regulatory frameworks influence the costs, risks, and opportunities of international trade strategies, and the way in which firms are made. When properly coordinated, regulatory measures can increase transparency and minimise transaction costs, but when not well coordinated, overly complex regulations can lead to increased compliance costs and limit firm agility (HUA, 2025). According to the UK trade regulations, approximately 49% of the UK exports are in the form of goods in 2024, which indicates the regulatory significance of export-oriented approaches (Gov UK, 2025). Nevertheless, the lack of consistency in regulations and overlaps among the agencies make policy learning expensive to the firms that adopt cross-border strategies. Thus, institutional policies have both facilitating and inhibiting impacts on the design of trade strategies.

2.9.1 Government regulations

Government regulations normalise the entry criteria in the market, and informational barriers in favour of exporting firms are minimised. An example of this is that, in the UK Trade Strategy, the country insists on conformity to international standards to enhance trade facilitation and cut the red-tape delays. Nonetheless, stricter regulatory compliance, particularly in safety and environmental areas, may increase the cost of compliance and scare away some companies from exporting, which make the firms less responsive to market signals. Research shows that in major industries; the level of regulatory strictness is proportional to the lower rates of export expansion because companies redirect their resources to national demands instead of international expansion (Cherif and Hasanov 2024). Therefore, the benefits of government regulation are that there are gains in the trade strategy and the drawback is the increase in compliance costs.

2.9.2 Institutional policy uncertainty

Policy uncertainty plays a big role in determining the strategic trade decisions made by firms, since the inability to predict the actions of the institution increases the operational risk and makes long-

term planning difficult. Empirical evidence has shown high levels of trade policy uncertainty that are connected with low levels of investment and postponed entry into new markets. To illustrate, in 2024, the UK exports and imports comprised 62% of GDP, which is an indicator of a high trade dependence but also a vulnerability to changes in policies, which can disorient the market confidence and plans (WTO, 2024). It has been found that the more policy uncertainty firms experience, the more they invest in innovation, but postpones substantial export projects until the policy situation stabilises (Sui *et al.*, 2022). In turn, institutional uncertainty has the potential to provide incentives to adaptive strategies as well as to repress growth commitments.

2.9.3 Effect of world trade agreements

Trade agreements in the global context have made market access predictable as well as minimised tariff and regulatory risks, which give companies more assurance to venture into foreign markets. According to the perspectives of Tian *et al.* (2022), membership of the comprehensive agreements gives structural frameworks that reduce the trade costs and maximise the allocation of resources across borders. The decelerating rate of multilateral accords and the preference for bilateral agreements, however, may divide the regulatory regimes, which result in compliance complications and strategic ambiguity to globally minded firms. However, the level of free trade agreements provides better strategic clarity by ensuring that they provide legally binding agreements that favour the exporters due to reduced trade costs and legal safeguards. In general, international agreements are strategic facilitators, but they pose regulatory complexity through their dynamic character.

Global trade agreements also influence strategic decisions, such that tariff and non-tariff requirements that impact competitiveness are shaped. In other words, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) is 13% of global GDP, which provides new tariff cuts in the UK market after access, which reduces the cost of exports (MFAT, 2024). However, institutional and regulatory influences discussed above can be interpreted more clearly through institutional theory, which sheds light on how formal rules and policy uncertainty recalibrate firm behaviour and strategic trade decisions. On the other hand, the uneven impact across firms is also aligned with the principles of resource-based view, based on which manufacturers with robust internal capability adapt trade strategies under volatile regulations.

2.10 How the manufacturing sector is affected by the trade policies of the UK government

2.10.1 Post-COVID trade policies

Post-COVID strategies of the UK government in trade were meant to boost export-led growth by increasing market accessibility and minimising export barriers. The UK Trade Strategy increased the UK Export Finance (UKEF) lending facilities by 20-80 billion pounds to provide trade finance to exporters in the UK and enhance their competitive edge in the global market. This growth assists manufacturers in getting contracts and working capital requirements (Gov UK, 2025). Nevertheless, certain researchers believe that the trade policy is still not equal as it favours big businesses at the expense of SMEs, which still have to deal with complicated compliance expenses and reduced abilities to benefit to the fullest extent of trade agreements (Hauser, 2022). Accordingly, the policy creates growth but shows distributional weaknesses.

Nevertheless, the post-COVID trade policies in the UK also focused on digital trade facilitation in the form of increased e-customs systems, which accelerated the time of clearance of manufactured goods. According to scholars, the use of digital documentation enhances the speed of export operations and decreases the time spent at the port (Machange and Yussuf, 2024). Implementation problems, such as the lack of digital infrastructure capacity of smaller manufacturers and uneven implementation across regions, however, still exist.

2.10.2 Effect of government support

The aspect of the government support, including trade finance guarantees as well as export promotion have impacted the global interaction of the manufacturing firms positively by reducing the financing barriers. Studies indicate that export finance assistance of the targeted product has a significant positive effect on the competitiveness of small and medium-sized manufacturers in the international market (Singh *et al.* 2024). UK Export Finance facilitates the achievement of 12.5 billion contracts related to exports by the year 2029, with a specific focus on SMEs to enhance the inclusion in the trade (Gov UK, 2024). Notwithstanding these advantages, it has been indicated that manufacturers are not yet content with the amount and access of support, especially in innovation subsidies and supply chain resilience funding (Gov UK, 2024).

The adoption of technology in manufacturing by the UK has been facilitated by government grant programmes like the Made Smarter Innovation Fund, which have made the manufacturers more automated and competitive in the international market. It has been proposed based on research that

specific innovation financing results in improved productivity and export preparedness of manufacturing companies (Singh *et al.* 2024). However, SMEs are not taking it up because of match-funding and complicated procedures to apply, which hamper the impact on the sector. It is also noted that manufacturers are receiving a report that support is more interested in adopting advanced technology rather than capacity building to engage in the international market. Overall, UK trade policies provide meaningful support to manufacturers through finance and digital facilitation, yet their impact is uneven due to complexity, access constraints, and differential firm capabilities.

2.10.3 Limitations of policies for manufacturers

The UK trade policies have not been without criticism for not doing enough to help in curbing the structural issue within the manufacturing industry. Although the academic discussions reveal that strategic trade interventions can enhance productivity and market depth, most of the policies do not have coherent long-term integration of industries (Mariotti, 2025). Moreover, survey findings indicate that manufacturing companies single out policy uncertainty, excessive compliance costs and unbalanced regulatory backing as key barriers to growth, at least within capital-intensive industries. Despite the government trade initiatives to reduce red tape and digitalisation of export services, manufacturers complain that this has been a slow process and that there are still bureaucratic bottlenecks that continue to hinder efforts to reduce trade barriers. As a result, the weaknesses of policies minimise the possible benefits of international trade relations.

Another major weakness of the UK trade policy is insufficient attention to international skills development based on international standards and new technologies. The scholarly sources suggest that the lack of skills decreases the adaptability of the UK manufacturers to the requirements of the global market, hindering the growth of exports (Driffield *et al.* 2024). Besides, the shortage of workers in technical sectors is still a problem of concern, increasing the cost of production and slowing down the fulfilment of orders. Critics argue that the present support measures are more of financial incentives, but there is not enough focus on the human capital shortages. Therefore, unless the UK manufacturers incorporate the strategies of skills in the trade policy frameworks, there are high chances that they leave behind their global competitors who have more flexible workforces and better-trained.

2.11 Growth in the manufacturing sector of the UK in the long-term

2.11.1 Sustainability across global expansion

The industry sector, including greenhouse gas emissions, is currently estimated to amount to 52.8 MtCO₂e in 2023, which is a reduction of 8.0%, and it indicates progress in decarbonisation (Gov UK, 2024). The decrease is a sign that the UK manufacturers are shifting towards sustainability in production strategies without reducing output. Another way through which sustainable practices can enhance international competitiveness is through compliance with the increased environmental standards in the export markets. Nonetheless, the prices of low-carbon technologies and compliance are still high, especially for small manufacturers with limited capital. The studies have proven that sustainability investments promote export resilience in the long-term, but exert short-term financial burdens on manufacturing companies (Jafari and Faghihi, 2024).

The trend of sustainability is also dictating the strategies of global expansion because international consumers are seeking environmentally friendly production. Companies that embrace sustainable operations have the advantage of better brand image and have access to high-quality international markets. It is proven that manufacturers that are innovative in terms of the environmental factor demonstrate greater export development and enhanced stability in the foreign market (Hu *et al.*, 2021). Nevertheless, the international sustainability regulations require compliance, which adds complexity to administration and the cost of certifications. These conditions may make smaller manufacturers unwilling to expand overseas in the long run, even though such a decision may yield benefits in the long term.

Long-term manufacturing development based on the correspondence between the sustainability objectives and global operations that can be scaled. Green supply chains lessen the risk of regulatory fines, energy market uncertainties, and reputational risk, and enhance the prospects of growth in the long-term. Evidence-based research shows that when manufacturers are strategic planners who take into account sustainability in their operations, they enjoy greater operational stability and international continuity (Negri *et al.*, 2021). However, sustainability efforts tend to slow the decision-making process and escalate coordination expenses through global value chains. Strategically, sustainability has been a key organisational competition driver for UK manufacturing firms. This also supports regulatory compliance, export resilience and long term growth. Although complex international standards, higher cost for lower-carbon technology

creates complexity for SMEs. UK manufacturers should integrate sustainability with global strategies in balancing environmental growth with operational agility and cost efficiency.

2.11.2 Future development issues and opportunities.

In 2023, the UK manufacturing sector had added about 200 billion to the gross value added in total, which underscored the further, albeit diminishing, economic role (EPH, 2024). This small percentage indicates structural issues such as productivity gaps, increasing input prices, and pressure from international competition. Nonetheless, these opportunities have to be scaled with time and skills supply, which are not even distributed regionally. It has been shown that productivity-enhancing innovation is a key factor to grow manufacturing, but is limited by capital and workforce (Dosi *et al.*, 2022).

Digitalisation represents a highly promising source of growth as it enhances productivity, flexibility, and competitiveness internationally for UK manufacturers. The adoption of automation, data analytics, and smart manufacturing systems allows companies to react quickly to the changes in demand in the world. It has been found that digitally advanced manufacturers gain greater productivity growth and export resilience in the long term (Huang *et al.*, 2024). However, barriers to implementation still exist, such as high initial investments and a lack of digital skills. The smaller firms are the losers, especially as they face the risk of increasing the performance gap in the sector. Moreover, Sustainability increasingly functions as a strategic capability, enabling UK manufacturers to enhance export competitiveness, regulatory compliance, and long-term resilience.

Global market diversification is also another great opportunity for future manufacturing. Diversification into non-traditional markets may limit the risk of regional shocks in the market and changes in demand. It has been shown empirically that a firm with diversified export portfolios has a higher long-term growth stability (Dosi *et al.*, 2022). But costs of market entry, complexity of regulations, and uncertainty of geopolitics become increasingly limiting factors in expansion strategies. Manufacturers also have to strive for diversification, reliability in the supply-chain, and cost-efficiency. Therefore, unequal access to green finance and skills constrains smaller manufacturers, requiring integrated policy and firm-level strategies to scale sustainable growth

2.12 Theoretical Underpinning

2.12.1 Global value chain (GVC)

The application of GVC is helpful to understand the effects of the post-COVID trade barriers on the manufacturing sector of the UK. According to this, global production is fragmented across countries; procurement of raw materials is done in one country and production happens in another one (Opazo-Basáez *et al.*, 2022). This theory is chosen since this can help analyse the impact of trade protectionism on the manufacturing sector of the UK, considering the global supply chain of the same industry. The manufacturing sector of the UK is dependent on the international market for its entire supply chain. In a report published in 2022, it was reported that goods worth £23.6 billion are awaiting completion since there is a delay in the supply of necessary materials, led by supply chain issues (Barclays Corporate Banking, 2022).

GVC is beneficial for the creation of employment and boosting productivity. There may be a transfer of technology as countries are involved in the global value chain (Rigo, 2021). Thus, countries may promote their development with the rapid development of infrastructure as they attract investment. Nonetheless, the occurrence of the pandemic dealt a hit to GVC, showcasing its flaws in times of global crises. UK manufacturers were forced to focus on building supply chain resilience because of the pandemic, causing disruptions in the supply chain. Apart from these, there were efforts made by UK manufacturers to adopt a nearshoring strategy to reduce dependence on the global supply chain.

2.12.2 Institutional theory

The use of institutional theory explains the way organisational behaviour is shaped by rules, norms and policies. Laws and socio-cultural factors may influence the strategies of organisations. The application of this theory is useful to evaluate the effects of post-COVID trade barriers on the manufacturing strategies of businesses in the UK. This theory is chosen as it can showcase the effects of global institutional norms and policies on the trade activities of manufacturing firms in the UK. In the post-pandemic era, countries across the globe imposed lots of restrictions, in the form of tariffs and export controls (Song and Agarwal, 2023). These were done by governments for the purpose of protecting domestic industries. The ideology of economic nationalism was also a driver for the application of such restrictive measures.

In this post-COVID era, China imposed restrictions on the export of critical minerals (BBC News, 2025). Being a major producer and exporter, such export restrictions caused disruptions in the manufacturing practices in many countries. Critical minerals are used in the production of different types of products, be it an automobile or a smartphone. In the post-COVID era, there were

restrictions on exporting advanced computing equipment from the USA to other countries (Reuters, 2025). Such policies and norms caused disruptions for manufacturing industries across the globe. The use of GVC and institutional theory combinedly shows the problem of trade protectionism affecting trade of UK manufacturers. Imposition of tariffs hurt exports of UK manufacturers, leading to changes in the global value chain.

2.12.3 Resource-based view (RBV)

RBV is a framework that explains how internal strengths and capabilities of firms offer them a competitive advantage (Lubis, 2022). This means manufacturing firms with strong internal strengths and capabilities can absorb shocks from the external environment. These internal strengths and capabilities can be skilled human resources, technological resources and financial resources. This theory is chosen to portray the diverse effects of trade barriers on organisations. Resource-rich organisations may find them in a better position to tackle trade barriers in comparison to small firms. In the case of UK manufacturers, the availability of such resources may be helpful to mitigate the shocks of trade barriers imposed by countries across the globe in the post-COVID era.

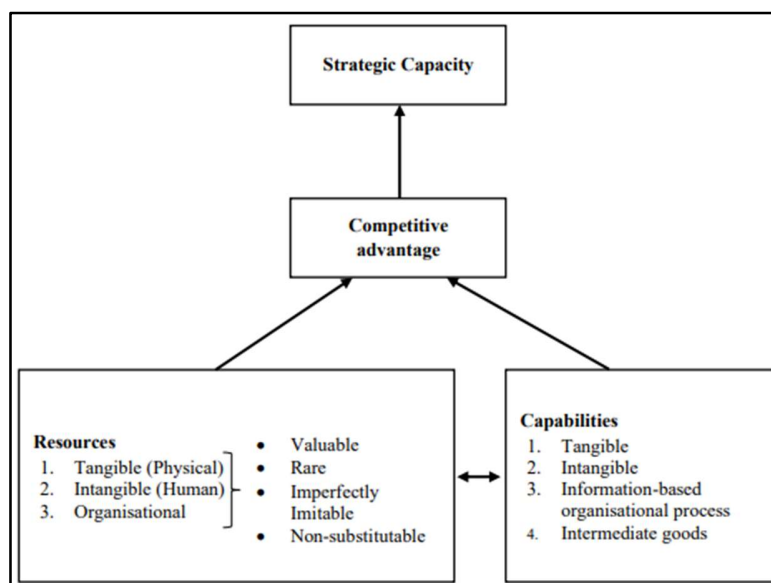


Figure 2.12.3: The concept of RBV

(Source: Lubis, 2022)

In the post-COVID era, businesses focus on embracing digitalisation to manage issues related to delays in the supply of goods (Kashem *et al.*, 2024). There is the use of AI by businesses to predict market demands. Accurate demand prediction helps businesses to manage their inventory to avoid

shocks of supply chain disruptions. Manufacturing firms with financial and technological resources may adapt to digitalisation to remain competitive amid such a volatile trade environment. In contrast, brands having fewer internal capabilities may face difficulty surviving. Thus, the application of this theory helps explain that post-COVID trade barriers, characterised by tariffs and non-tariff barriers, affected small manufacturing firms most in the UK. However, large manufacturers faced fewer hits of such barriers due to their internal strengths and capabilities. Utilisation of all the theories has indicated trade of UK manufacturers being hurt due to higher degree of trade restrictions in the post-COVID era.

2.13 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework considers the effects of post-COVID trade barriers on the growth of businesses in the UK manufacturing industry. The levels of tariff on manufactured goods, uncertainty in trade policies, non-tariff barriers to trade, and restrictions on the supply chain are considered important independent variables, which influence the international scenes of firms.

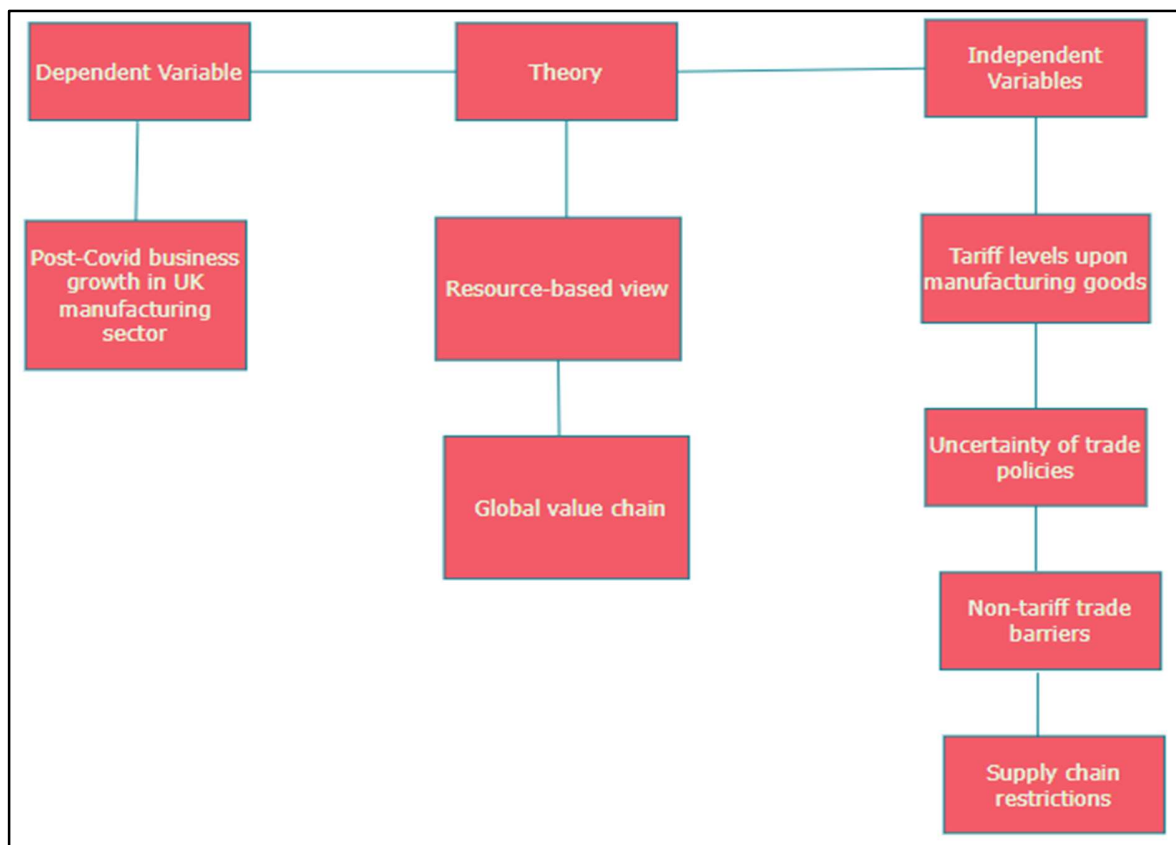


Figure 2.13: Conceptual Framework

(Source: self-made)

2.14 Literature Gap

The current literature also provides a comprehensive evaluation of the global trade shocks caused by COVID-19, but does not specifically provide much information concerning the impact of these on the UK manufacturing sector in the long-term. The majority of works on post-pandemic trade barriers are based on a macroeconomic approach, neglecting the strategies of firms operating in the manufacturing sector (Evenett and Fritz, 2022). Besides, studies on the effects of trade policies tend to be deficient in the bond between institutional theory and strategy management styles, leading to conceptual fragmentation (Balzano et al, 2025).

This leaves limited empirical analysis of how more specific trade barriers, including tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and supply chain restrictions, have a direct impact on international business growth at the firm level. Hence, Harris (2021) refers to a micro-level view that focuses on the dispersion of productivity between the frontier and the laggard firms, but not specifically on the dynamics of post-COVID changes in the trade policy or the performance of the international markets. Moreover, the central gap lies in the absence of an incorporated and firm-level analysis of post-Covid trade issues, which can be acknowledged through theoretical integration, SME-specific impacts and limited post-pandemic evidence collection.

2.15 Chapter summary

The chapter critically assessed the available literature on the post-COVID global trade, trade barriers, and their effect on manufacturing in the UK. Moreover, key gaps in existing research were identified, such as the lack of integrated, UK-focused, firm-level analysis, providing a robust foundation for the study's research objectives and methodology. Referring to these critical literature insights, the next chapter outlines research methodology adopted in identifying literature gaps. Considered with limited UK-focused integrated analysis of post-Covid trade barriers, this study adopts primary quantitative data analysis, enabling it to gather original data from UK manufacturers.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Chapter introduction

In this chapter, the methods followed to conduct this research are depicted. There is a use of Saunders' research onion to discuss the application of certain methods to execute this research.

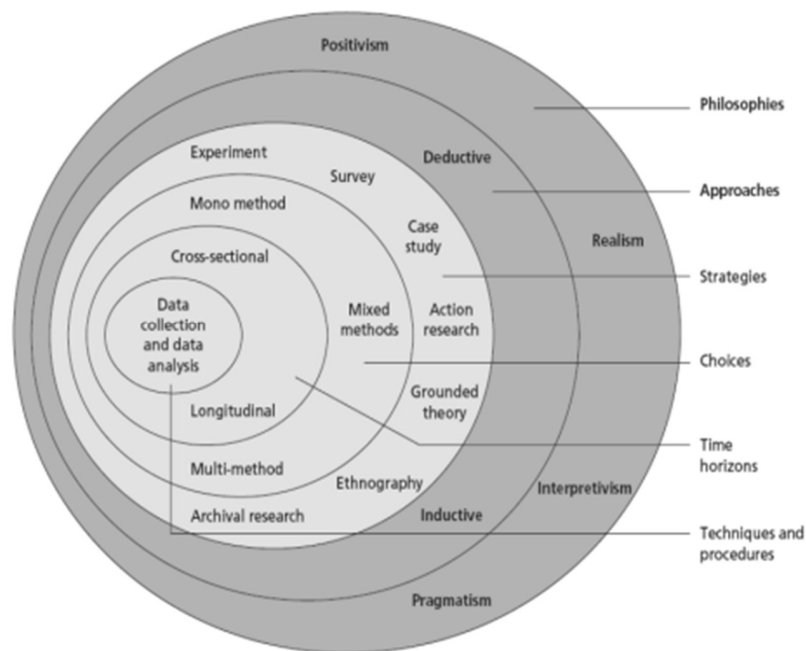


Figure 3.1: Saunders' research onion

(Source: Mphale *et al.*, 2024)

As depicted in the above figure, there are multiple elements of the research method. It begins with research philosophy and goes up to the data collection method and its analysis. Every element in the onion has different types. In this research, there is selection of one specific type under each element of the research onion.

3.2 Research philosophy

Research philosophy is referred to as a set of beliefs that offer guidance to researchers on the process of collecting data. There are three common research philosophies: interpretivism, positivism and pragmatism. In positivism philosophy, researchers are asked to collect data that are numeric in nature (Ali *et al.*, 2021). A collection of numeric data helps to offer measurable outcomes on a topic. Nonetheless, researchers are not able to produce broader qualitative outcomes on a subject by applying the same research philosophy.

In interpretivism philosophy, there is a focus on the collection of non-numeric data. An Interview is used as a common method for collecting such types of data (Mazhar, Anjum, Anwar and Khan, 2021). Since the views and thoughts of people are considered, researchers are able to generate a broader view on the research topic. However, in contrast to positivism philosophy, interpretivism philosophy cannot produce specific and measurable findings. Apart from these two philosophies, pragmatism philosophy offers researchers flexibility with their data collection process.

Justification

In this research, the focus is to evaluate the effects of post-COVID trade barriers on the international growth of UK-based manufacturers. These trade barriers include tariffs and various other forms of protectionism. Hence, the collection of non-numeric data, characterised by the thoughts and perspectives of relevant individuals, may help to offer a broader view on the topic. On the other hand, obtaining numeric data has helped to measure the degree to which post-COVID trade barriers impact the international growth of the UK manufacturing industry. Hence, it is justified to apply pragmatism philosophy in this research. Use of pragmatism philosophy has also facilitate measurable outcomes along with an in-depth view on the influence of post-COVID trade barriers on the business growth of the UK manufacturing sector.

3.3 Research Approach

The research approach works as a detailed guide for researchers with their data collection and analysis methods. Inductive, deductive and abductive are three common research approaches used by researchers. The application of the inductive approach helps researchers to produce a broader outcome from a specific observation (Kumar and Ujire, 2024). On the contrary, the utilisation of a deductive approach helps to produce specific outcomes from a broader view, utilising a top-down approach. Apart from inductive and deductive, researchers can have flexibility with their research approach as they choose an abductive approach. The characteristics of both inductive and deductive research approaches are used in the abductive research approach. In this research, an abductive research approach has been used.

Justification

Aligning with the pragmatism philosophy, both numeric and non-numeric data have been considered in this research. Hence, the abductive approach is justified in this research. An inductive approach has helped analyse qualitative data, while quantitative data have been evaluated using a deductive approach. Qualitative data analysis is supported by an inductive research

approach (Proudfoot, 2023). Therefore, the application of the abductive approach has helped to have a deeper understanding of the impact of post-COVID trade barriers on the international growth of the UK manufacturing industry. Besides, the application of the abductive approach has helped collect both numeric and non-numeric data to receive a broader view on the topic.

3.4 Research Design

Research design refers to the overall study that outlines the process by which the research has been structured to address the aim and objectives in a coherent and systematic manner (Imran *et al.*, 2024). The design of the research offers the logical framework that guides the selection of the methods, analytical techniques, and data sources to ensure the process is transparent and rigorous. The process of the research design is categorised in three key parts, including descriptive, explanatory, and exploratory. The application of the exploratory research design is utilised when the problem of the research is not defined clearly, aiming to enhance insights, generate understanding, and recognise patterns regarding the phenomenon. The application of the descriptive design focuses on describing the characteristics within the phenomenon. On the contrary, the application of the explanatory design wants to explain the connection between the variables, along with the understanding of why specific outcomes occur.

Justification

The study adopts the explanatory mixed method design. In the design, the quantitative assessment is conducted first for recognising the trends and patterns, followed by the application of qualitative analysis for interpreting and explaining those patterns in depth (Nagpal, Kornerup and Gibson, 2021). This design allows testing the effects of post-COVID trade barriers systematically and has contextual explanations of the policy adjustments and the strategic adaptation at the firm level, which directly answers the objectives of the study and the research questions.

The choice of the explanatory mixed-method is justified by the research topic, which examines the process by which post-COVID trade barriers influence the international strategy adoption along with the internationalisation decisions, UK government policies across the automotive manufacturing sector of the UK. The quantitative secondary information enables the recognition of the measurable effects of non-tariffs, tariffs barriers along with the constraints of export on the sector performance. On the other hand, the qualitative analysis helps the study explain how UK manufacturers respond through the supplier diversification, nearshoring and the market reconfiguration. As the trade environment after covid was policy-driven, complex and

heterogenous, the design has offered a comprehensive and robust framework to address the objectives of the study. Explanatory research design is also justified considering the use of a structured method for data collection in this research.

3.5 Methodological choice

According to the research onion, there are two key types of methodological choices: single method and mixed method. Single methods are quantitative and qualitative methods. In the quantitative method, researchers focus on the accumulation of numeric data to produce measurable findings (Taherdoost, 2022). In contrast to this, non-numeric data are considered by researchers as they apply a qualitative method. This helps researchers to generate an in-depth knowledge of a research topic. However, in this research, a mixed method combining quantitative and qualitative methods has been applied.

Justification

In this research, the focus has been on producing measurable outcomes on the effects of post-COVID trade barriers on the international growth of the UK manufacturing sector. Also, this research aims to evaluate the impacts of several trade barriers, such as tariffs, non-tariff barriers of the UK government and compliance regulations on the international growth of the manufacturing sector of the UK. Therefore, it has been justified to consider a mixed method since this allows the collection of both numeric and non-numeric data. Consideration of numeric data helps to offer a measurable view on the topic, while in-depth outcomes can be captured with the use of non-numeric data. Therefore, the application of a mixed method has facilitated collection of numeric and non-numeric data, leading to a wider perspective on the impact of post-COVID trade barriers on the growth and expansion of the UK manufacturing sector.

3.6 Research strategy

Research strategy helps researchers to meet their research objectives while answering their research questions. As shown in Figure 3.1, there are different types of research strategies: case study, survey and experimentation. Considering the collection of numeric data under a mixed method, a survey has been chosen as a research strategy. In a survey, researchers focus on capturing the views and thoughts of participants in numeric form (Chand, 2025). Close-ended questions are asked of the participants in surveys. Thus, the measurability of findings can be improved.

Justification

It has been one of the focus areas of this research to analyse the degree to which trade barriers in the post-COVID era across the UK impact the global growth of the manufacturing companies. Therefore, it has been necessary to apply a survey method as the research strategy to generate measurable findings.

3.7 Time horizon

Time horizon means the timeline involved in the collection of data in research work. On this basis, research works can be divided into two categories: cross-sectional studies and longitudinal studies. In cross-sectional studies, data are collected once (Cvetkovic-Vega *et al.*, 2021). This type of study helps to portray the happenings at the present time. It is easy and less time-consuming to conduct cross-sectional studies in comparison to longitudinal studies. However, using cross-sectional studies, researchers cannot report changes happening over a period of time.

In comparison to cross-sectional studies, researchers need to collect data over a period of time as they choose to carry out longitudinal studies. In medical research, there is the use of longitudinal studies. Thus, this particular method is suitable for research works in which there is a need to consider how things evolve over a period of time. Nonetheless, unlike cross-sectional studies, it is time-consuming to carry out longitudinal studies. However, in this research, a cross-sectional study has been applied.

Justification

In this research, the focus has been on evaluating the effects of post-COVID trade barriers on the international growth of the manufacturing industry of the UK. After the end of the pandemic, there has been an evolution in trade barriers across the globe. Hence, there has not been any need to apply longitudinal studies. Instead, a cross-sectional study has been ideal to portray the current trade barriers affecting the international growth of the manufacturing brands based in the UK.

3.8 Sampling

The sampling strategy employed in this study has been a non-probability purposive approach in order to pick respondents who have relevant industry knowledge. The method is suitable as the study needs to gather enlightened information collected by managers and executives in the United Kingdom automotive manufacturing industry. It is a fair decision, because purposive sampling allows reaching decision-makers who are directly concerned with strategic and internationalisation decisions (Rahman, 2023). The methodology puts more emphasis on depth and relevance of information than statistical representativeness in the broader manufacturing population.

This study used a population of 100 respondents in the manufacturing companies in the UK as its central sample. It is a fair decision, because this size is sufficient enough to be both feasible and to provide enough statistical power to perform both a descriptive and inferential analysis. Social media platform Facebook has been used to connect with the relevant participants. A poster depicting the need survey response was published on the same social media site. Thus, it has become possible to have 100 numbers easily for the survey. Using a sample size of 100 responses can enable a valid determination of patterns, relations, and variation in perceptions of trade barriers. This is deemed sufficient to undertake the survey based mixed method studies in resource and time limitations. Also, this particular sample size has been justified considering the issue of time constraint in this research. Resource constraint is one of the factors shaping sample size decisions of researchers (Lakens, 2022).

3.9 Data collection method

The research design in this study is a mixed method which incorporates primary and secondary data to be used in the research analysis. It is a valid decision, because mixed methods are the most effective means of capturing the quantifiable trends and managerial insights (Wasti, 2022). Google Forms is used to collect primary data necessary to guarantee effective distribution and the capture of standardized responses. The site fosters anonymity, access and uniformity of the geographically dispersed automotive industry respondents around the country. Online surveys minimize the task of the administration and enhance precision, comparatively and timely quantitative data aggregation. Perceived trade barriers, cost pressures, and post-pandemic disruption strategic adjustments have been measured using structured items. The exposure of questions is the same with the use of an online instrument which further enhances reliability and internal consistency in responses.

Secondary data collection has been used as a supplement of primary evidence to put the responses of firms into a larger policy and industry context. The fact that secondary sources allow grounding and longitudinal trade analysis, Hargadon and Wadhwani (2023), makes it a justified decision. Peer reviewed journals, policy documents and institutional reports are accessed on online academic libraries. These sources document regulatory changes, trade barriers and industry response strategies that have changed following the COVID disruptions. Triangulation relies on secondary evidence to complement surveys by giving them support through macroeconomic trends and policy developments (Tzagkarakis and Kritas, 2023). Industry reports carry sector-level

information which cannot be disclosed in totality by individual firm surveys. These sources combined contribute to both the depth and strength of analysis in the interpretation of post pandemic patterns of strategic adaptation.

3.10 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Clear inclusion as well as exclusion criteria have been applied to ensure that all the information sources used in the study are credible, relevant, and merged with the aim of the study. The study is focused on the post-COVID barriers of trade and the international adoption in the manufacturing sector of the UK automotive industry. These criteria have helped the study balance the analytical focus along with methodological rigour.

Criteria Type	Inclusion	Exclusion
Time period	Sources published between 2020 and 2025, reflecting post-COVID and post-Brexit trade conditions	Sources published before 2020
Sector Focus	Automotive manufacturing in the UK is related to the supply chain sector	Studies only focused on the non-manufacturing and service sectors.
Geographic scope	UK-driven studies or the global studies with relevance to the automotive trade of the UK	Studies with zero UK economy relevance
Thematic Relevance	Tariffs, Trade barriers, global strategy, and protectionism, along with internationalisation	Studies which are unrelated to strategic adaptation and trade policy.
Data Type	Government reports, Peer-Reviewed journals and	Blogs, non-academic studies and opinion pieces.

	industry reports	
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The criteria of the table has ensured that the set of data reflects present trade realities, captures the challenges, along with supporting the thematic assessment. Exclusion of irrelevant sources has decreased the analytical noise with strengthening the validity and credibility of the findings of the study.

3.11 Technique of Data Analysis

In this study, the mixed analytical strategy based on the quantitative analysis of secondary data and the qualitative analysis based on the themes is used. It is aligned with the explanatory sequential research design. The methodology allows for determining the observable trends and gaining a better understanding of strategic reaction in the UK automotive production industry.

Quantitative secondary data, which includes the volume of exports, tariff interventions and indicators of the performance of the sectors, are analysed by applying the descriptive statistical methods. In this regard, IBM SPSS software has been used to carry out the data analysis. Multiple analyses, such as descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations and frequency analysis have been done in that software. Frequency analysis has helped to portray the views and thoughts of the participants in an objective manner. The techniques are applied to determine trends and shifts in international trade performance after the establishment of post-COVID trade barriers. This study aims to identify patterns, which has enabled the research to determine the existence and magnitude of trade-related constraints to the sector. Apart from these, there has been an application of regression analysis to analyse all the primary quantitative data. Besides, Cronbach's Alpha has been used to ensure that all the collected primary quantitative data are valid and reliable.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative method which is used in academic literature, policy documents, government trade reports and industry analysis (Strang, Che and Vajjhala, 2022). Thematic analysis is especially appropriate since it allows organising a recurring theme concerning tariffs, non-tariff barriers, reconfiguring supply chains, nearshoring, and global strategy adaptation. In the application of the thematic technique, first, the researcher has developed familiarity with all the gathered secondary qualitative data. Then, codes and patterns have been identified from the gathered data.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research technique that is applied to locate, examine, and identify patterns (themes) within the information. This starts with familiarisation of data, whereby the researcher reads transcripts or notes many times to get a general understanding. Then, preliminary codes are created, highlighting significant parts of the data which are applicable to the research question systematically. Such codes are then analysed and classified into possible themes that indicate patterns in the dataset at large (Naeem *et al.*, 2023). During the reviewing themes phase, the themes are narrowed in terms of their consistency and their applicability to the coded data and the whole dataset. This is then followed by defining and naming themes with clear definitions and meanings of each theme. The last stage is the writing up of the analysis; this involves synthesising themes along with the data extractions to support and connecting the findings with the existing literature and theoretical frameworks. Thematic analysis is versatile and may be implemented in various research paradigms.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

All data sources employed in the research are publicly accessible and retrieved in the peer-reviewed academic journals, government papers and well-known international organisations. The integrity of the academic process was achieved through proper citation and following of the referencing style, preventing cases of plagiarism and misrepresentation of the references. All the data were viewed in the context in which they were initially interpreted to avoid the selective presentation and misrepresentation of findings to back up an argument that had been preconceived. It was done in a responsible way of collecting data, by keeping the digital sources in a secure way and by organising them in a systematic way in order to ensure transparency and traceability of the whole process of the research. It follows the UK GDPR and the data are triangulated by using various sources such as critical academic literature and independent industry reports, to guarantee balanced interpretation (Smirnova and Travieso-Morales, 2024). The research follows the institutional ethical principles, such as a sense of honesty, accountability, and respect for intellectual property that make the research conducted in a responsible and ethical manner.

3.13 Limitations

Even though this study has assumed a strict methodological approach, it has a number of limitations. The use of secondary data limits the possibility of obtaining firm-level managerial views, which may help learn more about the strategic decision-making process among the UK car

manufacturers. This has led to interpretations being founded on evidence as reported, as opposed to organisational experience.

The study targets the UK automotive manufacturing industry specifically, and this might narrow down the generalizability of the results to other manufacturing industries or national settings. Other sector-specific characteristics of capital intensity and regulatory exposure can have different effects on strategic responses. The trade policy in the post-COVID era can be outdated as new trade agreements are introduced. Despite the limitations, the study resolves constraints by selecting the sources carefully, triangulating the evidence, and merging with the established global business theory. It ensures that the outcomes remain relevant, analytically meaningful and credible.

This research is a mixed study that involves both primary quantitative data and secondary qualitative data. One of the main limitations is self completions in the form of surveys completed by the UK manufacturers themselves which can create response bias because the respondents can exaggerate the challenges or give socially acceptable answers to the questions. Also, the sample might not represent the whole UK manufacturing industry since accessing firms is limited leading to the possibility of selection bias. The secondary qualitative data, which is based on the literature and reports available, might also be biased by the views of the authors and the situation under which the data were created, which restricts generalisation. The study is also cross-sectional thus limiting the possibility of capturing the dynamic shift in trade barriers across the time, especially since post-COVID policies keep developing. Lastly, the quantitative and qualitative results could be presupposed by a lack of compatibility due to the dissimilarity between data sources and measures, which would influence the compatibility of the final analysis.

3.14 Chapter Summary

The chapter described the methodology used to explore the issue of trade barriers and global strategy adaptation after the Covid in the UK automotive manufacturing industry. It outlined the inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that the sources were relevant. The mixed analytical approach that was described in the chapter, using a combination of quantitative trend analysis with qualitative thematic analysis, was also used to offer both identification of the pattern and explanatory depth. The ethical aspects were considered to highlight compliance with academic integrity and responsible research practices. Lastly, the limitations of the research are recognised, and it includes limitations concerning the scope of the data, causality, and the sector. Together, these methodological choices create a clear and consistent basis for the following chapter of data

analysis that has allowed the systematic study of the impact of trade barriers on the internationalisation strategies in the post-COVID setting.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis_42 words extra

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This data analysis chapter was a systematic approach of the expert primary and secondary evidence on post-COVID trade barriers on UK automotive manufacturers. It was started with a quantitative analysis of the survey results of 100 respondents. SPSS was used to create descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, correlations, ANOVA, and reliability tests to determine the key patterns and relationships. This was supplemented by qualitative thematic analysis in depth into the broader economic, political, and strategic discussion. The combination of mix methods allows a strong triangulation that helps to increase the validity of the information.

4.2 Quantitative findings

Statistics													
	What is your current role within the organisation?	How many years of experience do you have in the UK manufacturing g sector?	Post-COVID trade tariffs have increased the overall cost of exporting manufactured goods from the UK. Agree or not	Protectionist policies introduced after COVID-19 have negatively affected the international competitiveness of UK manufacturing firms. Agree or not	Trade barriers have reduced our firm's ability to expand into new international markets. Agree or not	Post-COVID customs procedures and regulatory requirements have caused delays in cross-border manufacturing supply chains. Agree or not	Our organisation has shifted towards regional or domestic suppliers due to post-COVID trade restrictions. Agree or not	Government trade policies after COVID-19 have provided sufficient support to UK manufacturer s engaged in international business. Agree or not	Post-COVID trade barriers have reduced export volumes for UK manufacturing g companies. Agree or not	Our firm has invested more in compliance, documentation, and trade management due to increased trade barriers. Agree or not	Trade barriers have encouraged innovation and operational efficiency within UK manufacturing g firms. Agree or not	Overall, post-COVID tariffs and protectionist measures have had a negative impact on the international business growth of the UK manufacturing g sector. Agree or not	
N	Valid	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Mean		2.43	2.15	2.93	2.24	2.55	3.22	2.37	2.93	2.68	2.89	2.74	
Std. Error of Mean		.111	.086	.142	.121	.131	.128	.118	.134	.123	.134	.141	
Median		2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	2.50	2.00	2.00	
Mode		2	2	2	2	2	4	2	2	2	2	2	
Std. Deviation		1.112	.857	1.416	1.207	1.313	1.276	1.178	1.343	1.230	1.340	1.411	
Variance		1.237	.735	2.005	1.457	1.725	1.628	1.387	1.803	1.513	1.796	1.992	
Range		4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	
Minimum		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	
Maximum		5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	
Sum		243	215	293	224	255	322	237	293	268	289	274	
Percentiles	25	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	
	50	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	2.50	2.00	2.00	
	75	3.00	2.75	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	2.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	

Figure 4.2.1: Frequency distribution

(Source: SPSS)

The above image represents a frequency table of a survey of 100 individuals on the post-COVID trade barriers in the UK. The important data is that the mean of the customs delays is 3.22 and mode 2 is the majority of the categories.

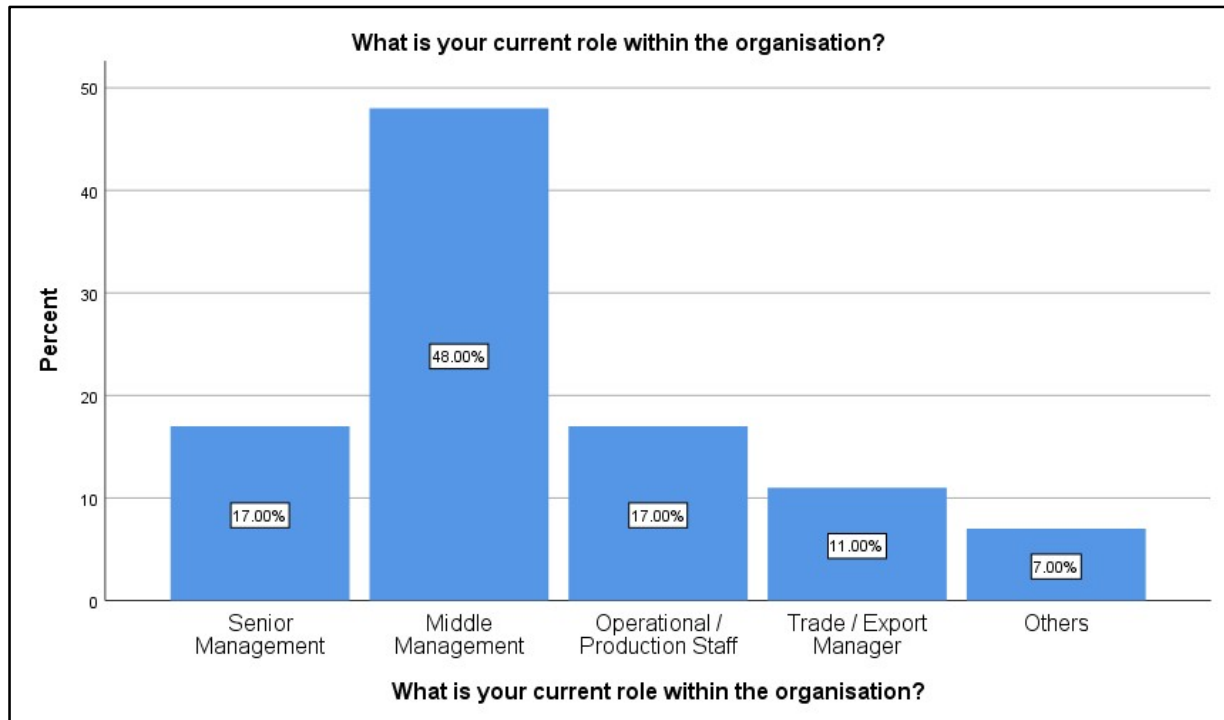


Figure 4.2.2: Role in organisation

(Source: SPSS)

Referring to the above image, demonstrates the organisational role of respondents of the survey. The largest group is the Middle Management 48%. The number of senior management and Operational/Production Staff 17% each and Trade/Export Managers with 11%. The rest 7% is under the classification “ Others” whereby the entire work force may have been surveyed.

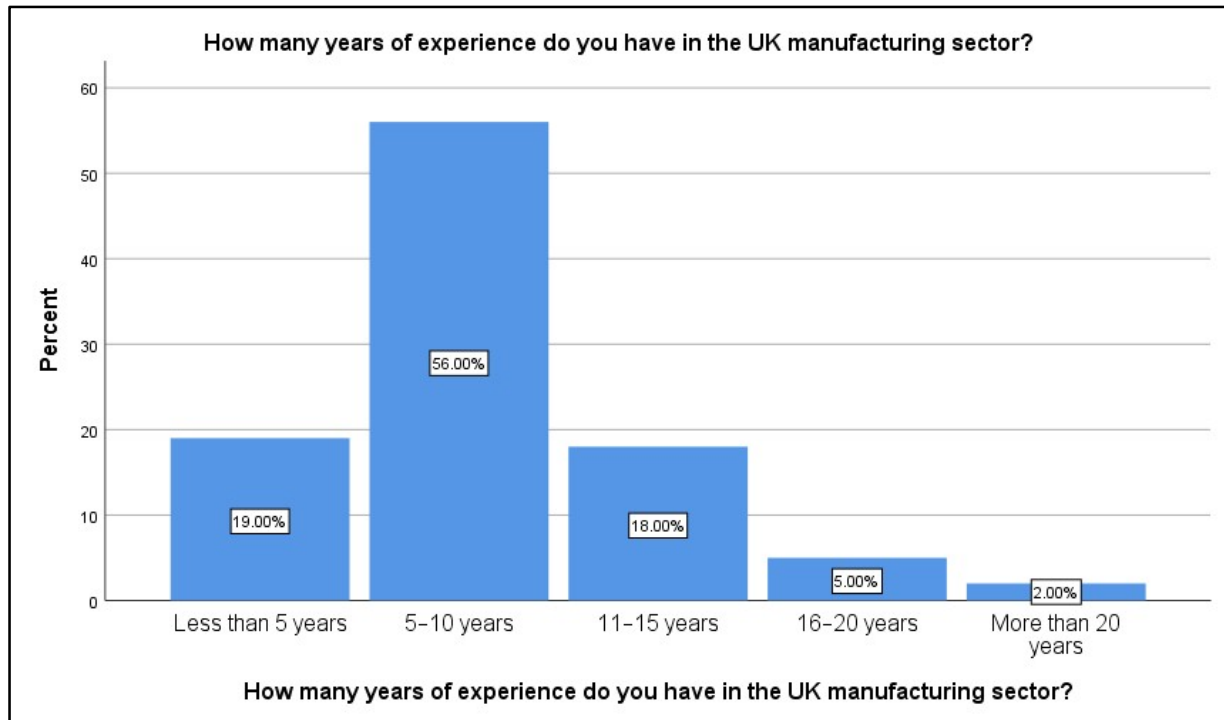


Figure 4.2.3: Years of experience

(Source: SPSS)

The above bar chart outlines the professional experience of the respondents of the survey in the UK manufacturing industry. Most 56% have an experience of between 5-10 years. Less than 5 years have 19%, 11-15 years 18%, 16-20 years 5% and more than 20 years 2%.

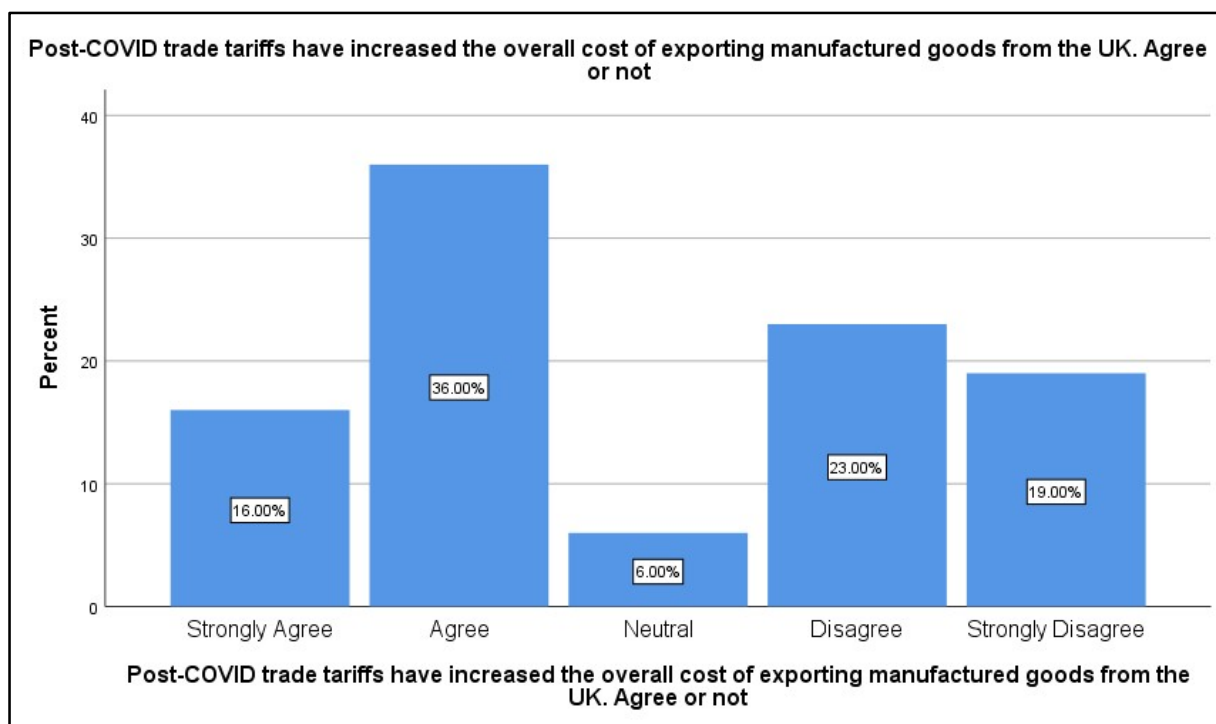


Figure 4.2.4: Increasing export cost

(Source: SPSS)

The above figure illustrates 52% of the respondents concede that post-COVID trade tariffs raised the cost of UK exports. This is composed of 36% who agree and 16% strongly agree. In contrast, 42% disagree, 23% disagree and 19% strongly disagree, and the small majority of 6% are neutral. The findings show that increasing trade tariffs are not seen as cost shocks in the short term that undermines the price competitiveness in the global economy.

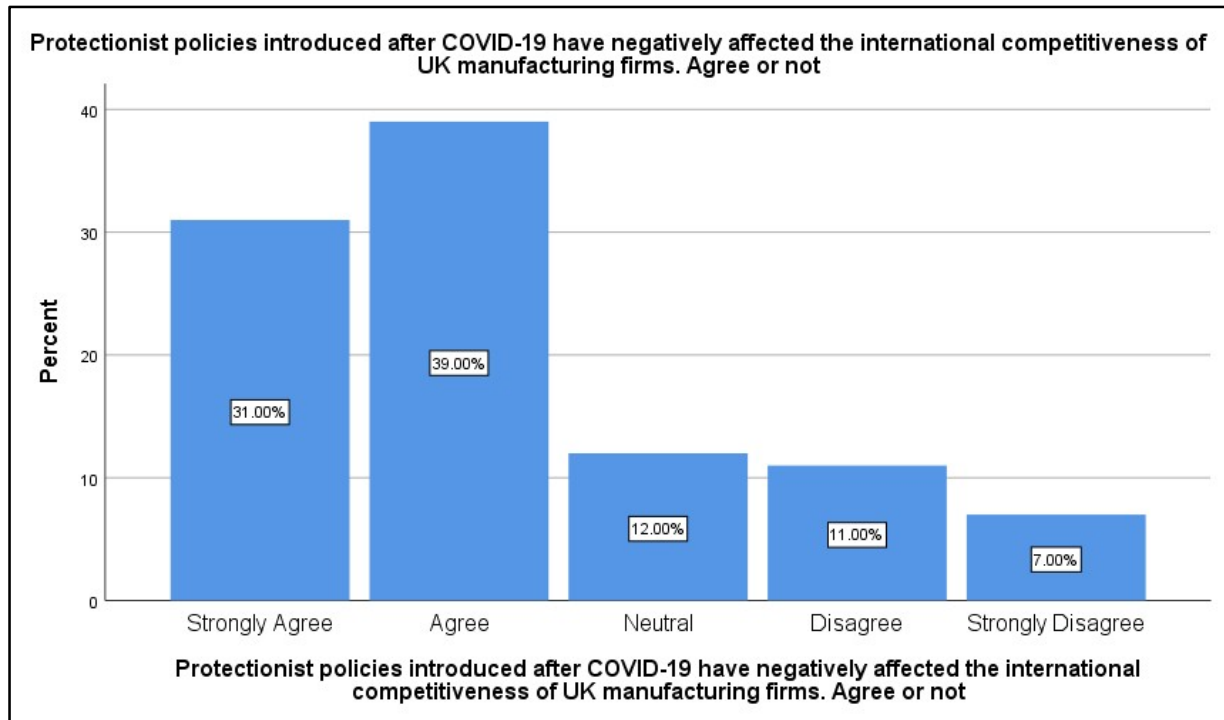


Figure 4.2.5: Protectionist policies impact

(Source: SPSS)

According to the above bar chart, 70% of the participants are of the opinion that post-COVID protectionist policies have negatively affected the competitiveness of UK manufacturing, with 31% strongly agreeing to the fact and 39% agreeing. It is found that a total 18% disagree (11% disagree, 7% strongly disagree) with the effects of these policies. This outcome means that protectionist policies bring about erosion of the competitiveness of UK manufacturing companies in high regards.



Figure 4.2.6: Firm's ability

(Source: SPSS)

The above bar chart shows that 61% of people are of the opinion that trade barriers have impeded the international operations of their firm with 37% strongly agreeing, and 24% agreeing. On the contrary, 31% disagree (22% Disagree, 9% Strongly Disagree), but only a small proportion 8% of the respondents remain indifferent in this context. These findings indicate that trade barriers are directly limiting the ability of firms to conduct international trade as a sign of strategic restriction.

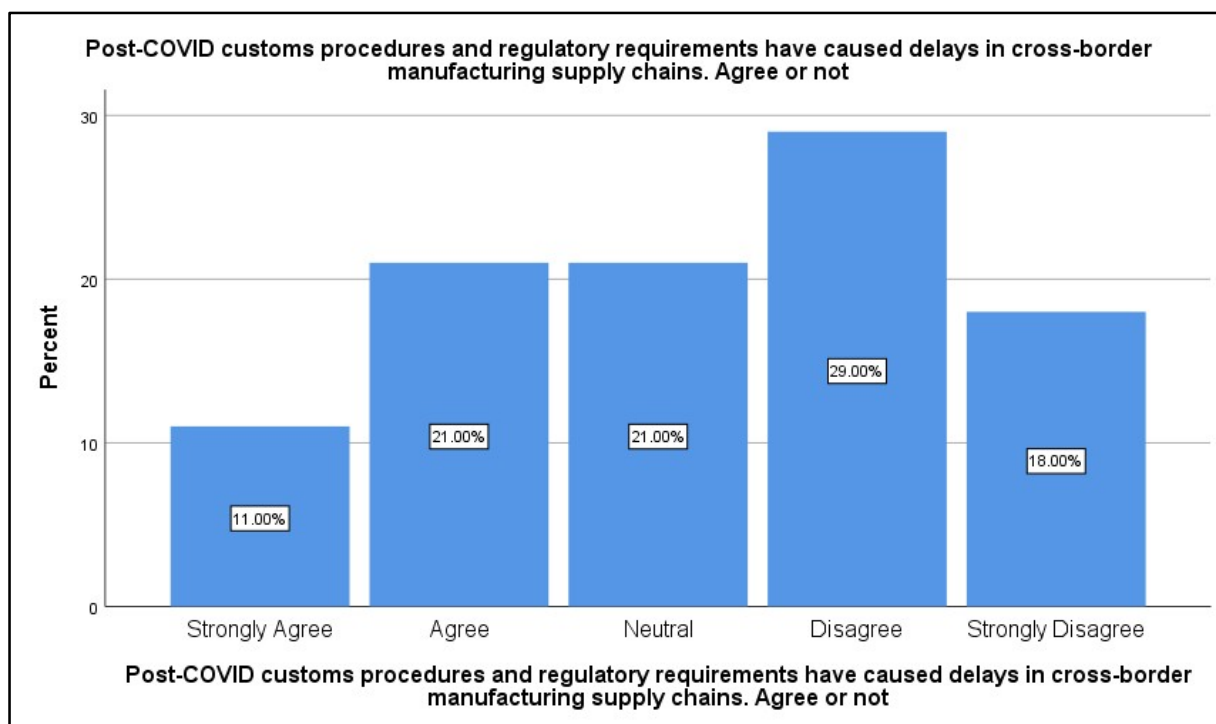


Figure 4.2.7: Cause of delays

(Source: SPSS)

The above image illustrates how supply chains are affected by post-COVID custom procedures and regulatory requirements. Although 32% of the respondents affirm that the factors are the reasons for the border slowdown, almost a half disaffirm the same with 47% (29% Disagree, 18% Strongly Disagree), indicating that it is not the case.

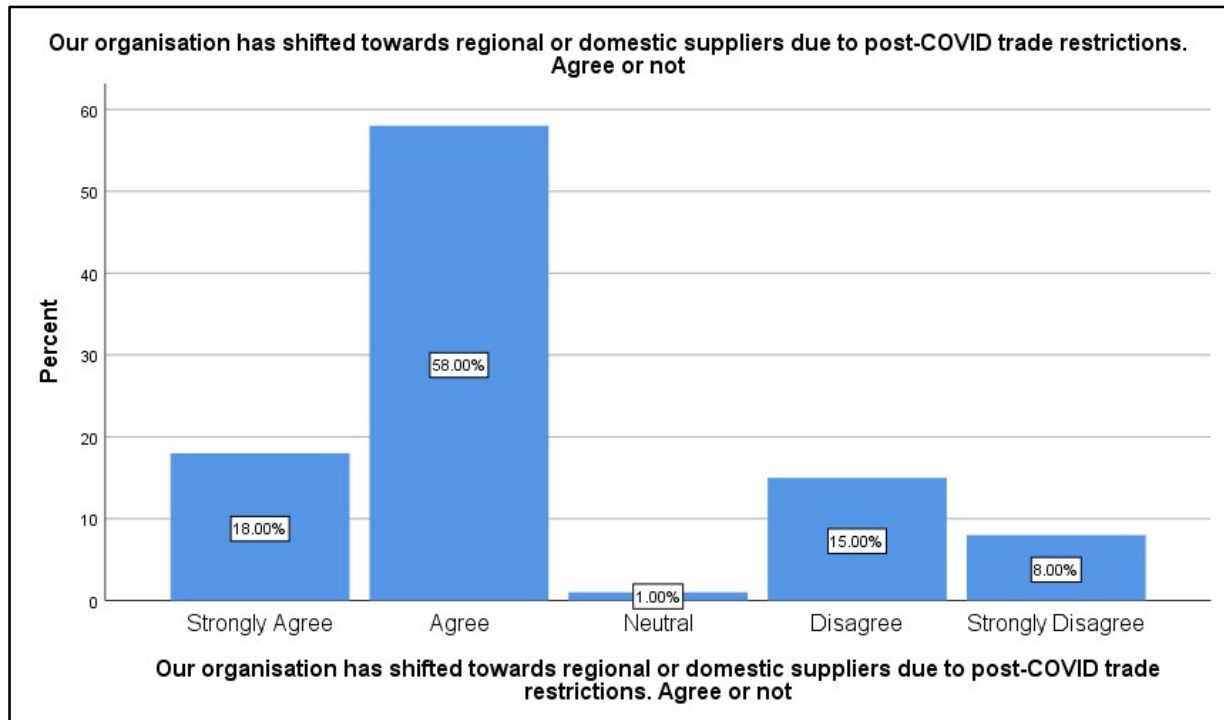


Figure 4.2.8: Post-COVID trade

(Source: SPSS)

According to this above bar graph, 76% of the surveyed organisations are moving towards the regional or domestic supplier base, as a result of post-COVID trade restrictions. 58% concur with this change and 18% strongly agree. The results imply that the trade barriers are already being converted into measurable drops in the export trade. It means that regulatory and cost hindrance is posing a direct influence on the performance of international sales of firms.

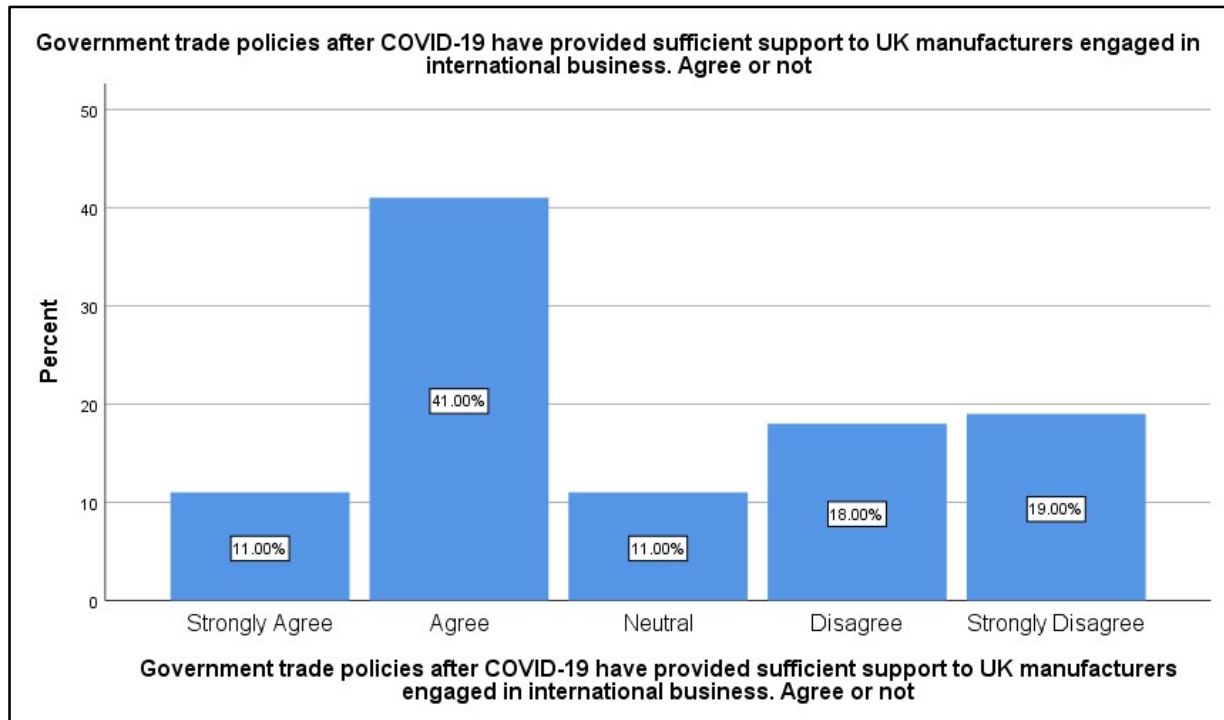


Figure 4.2.9: Government trade policies

(Source: SPSS)

Referring to the above image, 52% of all people who were interviewed think that after the COVID UK manufacturers were given adequate support through government trade policy with 41% saying Agree and 11% saying Strongly Agree to it. On the other hand, 37% of the respondents do disagree, 11% of the respondents are indifferent towards the effectiveness of the government.

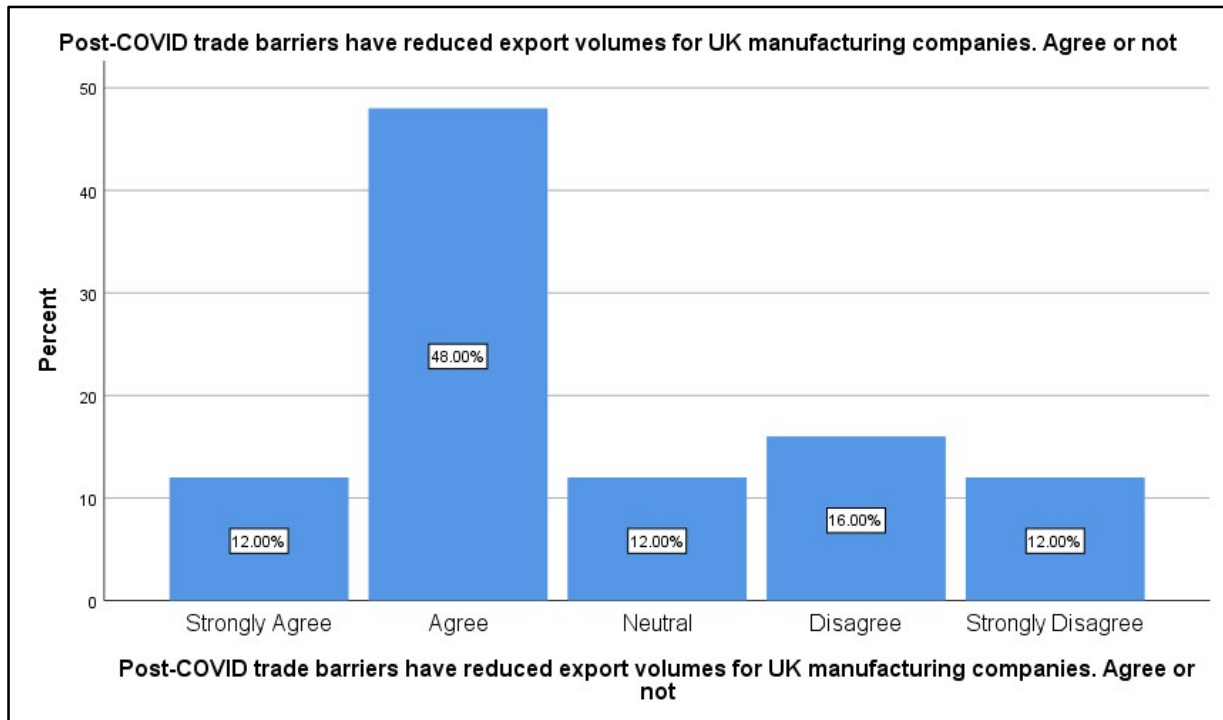


Figure 4.2.10: Reduced export volumes

(Source: SPSS)

The above figure demonstrates that 60% of the respondents are in agreement that the post-COVID trade barriers have mitigated the amount of exports made by UK manufacturing firms with 48% of respondents who replied that they agree and 12% indicated that they Strongly Agree. By comparison, only 28% (16% Disagree, 12% Strongly Disagree) of respondents disagree,, with 12% remaining neutral.

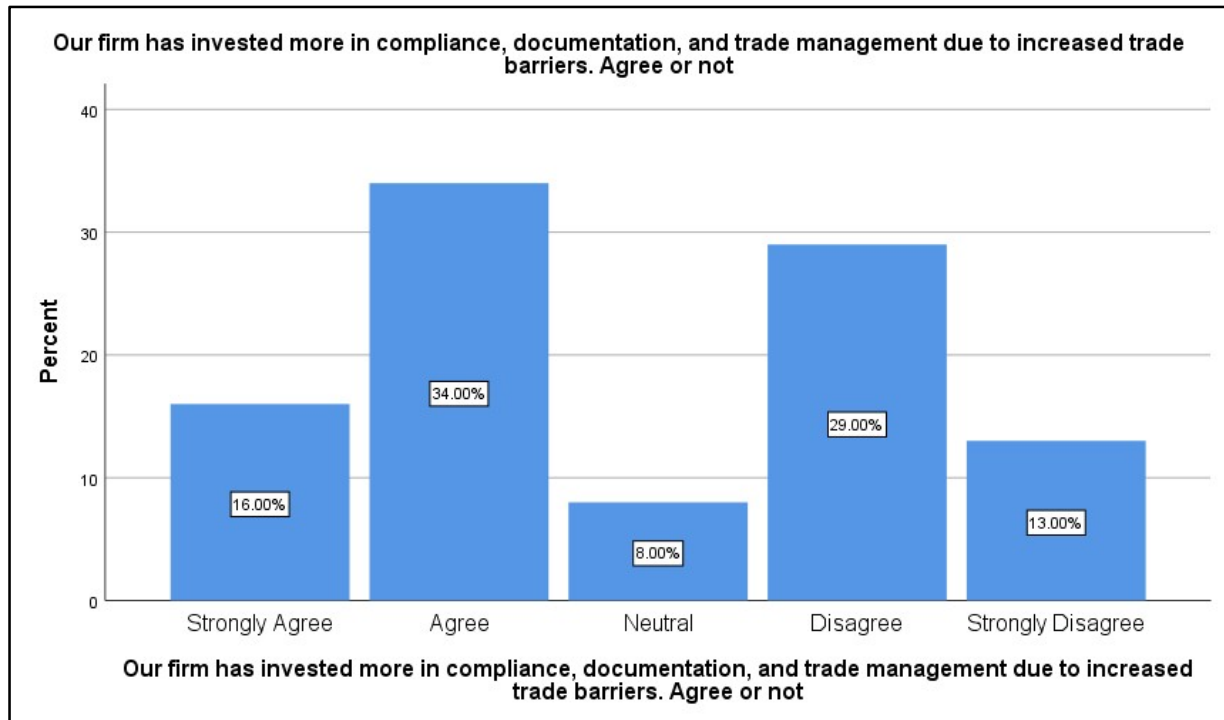


Figure 4.2.11: Reason of increased trade barriers

(Source: SPSS)

The above bar chart indicates that 50% of the trade barriers have resulted in higher investment in compliance and documentation at 34% Agreeing and 16% Strongly Agreeing. However, 42% of the people oppose this change in investment. The result underscores that trade barriers are largely engineered by the greater compliance and documentation requirements.

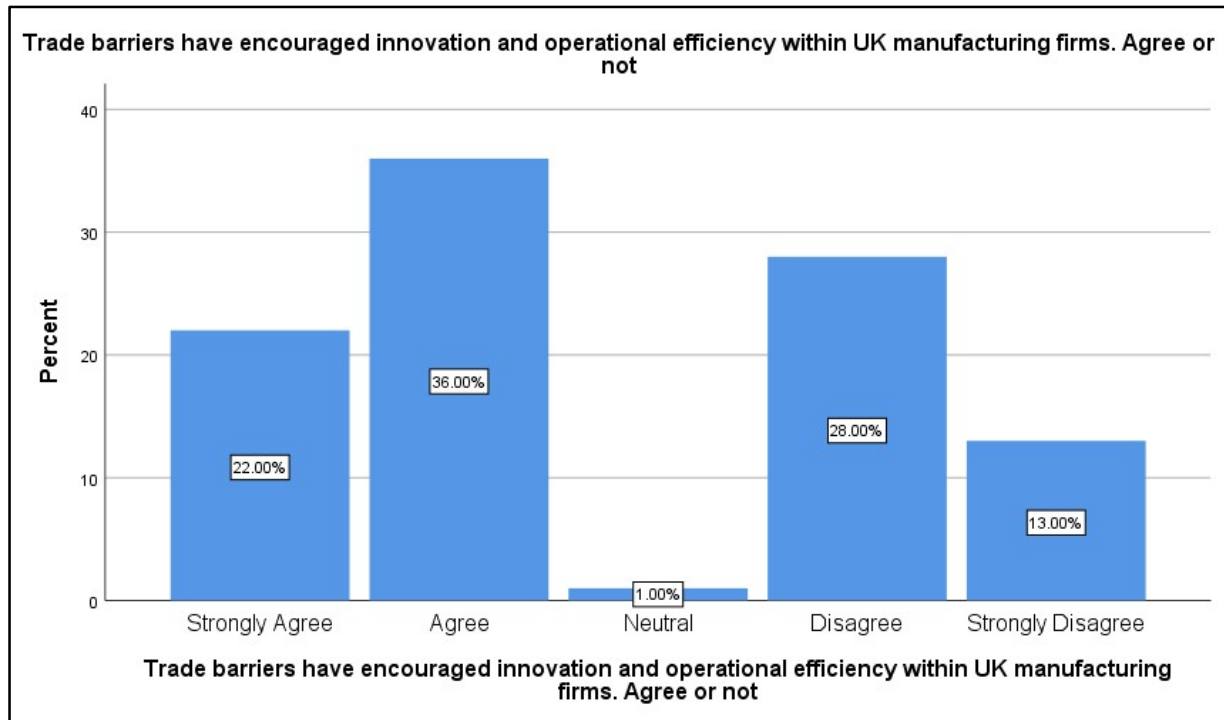


Figure 4.2.12: Innovation efficiency

(Source: SPSS)

Referring to the above image, 58% of the respondents are of the opinion that trade barriers have stimulated innovation and operational efficiency in the UK manufacturing companies. 36% are in agreement and 22% strongly agree, on the other hand, 41% disagree (28% disagree, 13% strongly disagree). Although trade barriers can depict process invention amid other companies, process invention is defensive and disproportionate among the manufacturing society.

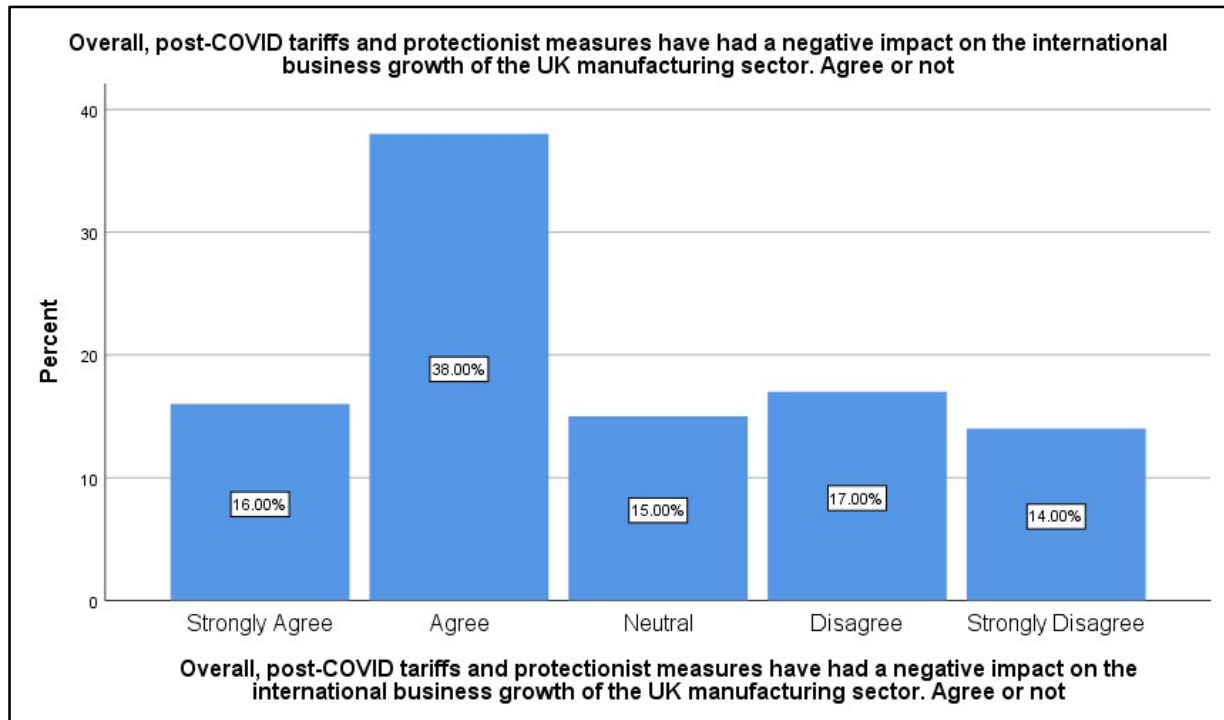


Figure 4.2.13: Impact on business

(Source: SPSS)

The above bar chart demonstrates that 54% of the respondents hold the view that the introduction of post-COVID tariffs and protectionist policies has adversely affected the growth of international business in the UK manufacturing industry. 38% of which said they agree and 16% strongly agree. On the other hand, 31% (17% Disagree, and 14% Strongly Disagree) of them, and 15% remain neutral. The trade policies adopted after the COVID are perceived as impacting negatively on the development of international business, not as factors that promote recovery or growth.

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
How many years of experience do you have in the UK manufacturing sector?	2.15	.857	100
Post-COVID trade tariffs have increased the overall cost of exporting manufactured goods from the UK. Agree or not	2.93	1.416	100
Protectionist policies introduced after COVID-19 have negatively affected the international competitiveness of UK manufacturing firms. Agree or not	2.24	1.207	100
Trade barriers have reduced our firm's ability to expand into new international markets. Agree or not	2.55	1.313	100
Post-COVID customs procedures and regulatory requirements have caused delays in cross-border manufacturing supply chains. Agree or not	3.22	1.276	100
Our organisation has shifted towards regional or domestic suppliers due to post-COVID trade restrictions. Agree or not	2.37	1.178	100
Government trade policies after COVID-19 have provided sufficient support to UK manufacturers engaged in international business. Agree or not	2.93	1.343	100
Post-COVID trade barriers have reduced export volumes for UK manufacturing companies. Agree or not	2.68	1.230	100
Our firm has invested more in compliance, documentation, and trade management due to increased trade barriers. Agree or not	2.89	1.340	100
Trade barriers have encouraged innovation and operational efficiency within UK manufacturing firms. Agree or not	2.74	1.411	100
Overall, post-COVID tariffs and protectionist measures have had a negative impact on the international business growth of the UK manufacturing sector. Agree or not	2.75	1.306	100

Figure 4.2.14: Descriptive Statistics

(Source: SPSS)

The descriptive statistics are the summary encompassing statistics of 100 respondents on the UK manufacturing sector. The main results are that the mean custom procedure used to delay the supply chain is high 3.22. The mean cost of exporting is also high 2.93, and the support of the government is adequate. The respondents said that their overall experience level was 2.15. In addition, trade barriers have effects on international expansion mean 2.55 and export volumes mean 2.68. Whereas the total adverse effects of trade barriers on the growth of business was recorded to mean 2.75.

Figure 4.2.15: Correlation

(Source: SPSS)

The Correlations table aims at estimating the linear relationship between variables in manufacturing surveys by applying Pearson Correlation (Schoonenboom, 2023). There is a strong positive correlation of .475 at the level of 0.01 and is significant between the raised costs of export and the belief that trade barriers are impeding international expansion. With the increase in compliance further, the correlation between the transition to domestic suppliers and compliance $r = .382$ is significant. Such values imply that with an increase in costs and administrative loads, companies increase the frequency of switching their supply networks and reducing the expansion and globalisation of processes. The positive correlations are statistically significant thus validating as the cost of exportation and compliance increases, the expansion to international levels also decreases.

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	66.535	10	6.653	95.271	.000 ^b
	Residual	6.215	89	.070		
	Total	72.750	99			
a. Dependent Variable: How many years of experience do you have in the UK manufacturing sector? b. Predictors: (Constant), Overall, post-COVID tariffs and protectionist measures have had a negative impact on the international business growth of the UK manufacturing sector. Agree or not, Our organisation has shifted towards regional or domestic suppliers due to post-COVID trade restrictions. Agree or not, Post-COVID customs procedures and regulatory requirements have caused delays in cross-border manufacturing supply chains. Agree or not, Trade barriers have encouraged innovation and operational efficiency within UK manufacturing firms. Agree or not, Protectionist policies introduced after COVID-19 have negatively affected the international competitiveness of UK manufacturing firms. Agree or not, Post-COVID trade barriers have reduced export volumes for UK manufacturing companies. Agree or not, Government trade policies after COVID-19 have provided sufficient support to UK manufacturers engaged in international business. Agree or not, Trade barriers have reduced our firm's ability to expand into new international markets. Agree or not, Our firm has invested more in compliance, documentation, and trade management due to increased trade barriers. Agree or not, Post-COVID trade tariffs have increased the overall cost of exporting manufactured goods from the UK. Agree or not						

Figure 4.2.16: ANOVA

(Source: SPSS)

The ANOVA table assesses the statistical significance of a regression model that employs multiple programmes (Yu *et al.*, 2022). This includes trade barriers to predict years of experience in the UK manufacturing business. The Regression Sum of Squares is 66.535 having 10 degrees of freedom (df) and the Residual Sum of Squares is 6.215 having 89 df. This model provides a high F-value that equals 95.271 with a significant value (Sig.) of .000b, which implies that the predictors are very significant in terms of their description of the variance. These findings suggest that effects of trade barriers are well known throughout the industry and the findings are strong and applicable across the board beyond individual managers.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.990	.991	12

Figure 4.2.17: Reliability statistics

(Source: SPSS)

The Reliability Statistics table validates internal consistency and reliability of the survey tool that was utilised to conduct the survey on the 100 participants. It consists of 12 items in the analysis. The value of Cronbach's Alpha stands at .990 is greater than standard value, and the value based on Standardised Items is a little more at .991. These numerically high values, which are highly related to 1.0, stand out as a pointer of a very high internal consistency, which is an indicator that the survey questions. These are doing a good and reliable job in measuring the underlying constructs associated with the UK manufacturing trade barriers.

4.3 Qualitative findings

Theme 1: Escalation of Tariff and Cost Pressures Reshaping International Competitiveness

Tariff incrementation following the COVID has basically rearranged the competitive base of the UK automotive producers in the disintegrated global markets. According to Bailey *et al.* (2023), post-pandemic and post-Brexit tariffs were part of the structural pressures that put the

competitiveness of exports at risk. Economically, increased tariffs squeeze margins whilst politically they articulate protectionist agendas that are transforming bilateral and multilateral trade relations. Externally, as Cascaldi-Garcia *et al.* (2023) observe, the uncertainty around tariffs is more damaging to investment confidence than the size of tariffs. Tactically, other manufacturers counter this by moving to products that are higher value and technologically differentiated to counter the price disadvantages.

According to data supplied by ONS, the UK automotive goods exports dropped to £52.2 billion (8.2%) in 2023, which is a sign of diminished competitiveness (ONS UK, 2023). Thus, these contractions caused by the disengagement created by tariffs may be associative but not cyclical volatility of demand. Additionally, according to the estimates of the government of the UK, the post-Brexit tariff administration added almost 7 billion pounds of compliance costs to the exporters each year (The Guardian, 2023). These values represent how trade policy choices convert into operation burdens which put off proactive internationalisation approaches.

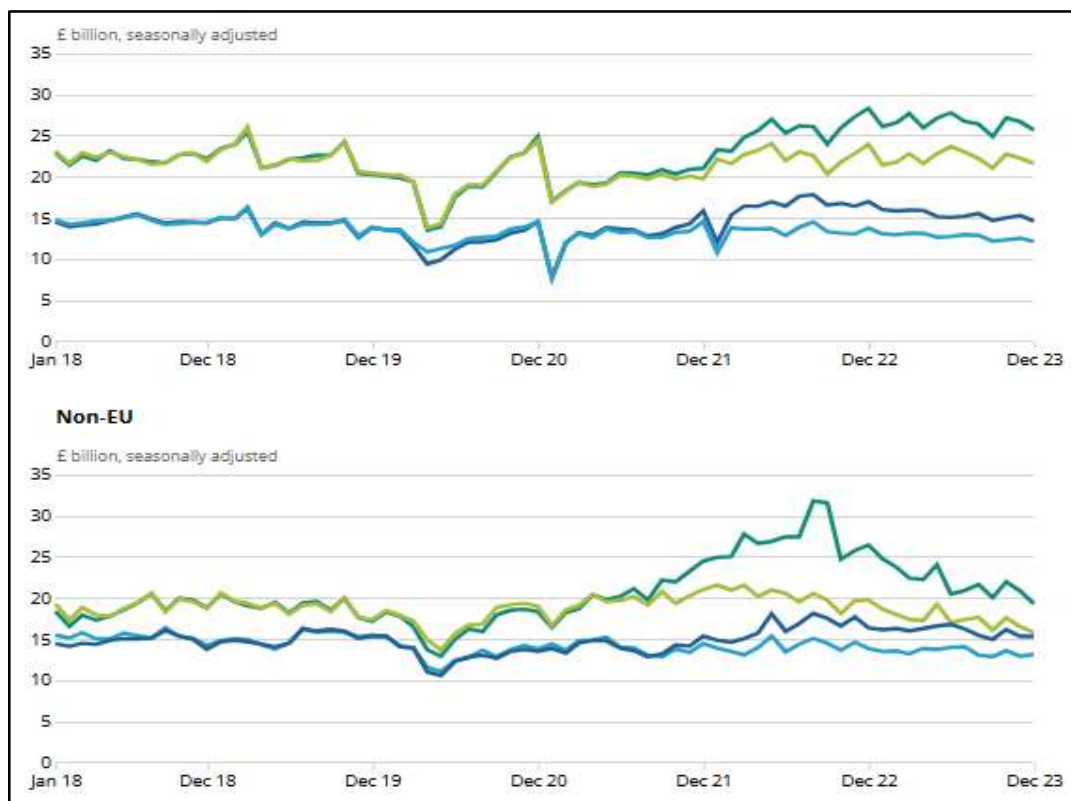


Figure 4.3.1: Declining trend of import from EU and non-EU countries in both value and inflation-adjusted terms in 2023

(Source: ONS UK, 2023)

The above figure indicates that the UK trade with non-UK markets recovered more firmly compared to the EU trade after 2021, which reflects the strategic shift of manufacturers towards market diversification during the pandemic (ONS UK, 2023). However, the pattern also supports the view of the 4th research question illustrating how firms adjusted global strategies to sustain growth. On the other hand, the condition also evidenced the first research question through outlining differential competitiveness across export markets under the changing trade patterns. Tariff regimes that are politically oriented have redefined the strategic decision-making horizons of the automotive manufacturing companies in the UK that are operating internationally. Gigauri, (2021) emphasises that the increase of the cost of transactions encourages internalisation strategies, which changes the conventional models of international expansion that relies on the market-based approach.

Moderate protectionism, according to Cherif and Hasanov (2024), may stabilise domestic production capacity, but lead to stagnation in exports in the long term in case it is maintained at high levels. As a result, companies strike a balance between rationality in the economy and political conformity by selectively abandoning price-elastic markets.

Theme 2: Non-Tariff Barriers and Regulatory Complexity Intensifying Operational Friction

Non-tariff barriers have turned into an overriding cause of friction on the operations of the UK automotive manufacturers that are working in other countries following the onset of the COVID-19. Bailey *et al.* (2023) note that the regulatory divergence and formalities increased after the pandemic and added to the existing frictions related to Brexit. These barriers increase compliance costs in an economic sense, and are politically indicative of sovereignty-based regulatory partitioning as opposed to trade facilitation objectives. In the external view, Alazzam (2021) states that non-tariff barriers are becoming a concealed protectionist instrument in the international trade regimes.

The complexity of regulations has transformed the manner in which the automobile manufacturers in the UK are organising and coordinating their operations across borders. Shlapak *et al.* (2023) highlight that non-tariff barriers are impediments in the global value chain involvement since they augment coordination and monitoring expenses.

In line with this perspective, French and Zylkin (2024) argue that a disjointed regulatory framework deter the firms from further integrating international production. Nevertheless, other manufacturers use digital compliance technology to ease administrative burdens to a certain extent. Non-tariff barriers have a long-term effect, which, at a strategic level, affects the international expansion decision-making beyond its operational issues. According to Moradlou *et al.* (2022), the increased uncertainty in transactions promotes the internalisation of the firms or regionalisation of supply networks. The perceived risk is created by political-driven regulatory volatility which makes it undesirable to enter into a foreign market even when the market is favourable. Britchenko (2025) put this trend into the context of structural de-globalisation, as opposed to a disruption that was merely temporary. Therefore, non-tariff barriers, on the one hand, limit the international development, on the other hand, they re-organize the competitive hierarchies in the UK automotive industry.

Theme 3: Strategic Supply Chain Reconfiguration as a Response to Trade Barriers

The authors state that heightened tariff and non-tariff pressure triggered a move towards the de-globalization of low-cost sourcing and towards regionally clustered and resilience-focused supply chains (Bailey *et al.* 2023). This shift creates short-term production and coordination costs but at the strategic level, it makes the economy less susceptible to disruption of the border and regulatory shock. In an external sense, Driffield *et al.* (2024) point to the fact that this restructuring is a part of a larger trend of nearshoring and supply diversification around the world. Locally, national industrial policies that promote local production also enhance the incentives of localisation. However, the findings indicate that UK manufacturers strategically reconfigured supply chains through nearshoring and supplier diversification to reduce exposure to post-COVID tariffs and non-tariff barriers. The response directly supports the 4th research question through showcasing adaptive capability, while reinforcing the first research question through outlining how supply chain resilience became a source of sustained international competitiveness.

There is qualitative evidence that reconfiguration of supply chains has delivered unequal and strategically complicated results between automotive manufactures in the UK. In a study carried out by the Office for National Statistics, in 2022, approximately 41% of manufacturing companies in the UK stated that supply chain disruption was a serious issue that led to restructuring (Barclays, 2022). Thus, these reactions may be explained by the fact that they are adaptive, not efficiency-oriented, which is increased risk aversion in the trade context of uncertainty. Besides, the

assessments on the resilience of government supply chains in the UK observe that most manufacturers implemented either supplier diversification or nearshoring measures after the COVID-19 (Parliament UK, 2021). These results indicate that continuity is highly valued during reconfiguration, as opposed to optimisation.

There is also a wider economic, political and competitiveness impact of strategic supply chain reconfiguration in terms of long term international development. Van Hassel *et al.* (2022) proposed that nearshoring reduces uncertainty in the process of transaction, but it also tends to raise the cost per unit, which conflicts with the conventional approach to cost leadership. Externally, Bettiol *et al.* (2022) cautions that over-regionalisation would focus on disintegrating the global value chains, undermining innovation diffusion and global competitiveness. Manufacturers thus are put in a complicated juggling process between resilience and worldwide coverage.

Theme 4: Protectionism and Policy Uncertainty Influencing International Strategic Decision-Making

Increased protectionism has greatly changed the international strategic focus of the UK automotive producers in the post-COVID context. According to Du and Shepotylo (2022), the protectionist trade policy enhances the uncertainty of institutions and forces companies to reevaluate their cross-border commitments. According to institutional theory, the inconsistency of policy sends a bad signal to regulatory legitimacy which heightens the perceived risks of international expansion. On the outside, Henrika *et al.* (2025) recommends that the protectionist cycles tend to focus on short-term political stability as opposed to long-term trade efficiency. As a result, companies redefine approaches to risk aversion, plasticity, and reversible global interactions.

The uncertainty in policies has also changed the way companies perceive and react towards international growth opportunities. Handley *et al.* (2025) argue that unstable trade policy interferes with the strategic planning horizon, which leads to incremental instead of commitment-intensive internationalisation. Based on the transaction cost economics, Gounopoulos and Zhang (2024) clarify that the increase in uncertainty increases the cost of governance thus motivating companies to internalise their operations or restrict themselves to a limited exposure to the market. This uncertainty changes the focus towards expansion to risk containment even in otherwise appealing foreign markets at a managerial level. Such conservatism in strategy is rational adaptation in place of strategy failure.

Importantly, protectionism has a complicated relationship with firm strategy, which is contradictory in some cases. In terms of resource-based perspective, the volatility of the policy limits the capability of firms to capitalize on location-specific advantages across borders. According to Hasan *et al.* (2024), fragmentation of trade governance has a negative impact on global value chain integration, which hinders the diffusion of innovation. It also found that the familiarity with regulation as an intangible ability is exploited by some firms to benefit versus other less institutionally embedded firms.

4.4 Summary

This chapter combined the secondary qualitative data with the primary quantitative analysis in the investigation of the post-COVID trade barriers on the international expansion of the UK automotive manufacturers. The qualitative review determined the reshaping of strategic decisions by tariffs, non-tariff barriers, supply chain reconfiguration, and protectionism. Besides, SPSS was used to conduct the analysis of primary data, which allowed triangulation of relationships between the main variables. A combination of these strategies offers strong and complementary evidence-based conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Chapter Introduction

The chapter critically analyses the empirical evidence being provided in Chapter 4 by placing it within the theoretical and empirical literature examined in Chapter 2. It does not surface the results but explains why, the UK automotive manufacturing industry after Covid barriers to trade have become material to business development and how companies have responded to this in their strategies. Since this sector heavily relies on cross-border supply networks, export-based manufacturing and alignment of regulatory policies, trade barriers not only represent a cost-based limitation but also a strategic and institutional problem. This chapter emphasises the competitive remodelling of the UK automotive firms through tariffs, non-tariff, protectionist and regulatory uncertainty on competitiveness, the organisation of its supply-chain, and innovation behaviour based on Global Value Chain (GVC) theory, Institutional Theory, and the Resource-Based View (RBV).

5.2 Impact of Tariffs on Export Costs and International Competitiveness

Among the most eminent results of the quantitative analysis, it is possible to note that 52% of the respondents considered that post-COVID tariffs have increased the price of the UK exports, and 60% of them mentioned that their export volumes were decreasing. The observation that over 50% of the interviewees claim enhanced export prices along with the declining export volumes justifies the fact that tariffs expose structural constraint to competitiveness, as opposed to momentary price perversion. With the example of the automobile industry of the UK where price-sensitive demand exists and the supply chain is mostly fragmented, the cost increase effect of tariffs is extended in a series of steps of production, which adds to its own impact on the final retail price of the vehicles. The current literature of the trade suggests that firms have the ability to neutralize the effects of tariffs through productivity gains or rebalancing exchange rates, but as observed in the current analysis, the adaptive resources are highly diluted in the post-COVID period. The constraints include labour shortages, supply-chain interruptions, and conflicting regulatory regimes seem to increase tariff sensitivity in comparison with pre-pandemic levels. Tariffs appear therefore, not to be possible as a tactical strain in the economic system but rather as the deliberate obstacles which accelerates the phasing out of firms with low profit margins. Pre-pandemic and post-Brexit tariff regimes have caused the daily structural destruction of price competitiveness of the UK automotive exports, especially in relation to their counterparts based in the EU, who still enjoy the benefits of

trading in Europe without friction, Bailey et al. (2023) argue. This argument is further switched in the survey mean score of 2.93 regarding increased costs of exports, which is affirmative to mean that cost pressures due to tariffs are very prevalent across automotive companies.

The UK automotive industry is so entrenched in both European and global value-chains where a vehicle crosses borders on several occasions during production. Any tariffs would affect any part of this chain, and in doing so they decrease the efficiency and diminish the comparative advantages that specialization has brought. This fact is consistent with the statement by Contractor (2021) that the uncertainty of trade after the COVID increases the uncertainty associated with operating internationally and reduces incentives to increase operations in the areas with a high capital intensity and tight margins.

The presented empirical evidence supports the previous academic work that explains the nature of tariffs with the decline in export competitiveness. However, the magnitude of the effect observed in the UK automotive market is higher than reported in a range of studies carried out before the pandemic. The conventional literature has assumed that companies can partially counter tariff shocks through productivity improvement or currency depreciation. On the other hand, the post-COVID environment seems to have limited these mechanisms. This discrepancy foreshadows that pandemic related supply chain impacts and labour unavailability have rendered tariff sensitivity more sensitive than the expectations of the traditional trade theory. In this vein, the tariffs within the modern context are no longer functions of distortion of price, but rather functions of barriers construction, which accelerates strategic exit of export markets, at least by the firms which are described as those with marginal profitability margins.

5.3 Protectionism and Policy Uncertainty as Strategic Constraints for Automotive Manufactures

Instead of limiting trade volumes, protectionist measures seem to have re-formed the concept of risk and opportunity concepts by UK automotive manufactures in the face of the international market. The empirical data of findings highlights that companies derive policy volatility as an indication that they should focus on flexibility rather than scale thus resulting in conservative internationalisation strategies. Such a behavioural reaction is of strategic importance in the sense that, it means that firms are not merely responding to the extent of barriers but are foreseeing future disruptive instability by regulations. Consequently, competitiveness in the international market is

undermined not only by direct prices but also by missed investment, the postponement of electrification initiatives, as well as by the hesitation of entering the market.

Regarding the perspective of institutional theory, the empirical findings indicate that the policy uncertainty acts like a constraint behaviour in the sense that it has led to shortening of the strategy planning horizons of the firms. The statistically significant ANOVA outcomes prove that the protectionist policies not only become passive contextual variables, but they are also active determiners of the international strategic orientation. This finding builds on earlier work in institutions, showing that the negative effect of uncertainty in the post-COVID period is disproportionately true against long term capital investment in capital-intensive industries like the car assembly industry.

Handley et al. (2025) argue that policy uncertainty in many cases can be more harmful than the imposed tariffs themselves because it cuts the planning horizon of companies and creates risky aversiveness. A greater number of UK automotive manufacturers are therefore now opting to focus on incremental or reversible internationalisation strategies -like limited exposure to exports or the regional approach to the market, as opposed to high intensity global expansion. As stated by Cherif and Hasanov (2024) warn, despite the political and social short-term benefits provided by protectionism, it erodes export-led growth, a spread of innovation, and long-term competitiveness.

5.4 Non-Tariff Barriers, Regulatory Complexity, and Operational Friction in Automotive Trade

The fact shows that non-tariff barriers (NTB) result in indirect but long-term cost of operations, which prove to be very unfriendly to just-in-time production systems used in the automotive industry. Unlike tariffs, which are visible and measurable, non-tariff barriers increase uncertainty by creating inconsistencies in the application of a specific regulation, as well as by delaying the administration. These frictions, according to the Global Value Chain theory, undermine the cross-border coordination efficiency, which reduces the benefits of specialization that have traditionally formed the basis of the competitiveness of the United Kingdom automotive export in the past. The strong correlation between the cost of exportation and limited international expansion also indicates that regulatory complexity acts as the mediating mechanism between the decisions of the trade policy and strategic expansion.

These findings provide strong evidence of the argument that NTBs performed as a sort of a protectionist stealth action which cost more in compliance terms but no greater increase in tariffs

(Alazzam, 2021). In the case of automotive producers that use just-in-time (JIT) production methods, the delay in any customs task is bound to disrupt assembly times, bloat inventory storage expenses, and reduce total productivity. Seeing the NTBs through the prism of the global value chains (GVCs), they introduce uncertainty into the logistics commonly performed across the border, thus undermining and efficacy-driven models of production that have been historically characteristic of the automotive industry.

The Institutional Theory also determines the fragmentation of the trade governance by the regulatory divergence created by COVID-19 and Brexit. The automotive companies are already obliged to comply with the variety of standards, certification requirements and documents procedures in the dissimilar markets. As a result, the focus of the managers and resources in product development and market expansion are relocated to regulatory compliance. Strong positive linkage ($r = 0.475$) between costs of exports and hampered international growth is empiric observation in support of the argument that regulatory burdens directly mediate growth ambitions in the automotive industry.

At the same time, qualitative data are consistent with our assumption that regulatory complexity has encouraged organisational learning and investment in digital compliance tools in the larger automotive companies and thus supports the resource-based view (RBV) hypothesis that institutional knowledge, regulatory expertise, and digital capabilities is a strategic source.

5.5 Strategic Supply Chain Reconfiguration and Resilience Building in the Automotive Industry

One of the survey findings that are presented in an empirical manner is that 76% of companies respond that they have moved to either regional or domestic suppliers due to post-COVID trade restrictions. This trend, in the automotive industry, is an indicator of a resounding strategic shift towards less globe-spanning, cost-efficient supply chains in more regionally focused ones.

In terms of Global Value Chain literature this phenomenon can be viewed as a partial but not a total de-globalisation but not total disengagement. To reduce the duration of their supply chains, enlarge their supplier base and use near-shoring strategies to soften the impact of any border discontinuities as well as geopolitical tensions and regulatory uncertainties, Automotive companies are shortening their supply chains.

Still, the analysis should be aware of the strategic trade-offs of such a shift. Even though supply chain reconfiguration has strengths of improving resilience and supply security, it typically

increases the per-unit cost of production and limits access to specialised global suppliers, especially in high-technology automotive products such as semiconductors, battery systems. Moradlou et. al. (2022) caution careless reshoring without an accompanying investment in competence building, automation concepts, and invention can become very counterproductive to long-term competitiveness.

These results may indicate that UK automotive coach-building interventions have to be carefully counterbalanced so as not to jeopardise competitiveness over the long run. As much as regionalisation is beneficial as it decreases the susceptibility to the effects of the border, it also presents the risks of isolating firms due to a lack of access to global innovation. The UK manufactures, therefore, have to seek a strategic coherence that balances localisation of supply chains with significant investments in automation, development of supplier capability and strategic alliances with technology based international suppliers. Without such complementary efforts, the resilience policies can work against the companies trending into deeper cost units of production thus hijacking their world-market shares.

5.6 Innovation and Digitalisation as Adaptive Responses in Automotive Manufacturing

Despite the fact that the trade barriers seem to have triggered innovation and digitalisation, the relationship should be viewed with apprehension. To the extent that evidence exists, a large portion of this innovation is reactive as opposed to opportunity-driven, it centers upon compliance efficiency as opposed to market growth. Conceptually, according to RBV, this portrays asymmetry of capabilities in the industry. The bigger companies who have developed digital platforms are in a better place to turn regulatory pressure to operational advantage compared to SMEs who lack resources to transform innovation into sustainable international performance. Consequently, innovation that is caused by trade can actually support structural inequalities instead of neutralizing them. Although most of the respondents associate post-COVID trade barriers with increased innovation, this correlation should be viewed with some caution. Innovation in this kind of environment is largely reactive instead of strategic driven by necessity and not opportunity. Whereas the compliance is more efficient and transparent through digital tools, these instruments are not capable of eliminating the lack of market access or increased tariff risk. In addition, the gains of innovation are not equally shared and thus, supporting structural imbalances between big manufacturers and SMEs.

5.7 Government Trade Policy Support: Effectiveness and Limitations for the Automotive Sector

According to the findings of the surveys, it is revealed that 52% of the survey participants believe that UK government trade policies have provided adequate support in the post COVID period, but 37% do not. This paradoxical view reflects general criticism that trade support systems are skewed to benefit large exporters. Programmes like UK Export Finance and digital customs reforms have helped in increased access to finance and less administration time, which has increased the involvement of major automotive manufacturers internationally.

However, qualitative evidence shows that there is still unhappiness over accessibility, complexity and inclusiveness of policies that relate to SMEs. In terms of the Institutional Theory, this gap refers to a disconnect between the design of policies and firm-level capacity. Despite the expectation of trade policies promoting exports and competitiveness, they are not as effective in the automotive industry due to the lack of balance in applications and priority to support skills development.

The arguments presented above support the idea of Hauser (2022) that the UK trade policy in the post-COVID period has distributional shortcomings. Unless specifically directed towards helping automotive SMEs, particularly in the areas of digital capability development, regulatory compliance, and participation in market intelligence, government interventions can only lead to the enhancement of existing inequalities rather than to the creation of an inclusive and sustainable global development.

5.8 Theoretical Integration and Synthesis

Global Value Chain theory, Institutional Theory, and the Resource-Based View offer a more holistic framework elucidating the post-COVID trade dynamics than would be the case in the context of one of those frameworks applied individually. There is empirical evidence that the post-COVID trade barriers no longer distribute competitive advantage evenly across firms; instead, they redistribute competitive advantage to firms that have been blessed with better institutional knowledge, more digital skill, and strategic flexibility. In its turn, this multi-theoretical methodology develops the traditional trade theory introducing institutional instability and heterogeneity of firm capabilities as a major reason for its explanation. Interestingly, the mentioned integration emphasises that the UK automotive sector experiences following the COVID-19 cannot be explained solely in the light of the traditional trade theory, but had been the consequence of the

interaction of three elements: institutional instability, heterogeneous capabilities of the firms. and disrupted value chains.

5.9 Chapter Summary

The chapter shows a critical analysis of the impact of emerging trade barriers as a result of post-COVID on international business development in the United Kingdom automotive manufacturing industry. The results verify that tariffs, non-tariff barriers and protectionist measures have increased costs of export, reduced access to the market as well as enhancing the complexity of operation. At the same time, car companies have reacted by fighting internally restructuring their supply chains, innovation and discriminative global interaction.

It has been revealed in the discussion that government policies and digitalisation provide some relief, but structural inequalities still exist, specifically affecting small-to-medium enterprises (SMEs) in the ecosystem of automotive suppliers. With the combination of empirical results with the known theoretical statements, this chapter provides a strong background of the conclusions and policy recommendations expressed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction and Restatement of Research Aim

The paper has analysed how the presence of trade barriers after the COVID-19 affected the international growth policies of UK-based manufacturing companies and focused on the automotive industry. It examined the effects of tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and protectionist policy, and uncertainty on the competitive front, export performance, and strategic decision-making. The mixed-method approach has been followed combining secondary qualitative evidence with primary quantitative data analysed with SPSS.

6.2 Summary of Key Findings

The quantitative results confirm that post-COVID trade barriers had a significant and an empirical effect on the international expansion of UK manufacturing companies. Analysis on SPSS showed that there was a high perceived level of customs delays, a higher cost of exportation, and lesser volume of exports which interpreted that there was a large amount of operational and financial stress. Most of the respondents found that tariffs and protectionist policies have negative impacts on the competitiveness of international markets and limit the output of exports. The correlation analysis revealed that the positive association between the increase of export costs and perceptions of trade barriers as an impediment to international expansion were statistically significant, with additional associations establishing that an increase in compliance requirements leads to increased changes in suppliers towards domestic and regional ones.

These quantitative results are also complemented and enriched by the qualitative findings because they clarify the manner and reason of such impacts. Secondary sources suggest that tariffs undermine the competitiveness of prices, especially of small firms that lack the capacity to compensate for the extra costs. The non-tariff barriers such as regulatory divergence and custom processes were observed to enhance the operational strain, disruption of just-in-time supply chains, and diversion of management concentration on growth-related operations to compliance management. These impediments were particularly demanding to companies that were integrated within elaborate international value chains, which strengthened the risk-averse strategic behaviour and discriminating international activities.

The aggregate of the mixed-method results shows that strategic supply chain reconfiguration is also one of the most prevalent reactions to post-COVID barriers in trade. Companies are moving towards regionalisation, sourcing in their home countries and diversifying suppliers in order to

gain strength and minimize the risk of policy shock. Though the strategies are effective in enhancing stability in operations, they restrict entry to high growth global markets and this is a trade-off between resilience and global accessibility.

6.3 Linking with objectives

The results address the research objectives of the study.

Objective 1

The first objective that analysed the effects of post-COVID tariffs on international competitiveness was well achieved. The quantitative findings revealed a greater perception of increased cost of export and decreased volumes of export among most of the respondents. This relationship was further confirmed by the statistically significant relationship between the cost of exports and hampered international expansion.

Objective 2

The second objective was aimed at non-tariff barriers and regulatory complexity. This was achieved by qualitative results on customs delays and compliance costs, complemented by the quantitative data.

Objective 3

The high mean of delay related to customs and popular acceptance that UK regulatory demands interfere with the supply chain (Clark, and Bernard, 2022).

Objective 4

The goal of analysis of strategic responses was achieved because of the evidence of mass regionalisation and household sourcing. The empirical data showed that there is a high level of agreement that companies are relocating supply bases after the COVID.

6.4 Theoretical Contributions

The study is relevant to theory through the expansion of the known paradigms of international business into a trade environment post-COVID. The Institutional Theory is supported by showing how regulatory uncertainty and protectionist policies influence. The firm behaviour and restrain strategic legitimacy across the borders. The Resource-Based View is further developed by emphasising regulatory knowledge and flexibility of supply chain as key intangible competences (Kero, and Bogale, 2023). Combining these theories with the help of the mixed-methodology, the study contributes to the knowledge of internationalisation in the climate of increased uncertainty.

6.5 Practical Implications

The results provide significant practical implications regarding the managers and policymakers. Managers must focus more on strategic flexibility, invest more in compliance capabilities and use supply chain approaches that are more balanced and more resiliency their growth internationally. There is some evidence that localisation can limit the competitiveness in the long term because required access to the global markets diminished. The findings are important to the policymakers because it points out the need to be clear in their regulations, trade policies.

6.6 Limitations of the Study

This study has a number of limitations in spite of what it has contributed. The quantitative result was based on 100 respondents which might have a limited scope of analysis to the whole UK manufacturing industry. There is the element of perceptual bias associated with the utilisation of self-reported survey data. Moreover, the study is targeted at a definite post-COVID era with unprecedented upheaval, the discoveries of which can change as the state of trade stabilises.

6.7 Future research directions and recommendations

The longitudinal designs can be followed in future studies to understand the influence of trade barriers in shaping international strategies in various stages of post-crisis. According to Aghazadeh and Zandi (2023), internationalisation is a dynamic process that needs a dynamic analysis instead of cross-sectional analysis. The minimal generalisability of this study would be overcome through comparative studies across nations and manufacturing industries. Objective indicators of performance should also be included in work in the future to decrease the perceptual bias. Besides, the analysis of digitalisation, sustainability regulations, and geopolitical changes would enrich the knowledge of the new strategic responses.

Recommendations

In accordance with the results, the UK manufacturers of automobile products need to implement a balanced internationalisation approach that would entail both supply chain resilience and further involvement in the global market. For reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, firms ought to invest in digital trade compliance solutions, AI-powered supply chain visibility, and expertise in regulations. Regionalisation of key suppliers and strategic ties with EU and international suppliers of technology can be useful in keeping innovation access alive. Those in charge of the policy making processes can focus on the clarity of the regulation, lessening the customs friction, crafting trade supporting programmes. It can be inclusive and specifically a reserve of SMEs, especially in

enhancing skills and digital capability. This would be the kind of action, coordinated at both firm level and policy level, that is needed to maintain long-term competitiveness.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey questionnaire

1. What is your current role within the organisation?

Senior Management

Middle Management

Operational / Production Staff

Trade / Export Manager

Other:

2. How many years of experience do you have in the UK manufacturing sector?

Less than 5 years

5–10 years

11–15 years

16–20 years

More than 20 years

3. Post-COVID trade tariffs have increased the overall cost of exporting manufactured goods from the UK. Agree or not.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

4. Protectionist policies introduced after COVID-19 have negatively affected the international competitiveness of UK manufacturing firms. Agree or not

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

5. Trade barriers have reduced our firm's ability to expand into new international markets. Agree or not

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

6. Post-COVID customs procedures and regulatory requirements have caused delays in cross-border manufacturing supply chains. Agree or not

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

7. Our organisation has shifted towards regional or domestic suppliers due to post-COVID trade restrictions. Agree or not

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

8. Government trade policies after COVID-19 have provided sufficient support to UK manufacturers engaged in international business. Agree or not

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

9. Post-COVID trade barriers have reduced export volumes for UK manufacturing companies. Agree or not

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

10. Our firm has invested more in compliance, documentation, and trade management due to increased trade barriers. Agree or not

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

11. Trade barriers have encouraged innovation and operational efficiency within UK manufacturing firms. Agree or not

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

12. Overall, post-COVID tariffs and protectionist measures have had a negative impact on the international business growth of the UK manufacturing sector. Agree or not

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neutral

Agree

Strongly agree

Appendix 2: Participant information sheet (PIS)

University of Wales Trinity Saint David (London Campus)

Participant Information Sheet

Winchester House, 11 Cranmer Rd,

London SW9 6EJ

Tel: 020 7127 7400

		Participant Identification Number:	2428117
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET			
Project Title: POST-COVID TRADE BARRIERS AND GLOBAL STRATEGY IN THE UK MANUFACTURING SECTOR: AN ANALYSIS OF TARIFFS, PROTECTIONISM, AND THEIR IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS GROWTH			
Name of Researcher: Pratik Mukeshbhai Prajapati		Name of Supervisor: Dr. Muhammad Tariq	

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Pratik Mukeshbhai Prajapati and I am an undergraduate student in the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, United Kingdom (London campus). Currently, I am conducting research entitled 'Post-

covid trade barriers and global strategy in the UK manufacturing sector: an analysis of tariffs, protectionism, and their impact on international business growth’.

The purpose of this research is to:

Although there is extensive literature on the macroeconomic trade shocks experienced because of COVID-19, few studies have formally investigated the direct effect of post-pandemic trade barriers and protectionism policies on the UK manufacturing industry. Specifically, the nature of effects of these constraints on international competitiveness, strategic decision making and business expansion lacks sufficient clarity. This disjunction limits effective policy-making and informed managerial reactions in the post-COVID trade country. The study aims to investigate the impact of these trade barriers on the international trade of the UK and the manufacturing sector and how business firms can plan to address them and promote growth in the post-COVID era.

Aim

The study is aimed at examining the impact of post-Covid trade volatility and protectionist policies associated with international business expansion strategies focusing on the UK manufacturing sector.

Objectives

RO1: To test the effect of trade barriers that come after COVID on the competitiveness of the UK manufacturing sector in the global markets.

RO2: To address the question of how protectionist policies influence the trade policy of UK manufacturers in the post-pandemic period.

RO3: To evaluate how the current policies made by the UK government are effective to meet challenges of trade barriers and protectionism in the manufacturing industry.

RO4: To assess the tactics used by the manufacturers in the UK to meet the new trade restrictions and their effectiveness in maintaining long term expansion.

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project by [indicate what activity you want them to do].

Please complete the accompanying consent form. I will [take notes/record audio/record visual-audio] during the interview with your permission.

Please note that the [questionnaire/interview/activity] should not take more than [give timing guidance] to complete but, there is no time constraint. Your participation in the [questionnaire/interview/activity] will be voluntary. You will not receive any remuneration or reward from the researcher. As a participant, you may decide to stop the [questionnaire/interview/activity] at any point of time without any explanation and/or reason.

All data generated from this or any interview will remain confidential. For more information, please view the university's [Research and Data Management Policy](#).

I thank you in advance for your time and participation. If any questions do arise, feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Name of Researcher: Pratik Mukeshbhai Prajapati	Signature of Researcher: P.M. PRAJAPATI
Email of Researcher: 2428117@student.uwtsd.ac.uk	

Appendix 3: Participant consent form

Participation Consent Form



Participant Identification Number: **2428117**

PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

(for researcher to fill)

Project Title: POST-COVID TRADE BARRIERS AND GLOBAL STRATEGY IN THE UK MANUFACTURING SECTOR: AN ANALYSIS OF TARIFFS, PROTECTIONISM, AND THEIR IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS GROWTH

Name of Researcher: PRATIK MUKESHBHAI PRAJAPATI

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Muhammad Tariq

Email of Researcher: 2428117@student.uwtsd.ac.uk

Aim of Research: The study is aimed at examining the impact of post-Covid trade volatility and protectionist policies associated with international business expansion strategies focusing on the UK manufacturing sector.

(for participant to fill)		YES	NO			
1	I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated 01/02/2026 for the above study.	×				
2	I understand there are no material benefits for participating.	×				
2	I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	×				
3	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	×				
4	I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles or presentations by the researcher.	×				
5	I consent for my name and title to be used within this study.	×				
	Where applicable, I understand that my details will not be anonymous.	×				
6	I agree to be recorded (audio and/or audio-visual video).	×				
7	I agree to take part in the above study.	×				
Researcher's Name (Print)		PRATIK MUKESHB HAI	Signature	P.M. PRAJAPA TI	Date	01/02/2026

	PRAJAPAT I			
Participant's Name (Print)		Signature		Date

You may decline to participate in this study. You may end your participation in this study at any time. All data generated from this or any interview will remain confidential. For more information, please view the university's [Research and Data Management Policy](#).

When completed please email a copy to the below address to be kept on the file of the researcher and retain a copy for yourself.

Subject Title: **[NAME OF PARTICIPANT] – Participant Consent Form**

Email: 2428117@student.uwtsd.ac.uk

Appendix 4: SPSS INPUT

<https://d.docs.live.net/aaab653104864c5d/文件/Input%202.sav>

Appendix 5: OUTPUT

[https://d.docs.live.net/aaab653104864c5d/文件/Output1%20\(1\).spv](https://d.docs.live.net/aaab653104864c5d/文件/Output1%20(1).spv)