COVID-19 impact on cross-border M&A advisory business in Japan

Bebenroth, Ralf

Lielienthal, Carolin

Massmann, Kevin

(Citation)
Review of International Business and Strategy,34(5):713-731

(Issue Date)
2024-11-12

(Resource Type)
journal article

(Version)
Accepted Manuscript

Covid-19 pandemic trouble? An exploratory study on German acquisitions in Japan

Abstract

Purpose

This study investigated how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted cross-border acquisitions. Though literature suggests that cross-border investments decreased during the pandemic, there is little conclusive evidence on specific characteristics in the execution of particular acquisitions during such times. We applied the case study format to conduct our investigation by (1) providing a refined classification of influences on cross-border procedures and (2) highlighting critical characteristics during three phases of acquisitions, viz. search, negotiation, and integration periods.

Design/methodology/approach

The grounded theory approach was applied to three in-depth case studies of German companies that acquired Japanese targets during the Covid-19 pandemic. Data were supplemented by information received through additional case studies of German subsidiaries in Japan and interviews with consultants.

Findings

Firms had already intended to acquire their respective targets, with their decisions having been made prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the pandemic had no impact on target selection. Owing to travel restrictions, information exchange was limited which inevitably led to higher usage of digitalization. While several barriers led to delays in negotiations, prevailing mutual trust helped to reduce difficulties. During the integration period, we found delays in synergy creation and increases in remote communication. Nevertheless, the digital workflow of documents improved the efficiency.

Originality

Our study provides novel insights into the execution of cross-border acquisitions impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. We discuss new implications for M&A research and practice, focusing on German firms acquiring Japanese targets.

Keywords

Acquisitions; Covid-19 pandemic; grounded theory; integration period; negotiation period; search period.

1. Introduction

The outbreak of Covid-19 in December 2019 led to a pandemic worldwide (Lee *et al.,* 2021), causing far-reaching consequences for society (Madinga *et al.*, 2023) and many firms to restrict or even exit their businesses (Bartik *et al.*, 2020; Bernstein *et al.*, 2020). Regarding mergers and acquisitions (M&A), the literature indicates a negative impact of Covid-19 on transactions (Aschbacher and Kroon, 2023; Lee *et al.*, 2023), resulting in a sharp decline in the volume of worldwide deals (Rasheed and Husain, 2022). While some studies found evidence of significantly lower direct investments owing to the Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. Ho and Gan, 2021), other studies indicated otherwise. For example, Lee *et al.* who studied acquisitions in 2020 stated: “Covid-19 indices do not hamper M&A deals in general” (p. 12). According to Bauer *et al.* (2022), companies were able to adjust their acquisition behavior during the Covid-19 pandemic, for example, with regard to approaches for identifying target companies. Therefore, research suggests that firms use different strategies to adjust their behavior in acquisitions

(Clarke, 2023) in the “new normal” post-Covid-19 pandemic.

It is still too early to make a definitive conclusion about the full impact of Covid-19 on the global M&A business. Nevertheless, Magnanelli *et al.* (2022) point out that there is scarce research on how the pandemic impacted M&A transactions. It should be noted that most studies are based on secondary data from databases. For instance, Jebran and Chen (2022) examined secondary data on how managerial ability affected acquisition decisions during the Covid-19 crisis. However, by relying on large databases, particular practices and characteristics of transactions are not fully reflected. An imprecise view of the inner content of acquisitions limits our ability to elucidate characteristics that affect cross-border acquisitions.

Our research fills this void by focusing on particular practices and characteristics of specific cross-border acquisitions that were realized during the Covid-19 crisis. To obtain a better understanding of the execution of such acquisitions, the present study adopted a qualitative and inductive approach. We interviewed several top managers and decision-makers who were actively involved in three acquisitions of Japanese target firms by German companies. We specifically focused on acquisitions of German firms in Japan, because Japanese managers tend to be particularly sensitive to negative impacts (Fujitani *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, the Japanese government introduced highly strict measures of border-control, which poses special challenges for acquisitions of Japanese targets (Grepin *et al.*, 2023). The interviews were conducted with the objective of answering the following research question of this study:

How were acquisition processes between German bidding firms and Japanese target firms affected by the Covid-19 pandemic?

Our study contributes to fulfilling the need for definitive characteristics that reflected the processes of cross-border acquisitions during the Covid-19 pandemic. For this, we segmented the acquisition process into three phases: Search, negotiation, and integration periods. Our findings are manifold. In the search period, we see that all three German bidder firms, even with the deals signed during Covid-19, had previous market presence in Japan and even some kind of relationship with the Japanese target before the outbreak of Covid-19. There was no evidence of the Covid-19 pandemic having an impact on target selection in any case. Because of travel restrictions, first-hand information was largely replaced by online communication. Hence, there was a higher degree of digitalization during the three phases of M&A. At the negotiation stage, we identified multiple challenges, such as increased barriers in remote negotiation and slowed down progress in integration (compared to the period before the Covid-19 pandemic). Furthermore, we found that the established trust in the Japanese targets helped reduce some limitations owing to Covid constraints during the negotiation phase. There was a higher volume of improved electronic workflow of documents because of physical travel restrictions. The degree and speed of integration were also impacted as Covid-19 travel restrictions led to an increase in remote work or work from the home office. This was especially true for managers of the acquired firms who had to change their office locations to the new German subsidiaries, and this often resulted in communication difficulties.

2. Phases of the M&A process

Fundamentally, a merger or an acquisition can be seen as a process that includes a large number of different activities and usually takes several years (Jemison and Sitkin, 1986). Research on M&A is accompanied by different schools of thought and is dedicated to a wide range of questions on activities in the pre-M&A phase and post-M&A phase (Bauer and Matzler, 2014).

The pre-M&A phase usually begins with activities to search for a suitable target firm and ends with the closing of the deal (Welch *et al.*, 2020). It can therefore be divided into the search period and the negotiation period. The post-M&A phase comprises complex activities to integrate the target into the acquiring company (Steigenberger, 2017). Consequently, it is referred to as the integration period.

2.1. Search period

The search period consists of activities to initiate the acquisition and to select a suitable target firm (Welch *et al.*, 2020). Initiating a deal is about the explicit decision of a firm to acquire another entity. The decision to initiate a cross-border acquisition is usually based on the content of strategies, i.e. an acquisition should contribute to the achievement of corporate goals through strategic actions like business expansion or diversification (*Seth et al.*, 2000). As part of the target selection process, potential targets are identified and assessed in terms of their contribution for the overarching objective (*Welch et al.*, 2020). Based on the resource-based view, targets are selected according to their tangible and intangible resources and capabilities that provide beneficial outcomes for the acquiring firm(Yu *et al.*, 2016; Kaul and Wu, 2016). In cross-border M&A, geographical characteristics of the target are also included in the decision-making process (Chen *et al.*, 2018). In order to make the best possible decisions on target selection, companies frequently rely on the support of consultants (Aschbacher and Kroon, 2023).

2.2. Negotiation period

All activities from making initial contact with the selected target to closing the transaction can be assigned to the negotiation period. It includes many steps such as the articulation of a nonbinding offer from the buyer, ongoing negotiations about the terms of the deal between the buyer and target, due diligence as well as the legal closing (Welch *et al.*, 2020). Researchers have investigated several factors influencing both the activities (e.g. price negotiation process) and outcomes (e.g. characteristics of the price) of the negotiation phase, including the bargaining power between the buyer and target (e.g. Cuypers *et al.*, 2016) as well as the degree of competition between multiple potential buying firms (e.g. de Bodt *et al.*, 2018).
Recently, an increasing interest in research on the relationship between trust and cross-border M&A has been observed (e.g., Maung, 2022; Sachsenmaier and Guo, 2019; Hain *et al.*, 2016). According to Zaheer *et al.* (1998), trust can either be interpersonal or interorganizational. Interpersonal trust is "the extent of trust placed in the partner organization by the members of the focal organization (p. 142)". While they are theoretically and empirically separate from each other, high levels of interpersonal trust can affect organizational trust between two firms. Consequently, trust between individuals and their firms can be a success factor for cross-border M&A (Jaura and Michailova, 2014; Sachsenmaier and Guo, 2019).

2.3. Integration period

Many synergies are the outcome of the integration phase (Angwin and Meadows, 2015). A well-managed integration is one of the most critical tasks for achieving synergies (Galpin, 2021). Integrating the target into the acquiring firm is a highly complex and challenging process (Steigenberger, 2017). This applies in particular to cross-border M&A, as the companies involved and their employees come from different cultures (Stahl *et al.*, 2013). According to Rouzies *et al.* (2019), integration processes are dynamic and embedded into other co-evolving processes like operations or crisis management. Besides taking into consideration the varying degrees of integrating the target firm with the acquiring firm, integration approaches also differ with regard to the speed of the execution of process changes (Schweizer *et al.*, 2022). While research on the speed of integration processes is limited, interest in this topic has been growing recently (e.g., Thomas and Louisgrand, 2022; Bauer and Matzler, 2014). In general, it can be expected that the quick execution of integration processes leads to faster realization of beneficial outcomes, such as synergies (Angwin, 2004). However, a quick execution of integration processes is not always the most favorable approach as speed can also hamper relationships (Homburg and Bucerius, 2006).

2.4. Influence of Covid-19 on the M&A process

Apart from a few exceptional studies, the current state of knowledge on the execution of the M&A process of cross-border transactions in light of the Covid-19 pandemic appears to be a black box. Existing studies primarily focus on the quantitative analysis of data bases, without investigating characteristics of specific activities within the M&A process (e.g. Jebran and Chen, 2022; Ho and Gan, 2021). One of the few exceptions is the research study by Bauer *et al.* (2022). By conducting a mixed-method research approach based on a survey and interviews, changes in the acquisition behaviour of companies from Germany and the United Kingdom were elaborated. The findings are reflected in four strategic archetypes during the time of Covid-19: (1) Hide strategy: Companies have temporarily suspended all M&A activities as M&A is perceived as a risk. (2) Cost strategy: Companies are merely continuing existing integration projects and massively restricting their search for new targets to reduce costs. (3) Run strategy: Companies perceive M&A as an opportunity to acquire targets affected by the crisis. (4) Marathon strategy: Companies continuously implement their M&A strategies and simultaneously monitor the market with regard to potential opportunities. In addition, the findings indicate that smaller mid-cap firms focused on either hide strategy or run strategy, while large listed companies mostly chose the cost strategy of marathon strategy. While this study provides insightful details on the behaviour of companies in the search period, other periods (negotiation period and integration period) were not investigated. Additionally, the study did not specifically investigate cross-border acquisitions.

3. Context and method

3.1. Context of Covid-19 and Japan

The context of this study was based on the Covid-19 pandemic situation in Japan. Japanese borders were largely closed from May 2020 until October 2022. During that time, business travelers faced much difficulty entering Japan (e.g., they had to undergo mandatory quarantine), or they were simply denied entry altogether.

Our study focused on three cross-border acquisitions of Japanese target firms by German firms. In acquisition case A, we interviewed the project leader for acquisition at the bidder side as well as the CEO of the acquired target firm. In case B, we interviewed the Head of M&A of the German firm who was actively involved in the execution of the deal. Finally, in case C, we were able to interview both CEOs from the German and Japanese firms. The cases (A, B, C), summarized in Table 1, differed significantly in terms of company size and industry. With regard to the three acquisitions, there was no practicable way for the staff of the German companies to travel to their Japanese target firms during the Covid-19 pandemic to conduct necessary negotiation and integration processes. Furthermore, we interviewed two consultants with experience in M&A between German and Japanese firms, as well as additional decision-makers in the subsidiaries of three German companies located in Japan (cases D, E and F).

Table 1: Case acquisitions of Japanese firms by German bidding firms

Case	Industry	No. of employees of acquiring firm	No. of employees of target	Year of acquisition
A	Precision technology	1,500	20	2021
B	Consumer goods	51,000	500	2022
C	Multimedia software	300	10	2021

Produced by both authors

To demonstrate the context, we refer to our additional three case studies of German subsidiaries based in Japan (D, E and F) already before the Covid-19 outbreak. All three additional firms faced challenges because of Japan's restrictive entry policy. Most of foreign-based firms in Japan restricted their employees to working from their home offices, often referred to as "telework" (Bebenroth and Nahar, 2022). For firm E, physical training could not be held. Therefore, in-person contact had to be reduced to remain financially viable. The German CEO of company F contended (in October 2022) that German managers would be back at work as before, i.e., their travel frequency would revert to the same levels as before Covid-19. However, the CEO of company F noted that American managers were travelling less after the reopening of Japan. This was an important observation as it showed that firms from countries other than Germany could lead to bias in our study results.

In addition, it must be mentioned that the integration of firms can take a longer time. For example, firm D was dismayed that integration issues of their firm had been an ongoing event since 2017. Special focus was placed on harmonizing German and Japanese employees without touching their pay schemes. Also, (Japanese) workers in several of these Japan-based (German) factories felt disadvantaged as they were not able to conduct "tele-work" (home office), unlike the (German but also the Japanese) white-collar employees.

3.2. Data collection

To address the research question for this study, an exploratory, inductive approach was adopted to gather data from qualitative interviews (Caligiuri and Bonache, 2016; He *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, findings cannot be used for generalization (Miranda and Duarte, 2020). Appendix 1 provides an overview of the interviews for this study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via video links and in person, with several key persons who were involved in the M&A processes of the three cases (A, B, C). It was envisaged that such a qualitative approach would enable the researcher to have access to more in-depth information as top managers would be contacted directly about their experiences and challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic. The interviews of the three M&A case studies were conducted in August and September 2023. The interviews with three additional German firms (D, E and F) were done via video links and in person from October 2022 to November 2022. Two consultants located in Germany and the United Kingdom with experience in M&A deals involving Japanese and German firms were interviewed in July 2023 and October 2023 via a video link. The interviews took between 30 minutes and 120 minutes with an average duration of 52 minutes.

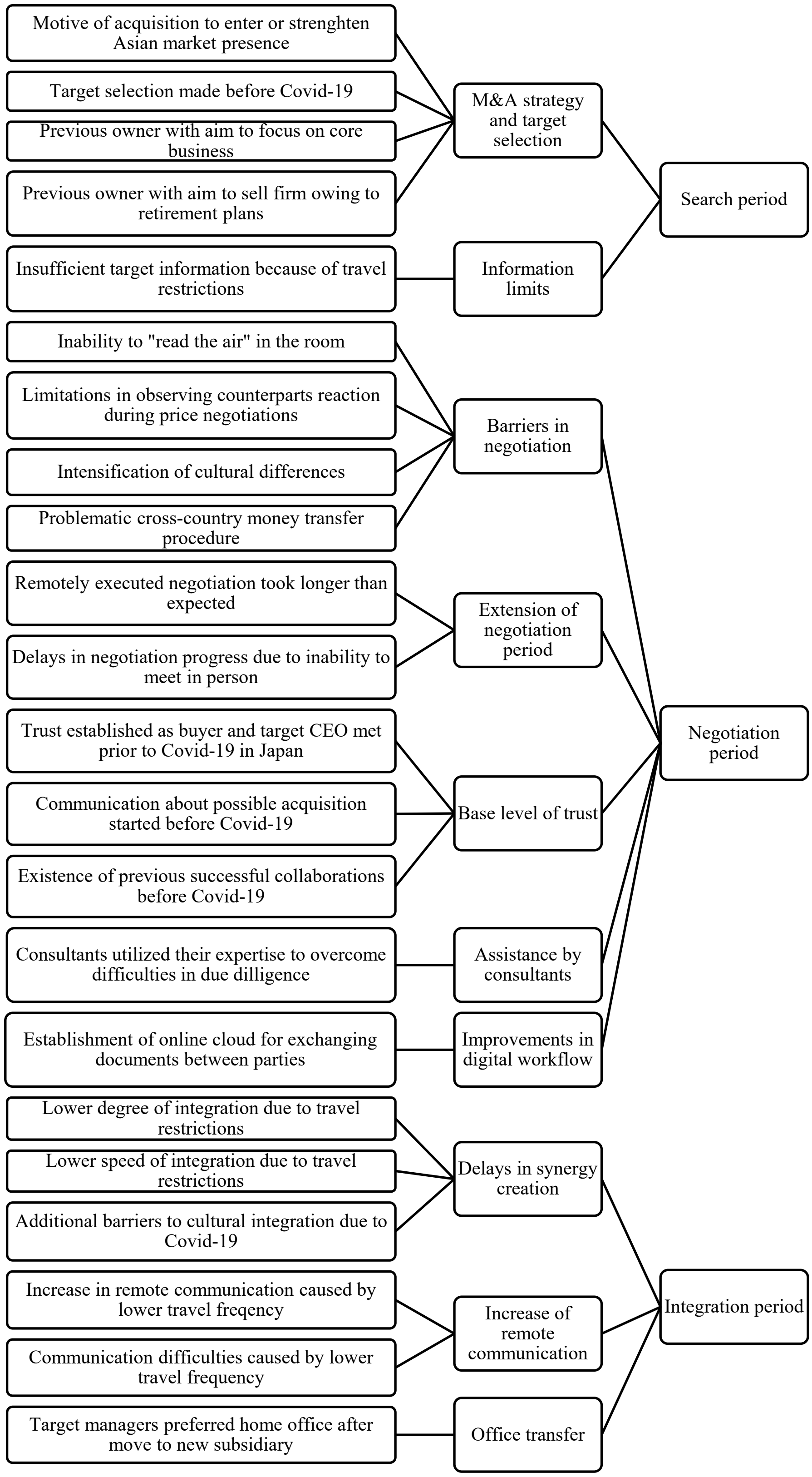
We felt that the three in-depth case studies and additional interviews with consultants and three other German firms having already a presence in Japan before Covid-19 should be deemed acceptable. Eisenhardt asserts that it is not necessary to have more than four in-depth studies to retrieve sufficient information to extend a theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) while Wilczewski *et al.* (2019) based their research on a single interview. Sinkovics *et al.* (2008) based their in-depth research on nine interviews.

3.3. Method and data analysis

The interviews were aimed at eliciting information regarding the acquisition behavior of German firms in Japan during the Covid-19 pandemic. This was an inductive approach (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). According to Reddy (2015), "good social science research is problem driven and not methodology driven" (p. 29) (see also Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 242). Therefore, we investigated the challenges of acquisitions that occurred by the impact of Covid-19 pandemic. The interviewees offered individual insights that were considered as primary sources of detailed content. Following common procedures, interviews were recorded, transcribed and then coded (Rodrigues and Martinez, 2020). Alternatively, memos were written by the researcher when the interviewees did not allow recording. Except for two interviews which was conducted in the German language as it was the mother tongue of both interviewers and the interviewees, other interviews were conducted in English. The data coding of all interviews was performed manually and the statements were translated as adequately as possible to reflect the true feelings of the interviewees. Transcripts and memos were coded following a template analysis approach developed originally for the grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

The data were coded into three different themes according to the phases of the acquisition, namely search, negotiation, and integration periods. The study is hence a refined version of the grounded theory by Charmaz (2014) who contended that the theory serves as a way to learn about real life issues while enabling the development of theories (Bebenroth and Nahar, 2022; Zhang *et al.*, 2022). This technique develops existing and potentially relevant themes into a framework in a flexible manner as they arise. By moving themes between levels, the authors refined and re-evaluated theoretical ideas and constructs generated through interviews until a status of theoretical saturation was reached (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Thus, following the typical template analysis for the grounded theory, the authors began coding 22 different facets initially as a first step (micro themes). As a second step, micro themes were categorized into ten macro themes. Following this, the macro themes were categorized in three overall themes, viz. the search, negotiation. and integration periods. The findings show ten macro themes, as summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Overview of findings (produced by both authors)



4. Findings
4.1. Search
4.1.1 M&A strategy and target selection
Looking at all three cases (A, B, C), the German firms had clear intentions to acquire the respective Japanese targets long before the pandemic came into play. These decisions were based on M&A strategies to enter the Japanese market (Du *et. al.*, 2013). For instance, the German firm in case A aimed to acquire a firm in Japan and accordingly undertook several steps to look for a suitable target. Interviewee A_2 summarized the search phase as follows:

Actually, we contacted several companies. Not only the target, we contacted two or three companies, the target was one of them. And then, I checked their revenue by myself, what kind of market. We can check their financial information roughly in public databases, so their financial statement, how many people, who has shares etc. This was the research phase in 2019. I visited there with our CEO, we did a factory tour at the target in 2019.

About the relationship with the target firm, the same interviewee provided the following comment:

It's not an actual sell and buy relationship, I knew the company, but we didn't buy anything from them, they didn´t buy anything from us. But we knew, because it's a similar market. It´s not competitor, but we knew each other.

As the intention by the German firms (in this study) to acquire Japanese targets had been made prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, the pandemic did not have a direct impact on target selection. For instance, while the acquisition of the firm in case C was finalized at the beginning of 2021, the decision to acquire the Japanese target had already been made years before, as explained by respondent C_1:

So basically, we had been negotiating for two years prior the time we finally closed the deal. So we didn't find and decide to buy the company in Japan during Covid. We knew we wanted to acquire them prior to Covid, and we actually had gone and visit them several times apart of Covid, to get many of the details worked down.

Regarding case B, the German firm had already acquired a part of the business of the Japanese target earlier in 2017. In addition, the acquirer had intended to purchase another part of the business from the same target at the same time. However, due to unresolved issues, the takeover could not be finalized.

From a tracing of the time line, there was no indication that Covid-19 influenced the intention of Japanese firms to sell their shares. In two cases (A and C), the acquisition was partly based on the fact that the Japanese owners were aiming to retire in the foreseeable future, and intended to pass the firm and its employees to a suitable owner. In addition, the Japanese firm in case B wanted to sell one of its strategic business units since it was no longer tied to its core business amidst its M&A strategy.

4.1.2. Information limits

The foregoing notwithstanding, it is worth mentioning that Covid-19 travel restrictions made it more challenging for cross-border bidders to find appropriate targets. For example, travel restrictions such as those that prevented staff from the German headquarters from going directly to the Japanese target for information gathering was one of the major challenges. Respondent A_2 who was the Representative Director of the Japanese subsidiary of the German firm prior to Covid-19 commented on this challenge:

I introduced several companies to our headquarter and they said "Oh, why not, we can just visit them". That was in 2019. But later (Authors' note: After travel restrictions occurred)*, it would not be possible.*

4.2. Negotiation
4.2.1 Barriers in negotiation

From the interviews, we managed to identify several challenges during the negotiation period induced by Covid-19. It is noteworthy that in two cases (A and B), the entire negotiation period between the German headquarters and the Japanese target was executed remotely without any physical meeting due to travel restrictions. When interviewee A_1 was asked about this challenging situation, the following statement was recorded:

It literally fell on our feet that Covid started when we had this clear intentions towards each other and then Covid started and then we got in the middle of this cross-border acquisition in a very strange period. (...) For your information, the entire M&A process has been done remotely, really remotely. I was in Japan first beginning of this year together with our CEO (2023, remarks by the authors)*, that was my first time visiting the target firm and Japan. So, the entire M&A process has been done and performed remotely, which is a little bit strange, but yeah, there was no other way, you know, we had to deal with the fact that we could not travel. (...)I think the travel restrictions were very strict (...) it was impossible to meet anywhere, and yeah that was something we had to deal with and of course that's the strange thing of Covid that, who would expect that it would take that long. It was always extended, there was always like now, in three month, maybe it's over and then we can visit each other and then it was every time postponed, postponed, and yeah, the complete M&A process (...) has been done remotely which is crazy if you look into retro perspective, insane basically, but okay, we did it.*

To find a way of physically negotiating with each other, the German firm in case B suggested that its Japanese counterparty meet with them in another country, like Singapore, as Covid-related restrictions were not as stringent there. However, the Japanese target rejected the suggestion since they would have had to quarantine themselves for up to two weeks upon re-entering Japan.

As negotiations were executed only virtually (e.g., by video conference, emails), respondent A_1 described the circumstances of the negotiation as follows:

I'm in business for 25 years in this high-tech environment and no matter what environment I always prefer face-to-face meetings, really sitting at the same desk with chairs and looking into each other´s eyes, see it in three dimensions, which was impossible at this time.

Interviewee A_2 detailed the problems during these negotiations:

We cannot see the face of the counterparty. So, we can only hear their voice, sometimes even just e-mail. We cannot see the temperature. For example, finally we needed to show the price. Once we showed the price, we cannot see their face, meaning we cannot understand their temperature, whether it is positive or negative impression, we don't know that. So, this is one *difficulty. And also a lot of other detailed negation, but we cannot see the air in the room.*

One interviewed Japanese consultant who had been working in a London-based subsidiary of a global consulting firm for eight years, commented on these difficulties as follows:

Our Japanese clients still prefer face-to-face meetings; they want to know the actual or real attitude of their counterparty.

Regarding case B, one of the biggest issues in negotiations was the branding rights after the acquisition. When asked about problems caused by virtual negotiations, interviewee B_1 referred to cultural differences between German and Japanese people, which were exacerbated due to the remote setting. In the additional case studies at firms E and F, the managers in Japan also complained about the increasing difficulties in negotiating with the German headquarters. For example, in case B, after the German party had made proposals with regard to the branding rights, the Japanese counterparty did not show any immediate sign of disagreement. Only after several virtual meetings later, however, did the Japanese party state that the proposal was unacceptable. According to the interviewee, this delay might not have occurred if both parties were negotiating in the same room.

Moreover, Covid-19 slowed down the closure of the acquisition deal in case C due to difficulties in cross-country money transfer procedures. Respondent C_1 explained:

Because of various lockdown impacts one of the things which was a little bit tricky was getting the money into the flow for the acquisition, because of who can go to the banks and things like that. It was more of a minor issue though. We had to leverage a sister company to help us get the money in the right place. The receiving and sending of wires also required in-person visits at banks and things like that.

It was common that new entities became established when German firms took over Japanese targets, such as in the additional cases D and E. Also in the acquisition case C, a new legal entity had to be established in Japan. Interviewee C_2 described the impact of Covid-19 on this specific process as follow:

Covid-19 did not lead to delays, but it was more time-consuming because certain people did not want to receive visitors or other people were only in the office or at home. It took a little longer, but it didn't cause any significant delays.

4.2.2. Extension of negotiation period

All the interviewees of the German firms agreed that Covid-19 inevitably extended the negotiation period. The additional case D, which closed its deal in 2018, had a much shorter negotiation period than the three main case studies (A, B and C). However, the perceived extent of the delay and the impact on the overall acquisition varied between interviewee and case. For instance, interviewee A_2 described the delay of the negotiation in the following way:

Indeed, there were a lot of processes done without face to face meeting, so negotiation or discussion and explanation was relatively longer than my expectation. (...) In the final phase of the negotiation, our CEO and their CEO joined, we just translated, it was quite fast. But yeah, negotiation took longer. (...) It was started from 2019 and it was finished in February 2021, I'm not sure how long does it take on average but in such a medium sized company, it should be *less than one year I think but it was more than one year.*

In addition, respondent A_1 gave the following impression with regard to the effect of Covid-19 on the duration of the negotiation period:

Yes, I think, Covid delayed it a little bit. (...) There are lots of processes these days which are being done remotely, so there Covid was not really the showstopper. From my point of view, it didn´t delay it so much, because you are in the process, you have homework, a to-do list. Yes, it sometimes makes sense that you can sit at the same desk, but well, even there was not Covid, Japan is at the other side of the world, so you still have the time delay, so yes I think that we would have more often meet each other and yet that has caused little bit of delay. Was is that dramatic, no, I don't think so.

In case C, the final stage of the negotiation (i.e., due diligence) had to be executed remotely. The management team from Germany was at least able to travel several times to Japan before the outbreak of Covid-19 to start negotiations on the deal. Regarding case C, interviewee C_1 explained the impact of Covid-19 on the negotiations in the following way:

It would have been smoother if we brought them over immediately or I could have gone over with 2 or 3 people immediately, but it was a very minor experience because of Covid.

Interviewee C_2 gave the following explanation on this issue:

We are in the software business, which means we don't have to make any critical visit or transport anything physical anyway. Everything we sell comes from download, so perhaps we were already predestined to handle everything online.

4.2.3. Base level of trust

Looking at our three cases at hand, all of them had some kind of interaction with their respective targets before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, indicating a base level of initial trust. Regarding case A, the CEO of the acquiring firm went twice to the headquarters of its Japanese target in 2019 to visit the factory and to conduct initial talks with the Japanese owner. According to interviewee A_2, this initial interaction was crucial for the overall outcome of the negotiation:

I think we are lucky that we could visit them in 2019. Otherwise, it would have been very difficult.

For case B, both parties had successfully closed an acquisition deal prior to Covid-19 in 2017. According to interviewee B_1, this had an effect on the outcome and duration of the later virtual negotiations during Covid-19, since both firms had already established a base level of trust in each other. Finally, interviewee C_1 commented on the influence of the historical relationship between both firms and the outcome of the virtual negotiations as follows:

Because the relationship had already been going for 20 years, it was a minor experience because of Covid-19.

4.2.4. Assistance by consultants

In two cases (A and C), the activities in the negotiation phase were supported by consultants. In both cases, interviewees (A_1 and C_2) explained that this had a positive effect on the speed of execution (e.g. in the activities for due diligence or the legal transfer of shares) in these difficult times, because consultants could utilize their expertise to overcome difficulties caused by the pandemic (e.g. inability to physically meet). This was said by interviewee C_2:

Covid didn't have a too big influence because we worked together with a consultancy firm and they undertook the legal steps for us.

4.2.5. Improvement in workflow

Digitalization is recognized as an important driver for speed. Yu and Yan (2022) find that optimizing digital finance policies in firms accelerates the digital transformation of enterprises. This was supported by all our active M&A case studies as well as at the additional three firms (D, E and F) with presence in Japan before the Covid-19 outbreak. Owing to Covid-19 restrictions, the managers of all our three case studies stated that the overall M&A process slowed down. However, interviewee A_2 mentioned an improvement of the efficiency of digital workflow as a result of ongoing travel restrictions:

All the data is digital due to Covid-19. We needed to store something in a digital way, so we set up an online cloud, together with both parties. They stored all of their documents in the cloud, which we can also access. It is easier to manage all that kinds of documents, because I can easily manage which documents need to be translated. But if it is kind of a face-to-face negotiation and we receive all documents on paper, it would be harder, I think. Some things are more efficient.

4.3. Integration
4.3.1. Delays in synergy creation

As a result of the ongoing travel restrictions, acquiring firms tended to choose low degrees of integration in the first few months after the acquisition. According to respondent A_2, these decisions were intended to ensure that acquired firms in Japan continue their operations ("business as usual") until Covid-19 restrictions were lifted:

In early stages, production was running, so we needed to keep everything as it was in the first place, like make up the production, that no people are leaving and to continue the business, which was most important in the beginning.

As the first step of integration, firm A conducted informal video meetings between managers of the functional departments from the German headquarters and the acquired Japanese firm. These virtual meetings helped to familiarise the employees of the acquired company with their colleagues from the head office as well as with elementary business processes, as was explained by interviewee A_2:

After the acquisition, responsible people from headquarter should visit the acquired firm and see how is it actually, how can they integrate them into their teams, like COO, CFO, all the top management, but we couldn't do that, it was done by remote. (...) It was very, very hard. We tried to organize some integration processes, we invited the key persons from headquarter, like procurement, technology, finance, each individual responsible person who has experience, and we also invited key persons from the acquired firm and we connected them to have some discussion. But no integration, just listening to their counterparty about what and how they are doing their processes, in order to understand the company. This was still virtually, not so easy.

But we successfully did some exchange. In that time, it was all we can do I think. (...) I didn't push too much, because it can create confusion.

In addition, the German headquarters organized a series of virtual workshops for the cultural integration of the Japanese target. It was intended as a means to overcome cultural barriers between employees from the headquarters and the acquired firm since employees of the Japanese target were not familiar with the German culture. Interestingly, similar procedures were reported by the additional case firms who were still working to improve mutual understanding. Interviewee A_1 from our M&A case study described it as follows:

We have to deal with the fact that we are a company of meanwhile approximately 1,500 people, divided all over the world with the majority in Germany, and we buy a company in Japan consisting of 20 people with the Japanese culture, Japanese mindset. We have to deal with the cultural differences as well. (...) We defined a group of stakeholders from both sides, and I took ownership of the cultural integration. (...) We addressed the cultural integration and did several workshops. What I basically tried to get is the organizations connect with each other. That's how we started to integrate both organizations, but it´s still during Covid, everything was remotely.

Observations from cases A and B coupled with evidence from the additional case D and consultants indicated that Covid-19 had a negative effect on the speed of integration, i.e., Covid-19 delayed the intended integration progress, especially the degree of integration. Interaction between the German headquarters and Japanese target was limited to virtual meetings, and business operations of the target were kept unchanged during the period of travel restrictions. As indicated by additional interviews with case F and consultants, the speed of integration accelerated after travel restrictions were lifted. The management staff from the German headquarters was finally able to go physically to the acquired target in Japan. Respondent A_1 described the speed of the integration as follows:

Integration was really like slow cooking. It takes time to get people on board, you cannot just do it in one workshop. (...) Sometimes it was really frustrating, it takes lots of time. (...) I get now the feeling that synergies start to happen.

4.3.2. Increase in remote communication

As known, Covid-19 had a significant economic impact worldwide, particularly on the global aviation industry. This is important for our study as headquarters are distant to their subsidiaries. The industry experienced a sudden decrease in passengers as a consequence of travel restrictions, travel-related anxiety and other factors (Morlotti and Redondi, 2023). After borders reopened and travel restrictions lifted, flight tickets were noticeably more expensive due to labor and aircraft shortages, rising oil prices and increasing demand (The Japan Times, 2023). Also the managers interviewed for this study reported that flight connections became more expensive (Freed, 2022). Hence, several of our case study firms adjusted their mobility behavior and reduced the number of physical visits from Germany to their Japanese subsidiaries. Instead, they shifted their focus to remote communication (e.g., video calls, e-mails), which was heavily used during the Covid-19 period. While remote communication can have several benefits, interviewee A_2 expressed some concerns regarding this shift:

We rely too much on web meetings, but sometimes this kind of analogue communication is important in order to know the feelings, what the counterpart is thinking. Still, you know, there *is some impact of Covid, it is not gone yet, because flight cost is expensive and number of the flights/airplanes is still limited. So the people in our company, I think its global, select the business case, when they can visit us, carefully. It was every time, if something happens with our business in Japan, now we can use web meeting. We are relying too much on web meetings, communication is important sometimes.*

Statements by an interviewed consultant complemented the previous quote:

Many local employees (authors note: in Europe) *are comfortable with communication on an online basis, but Japanese experts prefer face-to-face for post-merger integration (...) even if we feel that there is no necessity for such meetings.*

4.3.3. Office transfer

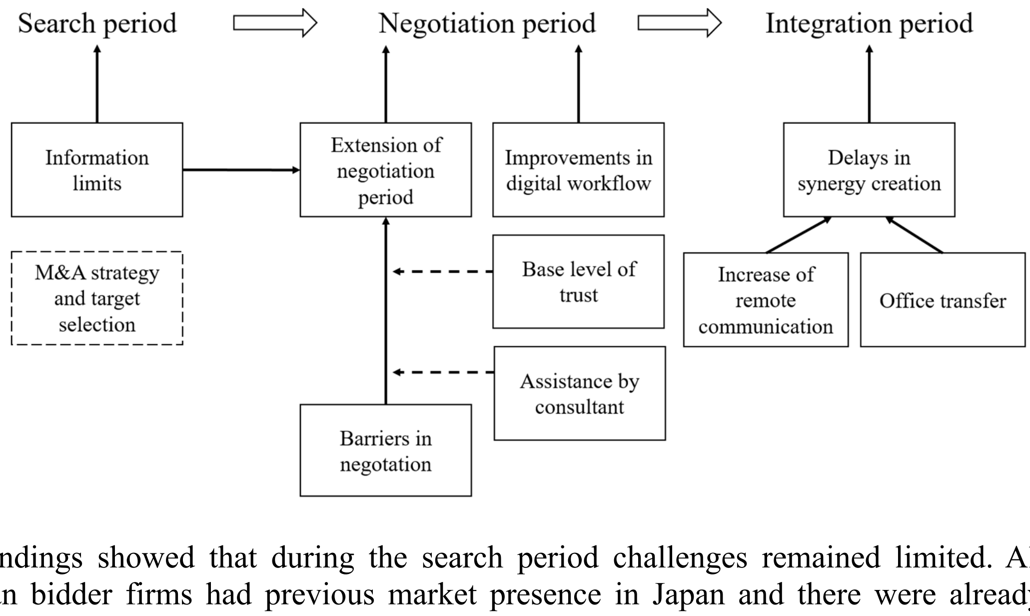
As our three additional case studies D, E and F show, the German firms in this study already had a subsidiary in Japan. So, the Japanese target firms had to move to the new headquarters, which was often located in Tokyo or its vicinity. However, because of Covid-19, many Japanese target managers declined to move to the new office; they did remote work at their home office. This made communication with the German side more difficult.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Discussion

Based on qualitative data collected from our interviews with three German companies which had acquired Japanese firms during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as additional interviews with German firms and consultants, we examined the definitive characteristics and difficulties that arose while making cross-border acquisitions. We contend that the best way to shed light on what actually happened at the firm level is by asking the people in charge directly. The authors undertook this endeavor. With regard to our research question, we identified ten main factors (macro level themes) through which Covid-19 pandemic affected the search, negotiation and integration periods of German firms acquiring Japanese target companies. Figure 2 visualizes the results of this study.

Figure 2: Factors (macro themes) affecting cross-border M&A during Covid-19 (produced by both authors)



Our findings showed that during the search period challenges remained limited. All three German bidder firms had previous market presence in Japan and there were already some interactions with the respective target firms. Therefore, Covid-19 did not influence target selection in any case. Because of travel restrictions following the outbreak of Covid-19, challenges concerning information gathering occurred, thus resulting in a higher degree of digitalization instead of in-person meetings. The negotiation period was not only wrought with difficulties, such as increased barriers in remote negotiation and relatively slow progress. Nonetheless, beneficial outcomes due to the Covid-19 pandemic were visible. For example, owing to travel restrictions and social distancing, digitalization became the norm; improved electronic workflows of document exchange led to an efficient interplay between the parties during due diligence analysis in the negotiation period. We also found that a base level of mutual trust as well as support from professional consultants mitigated negotiation difficulties. With regard to the integration period, travel restrictions caused a lower degree and speed of integration than intended, resulting in delays in synergy creation. Restrictions on physical travel also led to greater difficulty for the managers in charge of integration to have timely interaction with their counterparts from the other side.

5.2. Theoretical implications

Our study contributes to the literature on cross-border acquisitions during the Covid-19 pandemic by offering a comprehensive overview of particular characteristics that firms faced during the search, negotiation and integration periods. Although cross-border acquisitions have been investigated against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of studies take a quantitative approach to data collection from data banks (e.g., Ho and Gan, 2021; Jebran and Chen, 2022). In contrast, relatively few attempts have been made to elucidate specific characteristics of acquisition procedures (e.g., Bauer *et al.*, 2022).

In agreement with our findings, several quantitative studies have reported difficulties in M&A caused by Covid-19 pandemic. Such studies show a decline in the number of acquisitions during the Covid-19 pandemic (Ho and Gan, 2021; Magnanelli *et al.*, 2022). However, there are some notable differences between our study and previous ones. Firstly, our findings showcase that bidders in all three cases were already in contact with their targets before Covid-19 was declared a pandemic. Therefore, there was already mutual trust between the parties concerned. Moreover, while negotiation and integration took longer than expected (Jebran and Chen, 2022), according to the interviewees in this study, the acquisitions were completed successfully with only minor delays due to Covid restrictions. Similar opinions were expressed by the managers of the three additional case studies of German firms (already established in Japan before the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic) as well as the consultants. Secondly, we offer a more differentiated view of definitive characteristics in the M&A process. While acquisitions have been narrowed down to psychological aspects (Ançel İlaslan and Tanyeri-Günsür, 2023), we shed light on the procedures in each of the three phases (viz. search, negotiation and integration) in the German-Japanese acquisitions.

5.3. Practical implications

Our findings have several practical implications for enhancing acquisition behavior and realizing beneficial outcomes for cross-border transactions in an Asian setting. First, our framework can be used for mapping and profiling characteristics of acquisitions in the search, negotiation, and integration periods. This approach should be useful to bidding and target firms not only under Covid-19 pandemic circumstances but also in the post-Covid-19 period of the "new normal" to avoid mistakes made through undesired behavior.

Second, identified macro themes for the M&A process can be converted into practices on how to conduct an effective acquisition process. For instance, bidders who can only observe their counterparts electronically have to make sure that their intention is understood correctly by the negotiation partner. Japanese refer to the phrase “kuki wo yomenai” (i.e., not to be able to read the air). In other words, cultural issues, under normal circumstances already an important factor for foreign based subsidiaries (firms D, E and F), become even more important for bidders willing to invest in Japan at times of crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Cultural challenges as mentioned by our additional interviewees of firms D, E and F exerted a significantly stronger influence in our sample firms A, B and C.

5.4. Limitations

Notwithstanding the findings of our study, some limitations should be acknowledged, and addressed in future research. First, despite the diversity of the firms in our study, we only managed to include three particular acquisitions in our sample. Thus, although our findings offer some definitive characteristics in cross-border acquisitions, we are unable to draw more conclusions about their implications. However, we should also mention that, to the knowledge of the authors, there were only three other potential acquisitions for which we could not get access to. Furthermore, we interviewed three additional German firms that already operated in Japan as well as consultants with M&A experience for the Japanese market to gain a broader perspective.

A recommendation for future research would be to collect data from more bidders, including those from other European countries with similar strategies to German firms regarding Japanese targets. However, we are interested in how German firms with their unique cultural attitudes (e.g., their long-term thinking and their strong focus on technical elements) act to take over Japanese targets. Therefore, we leave it to future research to collect a wider sample.

Finally, future studies can be conducted by including surveys to validate or challenge our identified themes in the acquisition processes. Despite the rich primary data obtained from our interviews with the relevant personnel from the target and the bidder firms, more empirical work is needed to test our emerged themes across the three different phases.

Appendix 1: Description of interviews

Case	Role description of interviewee	Interview duration	Interview time
A_1	HQ-project leader for acquisitions: business development	45 minutes	September 2023
A_2	CEO of Japanese target firm	60 minutes	September 2023
B_1	HQ-head of M&A team	70 minutes	August 2023
C_1	HQ-CEO of acquiring firm	30 minutes	September 2023
C_2	CEO of target firm	45 minutes	September 2023
D_1	Japanese manager, legal affairs	50 minutes	September 2022
E_1	CEO at Japan based subsidiary and four board members	120 minutes	October 2022
F_1	Previous CEO at Japan-based subsidiary	40 minutes	October 2022
-	Consultant in Germany with experience in German-Japanese M&A	30 minutes	July 2023
-	Consultant in the United Kingdom with experience in German-Japanese M&A	30 minutes	October 2023

References

Ançel İlaslan, Z. and Tanyeri-Günsür, B. (2023), "M&A activity during the COVID-19 pandemic", *Applied Economics Letters*, pp. 1-7.
Angwin, D. (2004), "Speed in M&A Integration: The First 100 Days", *European Management Journal,* Vol. 22 No. 4, pp. 418-430.
Angwin, D. and Meadows, M. (2015), "New Integration Strategies for Post-Acquisition Management", Long Range Planning, Vol. 48 No. 4, pp. 235-251.
Aschbacher, J. and Kroon, D.P. (2023), „Failing Prey to Bias? The Influence of Advisors on the Manifestation of Cognitive Biases in the Pre-M&A Phase of Organizations", Group & Organization Management, pp. 1-41.
Bartik, A. W., Bertrand, M., Cullen, Z. B., Glaeser, E. L., Luca, M., and Stanton, C. T. (2020), "How are small businesses adjusting to COVID-19? Early evidence from a survey", Working Paper 26989, *National Bureau of Economic Research*.
Bauer, F., Friesl, M. and Dao, M.A. (2022), "Run or hide: changes in acquisition behaviour during the COVID-19 pandemic", *Journal of Strategy and Management*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 38-53.
Bauer, F. and Matzler, K. (2014), "Antencedents of M&A Success: The Role of Strategic Complementarity, Cultural Fit, and Degree and Speed of Integration", *Strategic Management Journal,* Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 269-291.
Bebenroth, R., and Nahar, Y. N. (2022), "Emerging Market versus Western Expatriates in Japan during the Covid-19 Pandemic", *Organizations and Markets in Emerging Economies,* Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 406-425.
Bernstein, J., Richter, A. W., and Throckmorton, N. A. (2020), "Entry and exit, unemployment, and macroeconomic tail risk", Working Paper 2018, *Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, Research Department*.
Bryant, A. and Charmaz, K. (2007), "Grounded Theory in Historical Perspective: An Epistemological Account", Bryant, A. and Charmaz, K. (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*, SAGE Publications Ltd, London, pp. 31-57.
Caligiuri, P. and Bonache, J. (2016), "Evolving and enduring challenges in global mobility", *Journal of World Business,* Vol. 51 No. 1, pp. 127-141.
Charmaz, K. (2014), "Constructing Grounded Theory", 2nd edition, SAGE Publications Ltd. London.
Chen Z., Kale P. and Hoskisson R (2018), "Geographic overlap and acquisition pairing", Strategic Management Journal, Vol. 39 No. 2, pp. 329-355.
Clarke, R. (2023), "Mergers and Acquisitions in the Post Pandemic Era: Lessons and Trends", *Journal of Business & Financial Affairs*, Vol. 12, 450.
Cuypers I. R., Cuypers Y. and Martin X. (2016), "When the target may know better: Effects of experience and information asymmetries on value from mergers and acquisitions", Strategic Management Journal, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 609-625.
de Bodt E. and Cousin J.-G., Roll R. (2018), "Empirical evidence of overbidding in M&A contests", Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis, Vol. 53 No. 4, pp. 1547-1579.
Du, X., Liu, H., Bao, L., and Huang, P. (2013), "Chinese cross-border mergers and acquisitions: strategic types, organizational factors and enterprise growth", *Journal of Asia Business Studies*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 171-184.
Eisenhardt, K.M. (1989), "Building theories from case study research", *Academy of Management Review,* Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 532-550.
Flyvbjerg, B. (2006), "Five misunderstandings about case-study research", *Qualitative Inquiry,* Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 219–245.
Freed, J. (2022), "Airfares on key routes to rise by as much as 25% in 2023 - Amex GBT", available at: https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/airfares-key-routes-rise-by-

much-25-2023-amex-gbt-2022-12-08/ (accessed 02 March 2024)
Fujitani, R., Hattori, M. and Yasuda, Y. (2023), "Domestic and international effects of economic policy uncertainty on corporate investment and strategic cash holdings: Evidence from Japan", Journal of the Japanese and International Economies, Vol. 69, 101272.
Galpin, T.J. (2021), "As another M&A wave begins: three ways to success", Strategy & Leadership, Vol. 49 No. 2, pp. 14-21.
Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1967), *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*, Aldine Publishing Company, New York.
Grépin, K. A., Aston, J. and Burns, J. (2023), "Effectiveness of international border control measures during the COVID-19 pandemic: a narrative synthesis of published systematic reviews", Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, No. 381, 20230134.
Hain, D., Johan, S. and Wang, D. (2016), "Determinants of Cross-Border Venture Capital Investments in Emerging and Developed Economies: The Effects of Relational and Institutional Trust", *Journal of Business Ethics,* Vol. 138 No. 4, pp. 743-764.
He B, An, R. and Berry, J. (2019), "Psychological adjustment and social capital: a qualitative investigation of Chinese expatriates", C*ross Cultural & Strategic Management*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 67-92.
Ho, L. and Gan, C. (2021), "Foreign Direct Investment and World Pandemic Uncertainty Index: Do Health Pandemics Matter?", *Journal of Risk and Financial Management* Vol. 14 No. 3, p. 107.
Homburg, C. and Bucerius M. (2006), "Is Speed of Integration really a Success Factor of Mergers and Acquisitions? An Analysis of Internal and External Relatedness", *Strategic Management Journal,* Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 347-367.
Jaura, M., and Michailova, S. (2014), "Cognition and knowledge sharing in post-acquisition integration: insights from Indian IT acquiring firms", *Journal of Asia Business Studies,* Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 146-167.
Jebran, K., and Chen, S. (2022), "Corporate policies and outcomes during the COVID-19 crisis: Does managerial ability matter?", *Pacific-Basin Finance Journal*, Vol. 73, 101743.
Jemison, D.B. and Sitkin, S.B. (1986), "Corporate Acquisitions: A Process Perspective", Academy of Management Review, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 145-163.
Kaul A. and Wu B. (2016), "A capabilities-based perspective on target selection in acquisitions", Strategic Management Journal, Vol. 37 No. 7, pp. 1220-1239.
Lee, H. S., Degtereva, E. A., and Zobov, A. M. (2021), "The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border mergers and acquisitions' determinants: New empirical evidence from quasi-poisson and negative binomial regression models", *Economies*, Vol. 9 No. 4, 184.
Lee, H. H., Hayakawa, K. and Park, C. Y. (2023), "The Effect of COVID-19 on Foreign Direct Investment", Global Economic Review, Vol. 52 No. 1, pp. 1-17.
Madinga, W.M., Blanckensee, J., Longhurst, L. and Bundwini, N. (2023), "The new normal: the adoption of food delivery apps", European Journal of Management Studies, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 175-192.
Magnanelli, B. S., Nasta, L., and Ramazio, E. (2022), "Bid premiums and cumulative abnormal returns: An empirical investigation on the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic", *Finance Research Letters*, Vol. 49, 103093.
Maung, M. (2022), "Trust and cross-border mergers and acquisitions", *International Review of Financial Analysis*, Vol. 83, 102262.
Miranda, S. and Duarte, C. (2020), "The job search journey of Portuguese Millennials: a qualitative exploratory study", European Journal of Management Studies, Vol. 25 No. 2, pp. 53-75.
Morlotti, C. and Redondi, R. (2023), "The impact of COVID-19 on airline´s price curves", *Journal of Air Transport Management*, Vol. 107, 102328.

Rasheed, S. N., and Husain, F. (2022), “Impact of COVID-19 on Mergers & Acquisitions”, Maqbool, A, Arafat Elahi, Y., Husain, F. and Badruddin, A. (Ed.), *Emerging Issues in Management & Economics in the Post Pandemic Era*, pp. 62-107.

Reddy, K. S. (2015), “The state of case study approach in mergers and acquisitions literature: A bibliometric analysis”, *Future Business Journal*, Vol. 1 No. 1-2, pp. 13-34.

Rodrigues, D. and Martinez, L.F. (2020), “The influence of digital marketing on recruitment effectiveness: a qualitative study”, European Journal of Management Studies, Vol. 25 No. 1, pp. 23-44.

Rouzies, A., Colman, H.L. and Angwin, D. (2019), “Recasting the dynamics of post-acquisition integration: An embeddedness perspective”, *Long Range Planning*, Vol. 52 No. 2, 271-282.

Schweizer, L., Wang, L., Koscher, E. and Michaelis, B. (2022), “Experimental learning, M&A performance, and post-acquisition integration strategy: A meta-analysis”, *Long Range Planning,* Vol. 55 No. 6, 102212.

Sachsenmaier, S. and Guo, Y. (2019), “Building trust in cross-cultural integration: A study of Chinese mergers and acquisitions in Germany”, International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 194-217.

Seth, A., Song, K.P. and Pettit, R. (2000),”Synergy, managerialism or hubris? An empirical examination of motives for foreign acquisitions of US firms”, Journal of International Business Studies, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 387-405.

Sinkovics, R.R., Penz, E. and Ghauri, P.N. (2008), “Enhancing the trustworthiness of qualitative research in international business”, *Management International Review*, Vol. 48 No. 6, pp. 689-714.

Stahl, G.K. *et al.* (2013), “Sociocultural Integration in Mergers and Acquisitions: Unresolved Paradoxes and Directions for Future Research”, Thunderbird International Business Review, Vol. 55 No 4, pp. 333-356.

Steigenberger, N. (2017), “The challenge of integration: A review of the M&A integration literature”, International Journal of Management Reviews, Vol. 19 No. 4, pp. 408-431.

The Japan Time (2023), “Why flying is so expensive and likely to remain that way”, available at: https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/04/27/business/flying-expensive-likely-to-stay/ (accessed 02 March 2024)

Thomas, M. and Louisgrand, N. (2022), “How does decision-making involvement affect perceptions of speed during post-merger integration?”, *European Management Journal*, Vol. 40 No. 6, pp. 906-916.

Welch X., Pavićević S., Keil T. and Laamanen T. (2020), “The pre-deal phase of mergers and acquisitions: A review and research agenda”, Journal of Management, Vol. 46 No. 6, pp. 843-878.

Wilczewski, M., Soderberg, A.M. and Gut, A. (2019), “Storytelling and cultural learning—An expatriate manager's narratives of collaboration challenges in a multicultural business setting”, *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, Vol. 21, pp. 362-377.

Yu Y., Umashankar N. and Rao V. R. (2016), “Choosing the right target: Relative preferences for resource similarity and complementarity in acquisition choice”, Strategic Management Journal, Vol. 37 No. 5, pp. 1808-1825.

Yu, M., and Yan, A. (2022), “Can digital finance accelerate the digital transformation of companies? From the perspective of M&A”, *Sustainability*, Vol. 14 No. 21, 14281.

Zaheer, A., McEvily, B. and Perrone, V. (1998), “Does Trust Matter? Exploring the Effects of Interorganizational and Interpersonal Trust on Performance”, *Organization Science*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 141-159.

Zhang, Z., Sekiguchi, T. and Li, J. (2022), “An exploratory study on women´s work values in the Chinese context: a grounded-theory approach”, *Journal of Asia Business Studies*, Vol. 16 No. 6, pp. 943-962.