
Editorial

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In times of economic boom as well as in a downturn, functioning international trade is an important driver behind the global economy. Between 1950 and 2000, world trade increased 16-fold, and international trade flows relative to GDP doubled between 1970 and 2000 (OECD, 2005). Worldwide exporting accounts for more than 10% of global economic activity (e.g. International Monetary Fund, 2001; World Bank, 2001). With export quotas in excess of 40% or more for many countries, exports have become a major source of national income and competitiveness for many small, open economies and a source of growth and survival for many micro, small, medium and large enterprises. Therefore, exports have become a focal point of interest for governments in many countries (Czinkota, 1994; Zou et al., 1998). Using a plethora of different institutions, programmes and mechanisms of export promotion, governments worldwide seek to assist their national corporate sectors in their export activities. At the same time, the subsequent question of export performance has drawn increasing attention for both managerial

practice and academic research. Governments are concerned about ways of improving their firms' performance in international markets. From a corporate point of view, the measurement and analysis of export performance is considered an important tool to boost corporate growth, strengthen competitive advantages, and ensure company survival in a highly competitive global marketplace (Samiee and Walters, 1990; Terpstra and Sarathy, 2000). What is remarkable is that despite the fact that exports are widely recognised as being important for national economies as well as the global economy as a whole, pertinent research is not very current. This was a main driver behind our motivation for this special issue. In particular, we felt that more and more current inquiries relating to the following aspects were needed:

- 1 *Export as a market entry mode*: Although various aspects of the global business activities of the multinational enterprises have received significant attention, the extant international business literature is dedicating surprisingly little attention to exporting as a mode of market entry. Little is still known about companies' motivations to engage in exporting activities, ways and means to assess their readiness to export, how and to what extent marketing-mix decisions are made in exporting companies, or how foreign target markets are selected.
- 2 *Export performance*: While the definition and determinants of export performance (e.g. Cavusgil and Kirpalani, 1993; Samiee and Anckar, 1998; Sousa and Alserhan, 2002) or factors contributing to export performance have received noticeable research attention (e.g. Aaby and Slater, 1989; Cavusgil and Zou, 1994; Thirkell and Dau, 1998; Zou et al., 1998), we are still far from a basic agreement. As an example, most studies in the field have measured export performance using objectively verifiable indicators such as export sales, export growth, export profitability, export market share, or export intensity. Others have suggested to use subjective scales in the measurement of export performance and even include dimensions such as organisational learning. As a result, we still know rather little about the determinants and the measurement of export performance.
- 3 *Export Promotion Programmes (EPPs)*: The extant literature on export widely investigates the impact of firm level factors on export performance. Despite the fact that there is some evidence in favour of export promotion programmes (e.g. Coughlin and Cartwright, 1987; Alvarez, 2004), their effectiveness, however, is still far from being proven (Nothdurft, 1992). While some studies indicate that EPPs have contributed to the development of successful export strategies, there are also some studies reporting that this support has been inadequately targeted, and has no effect in terms of performance.

In this special issue, we address some of these topics by presenting seven fine papers, which tackle complex and important issues related to export, export performance and export promotion programmes. In doing so they open many new research avenues.

Morgan-Thomas's paper 'Online activities and export performance of the smaller firm: a capability perspective' examines the antecedents of Online Contribution to Export Performance (OCEP), defined as the extent to which an export firm's objectives are achieved via online activities including online promotions, communications or transactions. Building on the export performance literature and framing the issue as a capability development problem, Morgan-Thomas examines how online capabilities, complementary capabilities in exporting, IT resources and intentional efforts on the part

of the firm affect OCEP. Based on a cross-industry sample of over 600 SMEs the results show that whilst some capabilities stimulate the performance of online export activities, others have a detrimental effect. Morgan-Thomas' study shows that online transactions do not seem to be associated with increased online performance. The results further suggest that online activities are most beneficial when treated as complementary to conventional export practices.

Chiao and Li's paper 'Are more exports better for firm's performance? The moderating effect of FDI' extends the research on the relationship between exporting and firm performance into the context of Newly Industrialised Economies (NIEs). In their study, Chiao and Li explore the relationship between exporting and performance by analysing a sample of large Taiwanese manufacturing firms. They find that the relationship between exporting activities and NIC-based firms' performance can be illustrated by an inverted U-shape curve. According to their results, in the early stages of internationalisation, firms which choose to export to several foreign markets can benefit from economies of scale. Firms can adopt exporting as a means to quickly gain access to foreign markets and gain economies of scale by selling products and services to similar markets. They also conclude that export promotion programmes of the Taiwanese government have been effective in encouraging export activity, and have produced numerous successful exporting firms.

In their article 'Structuring dyadic relationships between export producers and intermediaries', Chintakananda, York, O'Neill and Peng ask how export producers and intermediaries structure their dyadic relationships. Their study examines the factors that guide the behaviour and relationships between export producer and intermediary dyads. They examine both sides of a dyadic transaction and develop an export producer-intermediary behaviour typology by using a grounded theory method through qualitative interviews. They propose three forms of export producer-intermediary dyads (i.e. competitive, cooperative and mismatched) based on the degree of information sharing, intensity of price negotiation, level of transaction costs, and partner satisfaction and propensity to export directly. The authors conclude that both sides of export dyads should be considered in order to understand the motivation and factors affecting partnership form and success.

Ruppenthal and Bausch's paper 'Research on export performance over the past 10 years: a narrative review' qualitatively reviews existing export performance research within the last decade to classify and reconcile obtained results, to formulate hypotheses based on the inference of three major theories and finally to provide a comprehensive list of variables influencing the company's export performance. The goal of this narrative review is to document export performance research within the selected timeframe and to develop an integrative, dynamic framework explaining the effects of various independent variables and their direction of influence on export performance. The authors conclude that company, industry and institutional/market factors are major causes for variations in export performance.

Mariotti and Piscitello's paper entitled 'The impact of international involvement on firms' export performance' aims at extending the determinants of firms' export capacity including factors related to the international involvement of both the firms and the environment where they operate. The empirical test the authors conduct in their study relies upon an augmented gravitation model explaining export performance for about 300 firms located in an Italian province and observed throughout the period 1997–2003.

Results confirm that, *ceteris paribus*, firms' export performance depends on their international experience and network structure. However, the authors also suggest that firms benefit from export spillovers stemming from foreign multinational companies located in the same area, but only when they are vertically related.

The purpose of Navjote and Dogra's article 'Examination of export constraints affecting the export performance of Indian sports goods industry' is to identify the key constraints that influence the export performance of firms. The results of their study show that the factors that contribute significantly to export barriers for Indian sports goods industry are 'financial constraints', 'marketing constraints', 'technology constraints' and constraints related to 'availability of inputs'. The 'financial constraints' are related to the availability of finance and the cost of finance. 'Marketing constraints' include problems in export marketing and export packaging. With regards to 'technological constraints', access to technology is a constraint along with problems in quality management. 'Availability of inputs' is related to availability of skilled labour and availability, price and quality of raw materials. The findings of the authors provide a more concise understanding of export constraints because ten of the most common constraints are grouped in relation to four main factors.

Finally, Kandogan's paper 'Immigrants, cross-cultural communication and export performance: the Swiss case' explores the role immigrants play in the export performance of companies particularly in their home countries. Analysing country-level data, Kandogan finds that export effects vary with the size of the immigrant population, duration of stay and type of products traded. He also introduces the role of cultural proximity and communication and shows that the effect of immigration on export performance is significant only if the home and host countries are culturally distinct, and that better cross-culture communication and integration of immigrants are necessary to realise the export performance impact of immigrants

We hope that the articles in this present special issue on export, export performance and export promotion will inspire more research on related topics. We would like to express our gratitude to all the authors who have submitted papers for this special issue, but especially also to Vlad Vaiman, the Executive Editor of the *European Journal of International Management*, for his support, encouragement and patience. We also gratefully acknowledge the diligent efforts of the many reviewers of this special issue.

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