

Managerial Determinants of Export Performance: An Updated Meta-Analytic Review of Attitudinal and Skill-Based Factors

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ABSTRACT

Exporting remains the most widely used and accessible strategy for firms seeking entry into international markets, yet the understanding of what drives export performance continues to be fragmented. Although numerous studies have examined managerial influences on export outcomes, empirical findings remain inconsistent and sometimes contradictory. This paper provides an updated meta-analytic synthesis of research published between 1990 and 2012, focusing specifically on managerial determinants of export performance. Managerial characteristics are organized into two overarching categories: **attitudinal factors** management commitment, international orientation, customer orientation, and perceptions of export stimuli and barriers and **skill-based factors**, including export experience, foreign-language proficiency, and education level. Using the vote-counting method, studies were classified based on whether they reported positive, negative, or non-significant relationships between these variables and export success. The meta-synthesis reveals that attitudinal determinants, particularly management commitment and international orientation, show strong and consistent positive associations with export performance across the reviewed literature. Skill-based factors also contribute positively, although export experience shows mixed results. A refined conceptual framework is proposed to clarify how managerial mindsets and competencies jointly affect export outcomes. While the vote-counting method provides a clear directional summary of empirical evidence, it does not account for study quality or estimate effect sizes. Future research should incorporate quantitative meta-analysis and quality-weighted models to obtain more precise effect estimations. This study contributes a structured and integrated perspective on how managerial determinants influence export performance and offers meaningful implications for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers concerned with firm competitiveness in global markets.

Keywords: Export performance, Managerial determinants, Meta-analysis, international orientation, Export strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

Exporting is one of the most widely used strategies for firms seeking to expand internationally because it requires relatively few financial resources and offers lower operational risks than other entry modes such as alliances or foreign direct investment (root, 2004). As a result, understanding what drives strong export performance has become a central topic in international business research (zou & stan, 1998; sousa et al., 2008). Among the various explanatory factors examined, managerial characteristics consistently emerge as critical due to the central role managers play in directing strategy, interpreting foreign market information, allocating resources, and shaping organizational responses to international opportunities (leonidou et al., 2007; ibeh, 2003). Despite extensive research, the empirical findings concerning managerial determinants remain fragmented. Studies have produced conflicting results regarding the influence of managerial orientations, perceptions, and skills on export outcomes. For example, some research highlights strong positive associations between managerial attitudes and export performance (navarro et al., 2010; katsikea & skarmas, 2003), while others find weak or insignificant relationships (evangelista, 1994; kaynak & kuan, 1993). This inconsistency underscores the need for a structured synthesis that clarifies which managerial characteristics are most consistently linked with superior export outcomes.

This study addresses this gap by applying a meta-analytic vote-counting approach to research published between 1990 and 2012. Drawing from established integrative reviews (zou & stan, 1998; sousa et al., 2008), the study extends earlier efforts by

incorporating additional empirical work and organizing managerial factors into attitudinal and skill-based categories. Through this approach, the study seeks to identify consistent empirical patterns and propose a conceptual framework that integrates key managerial influences on export performance.

2. LITERATURE BACKGROUND

Export performance represents the extent to which a firm achieves its objectives in foreign markets, including profitability, sales growth, customer satisfaction, and competitive advantage (navarro et al., 2010). A variety of theoretical perspectives highlight why managerial characteristics are essential drivers of export outcomes. The resource-based view emphasizes managers as strategic assets capable of generating organizational advantage through knowledge, decision-making, and resource orchestration (barney, 1991; grant, 1991). Dynamic capabilities theory argues that managerial ability to integrate, reconfigure, and deploy firm resources is crucial for navigating rapidly changing international markets (sapienza et al., 2006). Organizational learning theory suggests firms achieve superior export performance when managers effectively acquire and utilize foreign market knowledge (cohen & levinthal, 1990). Contingency theory further posits that performance depends on how well managerial decisions fit external conditions (nutt, 2002). Taken together, these theoretical perspectives highlight that managerial orientations, perceptions, and competencies are central to understanding export performance. They provide a strong foundation for analyzing the managerial determinants synthesized in this study.

3. MANAGERIAL DETERMINANTS OF EXPORT PERFORMANCE

Managerial characteristics influence export performance because managers interpret foreign market conditions, evaluate risks, shape strategy, and allocate resources. Across the literature, attitudinal factors consistently emerge as strong predictors. Managerial commitment is frequently cited as one of the most influential determinants because committed managers dedicate resources, participate in export planning, attend international trade events, and foster long-term engagement in foreign markets (alvarez, 2004; o'cass & julian, 2003; gilaninia et al., 2012). These behaviors reduce uncertainty and strengthen the firm's export orientation, resulting in enhanced export performance.

International orientation is another key attitudinal factor. Managers with a strong international mindset are more open to cultural diversity, more alert to global opportunities, and more capable of identifying emerging international trends. Research shows that such managers are better able to adapt strategies to foreign markets and respond effectively to environmental changes, which leads to stronger export outcomes (cadogan et al., 2009; olsson & solberg, 2010; kropp et al., 2006).

Customer orientation also plays an important role. Managers who emphasize understanding and responding to the needs of foreign customers encourage product adaptation, service quality, and market responsiveness. This orientation is consistently associated with improved export relationships and performance outcomes (schneider et al., 2005; yalcinkaya et al., 2007; nazar & saleem, 2009).

Managerial perceptions of export stimuli and barriers likewise shape export behaviors. Studies demonstrate that when managers perceive exporting as an opportunity for growth and competitiveness, they adopt proactive strategies that improve performance. Conversely, strong perceptions of barriers—such as perceived risks, lack of information, or administrative burdens—discourage export activity and reduce performance (pinho & martins, 2010; wilkinson & brouthers, 2006; singh et al., 2010; donthu & kim, 1993). Skill-based determinants complement attitudinal characteristics by providing operational abilities needed to implement export strategies. Export experience is one such determinant, but findings are mixed. Some studies demonstrate that experience enhances foreign market knowledge and improves decision-making (dominguez & sequeira, 1993; gray, 1997), while others find limited or negative effects (kaynak & kuan, 1993; stump et al., 1998; brouthers & nakos, 2005). These inconsistencies suggest that experience may interact with contextual factors such as industry type, firm age, and target markets.

Foreign-language proficiency, on the other hand, shows consistently positive relationships with export performance. Managers with strong language skills communicate more effectively, build trust with partners, and navigate cultural contexts more successfully. This determinant is repeatedly shown to enhance export outcomes (krowles et al., 2006; katsikeas et al., 1996; suarez-ortega & alamo-vera, 2005). Education level also demonstrates a strong positive influence. Well-educated managers tend to have stronger analytical skills, broader strategic understanding, and greater ability to interpret international complexity, leading to enhanced export performance (gumed & rasmussen, 2002; brodrechtova, 2008; serra et al., 2012).

Overall, the literature clearly supports the conclusion that both attitudinal and skill-based managerial characteristics play decisive roles in shaping export outcomes.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study applies the vote-counting meta-analytic approach introduced by smith (1971). Vote-counting is appropriate for synthesizing export performance research because the literature includes a wide variety of operational definitions, analytical models, and measurement scales (sousa et al., 2008). Studies published between 1990 and 2012 were gathered from databases including sciencedirect, ebSCO, and google scholar, as well as from key journals such as the journal of international business

studies, international business review, and european journal of marketing. Only empirical studies in english examining managerial determinants of export performance were included; conceptual papers, case studies, and pre-1990 publications were excluded to maintain consistency. Each study was classified according to whether it reported a positive, negative, or non-significant relationship between a managerial determinant and export performance. To assess whether the proportion of positive findings significantly exceeded chance expectation, a sign test was performed using a binomial distribution following methodological recommendations by leonidou et al. (2007) and derfuss (2009). While vote-counting does not produce effect-size estimates or account for study quality, it provides a clear directional synthesis across heterogeneous empirical designs.

5. RESULTS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The synthesis reveals clear empirical patterns. Managerial commitment appears as the strongest predictor of export performance across studies (alvarez, 2004; julian & nhát, 2007; navarro et al., 2010). International orientation also shows a consistent positive relationship, aligning with earlier conclusions that globally minded managers outperform those with domestic orientations (kropp et al., 2006; olsson & solberg, 2010). Customer orientation likewise demonstrates robust positive effects, particularly through product adaptation and relationship building (cadogan et al., 2009; nazar & saleem, 2009).

Perceptions of export stimuli and barriers also exhibit strong predictive validity. Studies show that managers who perceive opportunities instead of obstacles pursue international activities more confidently and with greater strategic clarity, leading to improved outcomes (pinho & martins, 2010; wilkinson & brouthers, 2006; singh et al., 2010).

Skill-based determinants reveal additional insights. Foreign-language proficiency emerges as a strong and reliable contributor to export performance (krowles et al., 2006; katsikeas et al., 1996). Education level also contributes positively, confirming that managers with higher educational backgrounds interpret global markets more effectively (gumed & rasmussen, 2002; brodrechtova, 2008). Export experience shows mixed results, suggesting it may be contingent on firm size, industry dynamics, and managerial adaptability (dominguez & sequeira, 1993; bodur, 1994; brouthers & nakos, 2005).

The conceptual framework derived from these findings positions managerial attitudes as foundational drivers that determine strategic orientation toward exporting, while managerial skills provide the competencies required to execute these strategies effectively. Export performance emerges from the interaction of these two elements.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides an integrated meta-analytic synthesis of managerial determinants of export performance. The findings highlight that managerial attitudes particularly commitment, international orientation, customer orientation, and positive perceptions toward exporting consistently enhance performance. Skill-based factors, including foreign-language proficiency and education level, also contribute significantly, while the impact of export experience varies across contexts.

The proposed conceptual framework underscores that export performance results from the combined influence of managerial mindsets and managerial competencies. Managers act as strategic resources that shape the firm's ability to navigate international markets, consistent with the resource-based view (barney, 1991; grant, 1991).

Although the vote-counting method provides valuable insights, future research should adopt quantitative meta-analytic techniques to estimate effect sizes, account for study quality, and explore moderators such as firm size and industry type. Nevertheless, the present synthesis offers a clear, integrated understanding of how managerial determinants shape export performance and provides important implications for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers.

7. REFERENCES

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