



Key antecedents to “export” market-oriented behaviors: a cross-national empirical examination

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Abstract

In this paper, a model of the key determinants of firms' market-oriented activities in their export operations was developed and tested on survey data from New Zealand and Finland. The variables examined did a good job in predicting firms' export market-oriented behavior ($R^2 = 77\%$). The results suggest that several factors, which are unique to firms' export operations, may play an important role in influencing the firms' export market-oriented behavior. The findings also identified variables which have non-linear relationships with firms' market-oriented behavior in their export markets. Finally, some of the identified antecedents' importance varied across New Zealand and Finland. © 2001 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

As a result of the increasing tendency towards an open global economy (Webster and Deshpandé, 1990) and a focus on improving national trade deficits (cf., Katsikeas et al., 1996), international business involvement is gaining in importance, not only in terms of national prosperity, but also for individual companies. Not surprisingly, with exporting being the most common form of international business involvement (Leonidou, 1995), researchers have focused much of their attention on developing a greater

understanding of the determinants of export performance (for reviews, see Aaby and Slater, 1989; Zou and Stan, 1998).

One route to superior export success is through the adoption of a market orientation (e.g., Hooley and Newcomb, 1983). Reflecting findings in the broader market orientation literature (e.g., Greenley and Foxall, 1998; Oczkowski and Farrell, 1998), empirical work suggests that firms exhibiting market-oriented behavior in their export operations are more successful in their exporting activities than their less market-oriented counterparts (e.g., Cadogan and Diamantopoulos, 1998; Thirkell and Dau, 1998; Kwon and Hu, 2000). The conclusion to be drawn from these studies is that firms wishing to improve their export performance should show in-

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creased market-oriented behavior in their export activities.

In this context, several recent studies have provided insights into those factors which may impede or facilitate the adoption of market-oriented behavior (e.g., Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Ruekert, 1992). However, notwithstanding these developments, the situation is far from satisfactory for exporters. This is because empirical research into those factors which may bring about market-oriented behavior has not been undertaken in an exporting context; rather, researchers have developed and tested theories which are relatively context-free. That is, current theoretical models of the antecedents to market-oriented behavior have conceptualized the latter as being a set of activities which occur at the organizational level. However, as Uncles (2000, p. v) pointed out: “organisations are not concrete and singular (although this is implicitly how some researchers see market-oriented organisations)”. In other words, an assumption within these models is that an organization’s “general” level of market-oriented behavior, its level of market-oriented behavior in its domestic market, and its level of market-oriented behavior in its export markets, are all one and the same. As a result, the antecedents to market-oriented behavior have been conceptualized as being the same, and as having a uniform impact, across the organizational, the domestic, and the export levels of analysis.

Yet it is by no means certain that a firm’s level of market-oriented behavior within its domestic market will automatically be reproduced in its export activities. As noted by Hooley and Newcomb (1983, pp. 17 and 20) in an early review of the export performance literature: “perhaps the single most pervading finding into export performance is the fact that many companies simply fail to carry forward any marketing orientation they may have developed in their domestic market to [their export] markets... Management have been slow to adopt a market orientation in their [export] operations”. Consequently, conceptualizing market-oriented behavior at the organizational level may be inappropriate in the case of exporting companies. Thus, since a firm’s level of market orientation can differ, depending on whether one is considering its domestic or its export operations, it would seem prudent to study antecedents at the appropriate level of analysis. Specifically, if one

is interested in predicting firms’ market-oriented behavior in their export markets, antecedent factors should be contextualized to, and sought at, the exporting level. There are at least two benefits to be gained from this approach.

First, given that current theoretical constructions of the antecedents to market-oriented behavior have excluded explicit reference to the exporting context, one can argue that these theories have an implied domestic bias. However, it cannot be taken for granted that factors which tend to act as antecedents at the organizational or domestic level *necessarily* play the *same* role in facilitating or inhibiting market-oriented behavior at the exporting level. Indeed, as we argue in a later section, factors which have been seen to facilitate market-oriented behavior in a purely domestic marketing context may not necessarily facilitate firms’ ability to behave in a market-oriented way in their export operations. Consequently, contextualizing market orientation’s antecedents to the exporting setting is required to protect against incorrectly generalizing antecedent factors beyond the purely domestic marketing context.

Second, by studying antecedents to market-oriented behavior at the export level, the “theory of the antecedents to market orientation” is opened up to the possible discovery of additional antecedent factors. That is, antecedents may be found which affect a firm’s market-oriented behavior in its export operations but, because of their context-specific nature, do not lend themselves to being modeled as antecedents to a firm’s market-oriented behavior in its domestic market. For example, export coordination and export experience have been argued as antecedents to an exporter’s level of market-oriented behavior in its foreign markets (Cadogan and Diamantopoulos, 1995). However, it would not necessarily make sense to model these concepts as antecedents to a firm’s *domestic* market-oriented activities.

Consequently, the main objective of the current study is to develop and test a model of the antecedents to firms’ market-oriented behavior in their export operations. In order to achieve this, aspects of the internal logic of several of the “law-like generalizations” proposed in current theories of market orientation’s antecedents were recalibrated to better reflect their likely influence in an exporting context. Additionally, we proposed several new mechanisms,

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