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How exporters' and intermediaries' resources influence export performance

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of the paper is to investigate the influence of firm resources and export intermediary resources on export performance using the resource-based view (RBV).
Methodology: Data was collected from 320 small and medium sized exporters from Thailand and the unit of analysis was an export venture. Cluster analysis and discriminant analysis were used to test whether the availability of firm resources and intermediary resources vary between different SME clusters.
Finding: Results show that the high performing cluster used their intermediary resources and their own internal marketing capabilities to a greater extent than lower performing clusters.
Practical implications: The findings are particularly important for resource-constrained SMEs, as they need to focus on developing marketing capabilities and choosing intermediaries with a high level of experience and knowledge for their particular export market.
Originality/value: This research confirms the applicability of RBV in export literature extending current RBV theory. The findings in the paper indicate that the availability of firm resources as well as intermediary resources are important in determining export performance in an export-driven Thai economy.
Research highlights: The impact of firm resources and intermediaries resources on export performance was investigated. High performing firms used more intermediaries resources and own marketing capabilities. It is important to choose the intermediary with high level of knowledge and experience. Both firm resources and intermediary resources are important in determining export performance.

1. Introduction

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play an important economic role in ASEAN economies, as 90% of all businesses in Southeast Asia are SMEs. In Thailand, SMEs contribute 37.8% of the country's GDP and 30% of all exports are generated by SMEs (Office of SMEs Promotion, 2009). SMEs play such a significant role in Southeast Asian economies that at ASEAN 14th summit in 2009, ASEAN SME Council was tasked to strengthen SME development (Bangkok Post, 2010). Despite their economic importance, little is known about how exporting SMEs and their intermediaries use resources. Increasing our knowledge of SME export resource capabilities and those of their intermediaries is likely to improve our understanding of their export successes. Exporting success is particularly important in Thailand as Thai exports are facing increasing competitive pressure from lower wage countries such as China and Vietnam.

This research investigates the initial steps of an organisation's internationalisation strategy, exporting. We consider internationalisation as a dynamic process that develops gradually over time (Johanson and Vahlne, 1990). Pedersen and Petersen (1998) highlight that there are multiple complimentary explanations for internationalisation processes, showing that building experiential specific market knowledge, resources available and foreign market size all significantly influence firm commitment to a foreign market. Given the focus on SMEs, our approach also includes that role of the business network, in particular export intermediaries, and the SMEs ability to gain experiential knowledge and resources from their intermediaries (Johanson and Vahlne, 2003; Forsgren, 2002).

There are currently limited studies using the resource based view of the firm (RBV) as one of the complimentary approaches for investigating internationalisation and export performance, (Ma, 2006; Balabanis et al., 2004). RBV describes a firm as a unique bundle of tangible and intangible resources (Collis, 1991). Firm resources influence successful business operations by improving their efficiency or effectiveness (Barney, 2002; Camelo-Ordaz et al., 2003; Kaleka, 2002; Morgan et al., 2006). RBV is frequently linked with competitive advantage (Grant, 1991; Hall, 1993; Michalisin et al., 1997; Peteraf, 1993) but only occasionally with performance (see Westhead et al., 2001). Constructs such as firm size, export commitment and/or a firm's technology intensity are often used as proxies for a firm's resource bases (Dhanaraj and Beamish, 2003; Pedersen and Petersen, 1998). Emphasising both firm resources and export intermediary resources this research

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