

Enabling and Disenabling Boundary Conditions of Export Marketing Assistance: An Interdisciplinary Framework

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Enabling and Disabling Boundary Conditions of Export Marketing Assistance: An Interdisciplinary Framework

Abstract

Government-sponsored export marketing assistance programmes exert positive effects on the export performance of firms. However, the literature ignores the central concepts of international business (i.e. psychic distance and network), international marketing (i.e. export market orientation) and international entrepreneurship (i.e. international entrepreneurship orientation and prior international experience) when describing the use and effectiveness of export marketing assistance and its enabling and disabling boundary conditions. This study develops an interdisciplinary framework for export marketing assistance for early internationalising small- and medium-sized enterprises by relating these pretermitted concepts. We suggest entrepreneurs' prior international experience determines their use of export marketing assistance, while psychic distance moderates this relationship favourably and network unfavourably. Export market orientation strengthens the export marketing assistance–export performance relationship, while international entrepreneurial orientation weakens the relationship. Policymakers and managers can use this model in ascertaining the optimal use of export marketing assistance.

Keywords: export marketing assistance; international entrepreneurial orientation; export market orientation; psychic distance; network; export performance; international entrepreneurship; international business; entrepreneurial experience

Introduction

Export entrepreneurs contribute more to economic output and foreign exchange earnings than general entrepreneurs (González-Pernía and Peña-Legazkue, 2015). This has led governments around the world to devise policy measures to motivate entrepreneurs in exporting (Minniti, 2008) and to implement multifaceted initiatives to promote export entrepreneurship. Governments provide export entrepreneurs with both financial and marketing assistance. Financial assistance can take such forms as cash incentives, subsidies and preferential rates for guarantees, loans and government charges, while export marketing assistance (EMA) consists mostly of information (Diamantopoulos et al., 1993). Though financial assistance has a direct effect on export performance, marketing assistance does not have due to the presence of many intervening actors. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the impact of EMA on export performance.

Many studies have assessed the effectiveness of EMA in enhancing export performance. However, scholarship related to what determines the use and effectiveness of EMA is still scant. The literature on EMA remains fragmented in separate empirical studies, especially from a public policy perspective. Scholarly attempts to provide specific guidelines to target the most appropriate candidates for EMA programmes are not adequate. Export assistance literature, with few exceptions, discusses relatively few factors, which affects the relationship between export assistance programmes and export performance (Leonidou et al., 2011). Moreover, a clear theoretical foundation for how EMA can help a firm's exporting activities is lacking. Based on this finding, the current study assumes that EMA research tends to ignore the central concepts of international entrepreneurship, international business and marketing. The integration of such theories is essential to gaining a more in-depth understanding of EMA, since

it is operationalised within the context of these three interrelated disciplines. Thus, our aim in this study was to advocate a framework for EMA by connecting these concepts.

Since export performance can depend on individual, company, industry or market factors (Ruppenthal and Bausch, 2009), we based our model on the factors of both individual and firm level. We developed the framework considering early internationalising small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially international new ventures, due to the emerging prominence of these firms and the lack of research in export assistance investigating their unique needs. Moreover, EMA is mostly enjoyed by small firms (Martincus and Carballo, 2010), while more internationalised companies are less likely to use EMA (Crick and Czinkota, 1995).

In SMEs, the individual is the key decision-maker. Therefore, we argue that an individual entrepreneur's prior international experience, perceived psychic distance (PD) and network relationship strongly influence decisions to pursue EMA. The literature does not consider prior international experience an important determinant of the use of EMA. Again, while the purpose of EMA is to assist entrepreneurs in entering foreign markets by providing market-specific information and other assistance, researchers have overlooked the impact of the strategic orientations of firms, especially export market orientation (EMO) and international entrepreneurial orientation (IEO). Though some research exists on the direct relationship between EMA and a firm's export performance (Singer and Czinkota, 1994; Spence, 2003), and on how factors such as strategy, knowledge and commitment moderate such relations (Faroque and Takahashi, 2015), the role of a firm's strategic orientations, such as EMO and IEO, in moderating this relationship has not been examined.

Strategic orientations regulate a firm's activities and behaviours to ensure its viability and performance (Hakala, 2010). The two most common strategic orientations in general, and for studying the internationalisation of firms in particular are entrepreneurial orientation (EO; see Arshi et al., 2020; Eroglu and Quagraine, 2018; Rufaidah, 2019) and market orientation (MO; e.g. Colak et al., 2015; Herath and Karunaratne, 2018). Different strategic orientations dictate different perceptions of organisational priorities (Miles and Arnold, 1991). For example, an EMO firm will be more committed to increasing export performance. Therefore, this study presents EMO and IEO as the two most important intervening firm level variables to influence the EMA–export performance relationship because a market-oriented firm in export markets will seek more market information and related resources from government sources to reach its intelligence generation objective. Also, firms with a higher level of IEO can use their own intelligence to procure reliable and pertinent information without government assistance.

The objective of this study is to respond to these omissions in the literature and to present a conceptual framework delineating the role of IEO and EMO in the use of EMA. This study also illustrates perceived PD and network relationship as moderators between prior international experience and the use of EMA. In doing so, this study seeks to synthesise and integrate the stream of literature on EMA, invoking concepts such as PD and network from international business, EMO from marketing, and IEO and prior international experience concepts from international entrepreneurship.

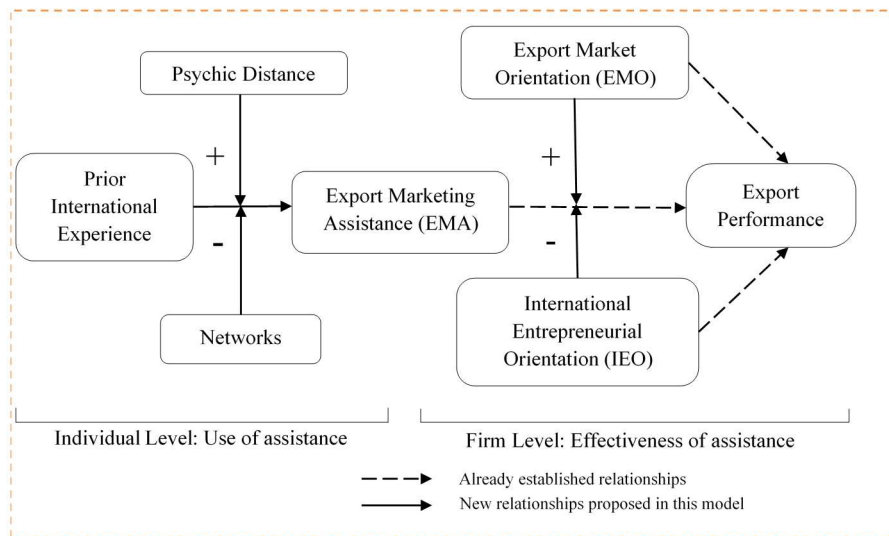
A conceptually sound theoretical model is imperative for assisting policymakers and educators in devising promotion programmes targeting specific exporter groups and aspiring would-be exporters. Therefore, this study presents a model to help policymakers, managers and researchers better understand EMA, contributing to EMA theory and advancing managerial

and policy implications. To defend our argument, we followed two key lines of research. First, we examined how entrepreneurs' prior international experience affects their use of EMA and the role of PD and networks in this relationship. Second, we investigated how EMO and IEO moderate the relationship between EMA and export performance. This article is organised as follows. At the beginning, a conceptual model of the relationships among prior international experience, EMA and export performance along with moderating effects is presented. Then, the relationships are explained considering the existing literature. The paper concludes with implications for academics, managers and policymakers.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 is built on two premises. First, based on the premise that early internationalising SMEs are resource-constrained and, thereby, heavily dependent on the entrepreneur and his/her knowledge and experience, which impact the intensity of the search for external assistance, we argue that an entrepreneur's prior international experience is a key factor of the usage of EMA.

Fig. 1 *Interdisciplinary Framework of Export Marketing Assistance Use and Effectiveness*



Second, the performance advantage gained by receiving EMA is expected to be contingent on strategic orientation, that is, IEO and EMO. IEO dictates a firm's mobilising vision to deploy resources (Wales et al., 2013) by not only providing an objective but also identifying the resources required to achieve the objective (Chirico et al., 2011). Again, internationalising firms, which have a strong market-orientated capability, can derive more performance advantage (He and Wei, 2011) from EMA. Therefore, we argue that these two strategic orientations can favourably or unfavourably affect the relationship between EMA use and export performance.

Prior International Experience as an Antecedent of the Use of EMA

'Experience' in this paper implies the international experience entrepreneurs possess. Prior knowledge, gained from education, experience or other means, modulates the entrepreneur's understanding and utilization of new information in more appropriate ways (Roberts, 1991) to seize more opportunities that emerge from their environment (Baron, 2006). Therefore, factors related to experience and knowledge have attracted considerable research attention (Unger et

al., 2011) in entrepreneurship. Researchers have shown that experience may account for entrepreneurial success (Cassar, 2014). Prior experience has also commonly been seen as critical in internationalisation decisions. Research in international business and international entrepreneurship has shown that prior experience is a decisive factor in identifying entrepreneurial opportunities (Westhead et al., 2009), especially, previous international experience, which brings forth international opportunity through calculative search and discovery (Chandra et al., 2009).

Educated and internationally experienced entrepreneurs may have more information about EMA sources. Such information may influence them to use these sources, but researchers in both entrepreneurship/international entrepreneurship and EMA have remained silent on this relationship. Export assistance literature states that firm's export experience helps in exploiting such assistance (Singer and Czinkota, 1994). However, since the literature indicates that budget-constrained firms are highly likely to take advantage of export assistance (Haddoud et al., 2017) and that entrepreneurs are the dominant decision-makers in early internationalising SMEs, analyses without entrepreneurs themselves to provide a better understanding of the export assistance field would not be complete.

In the pre-internationalisation stage, the entrepreneur is the principal decision-maker and key actor of opportunity recognition (Bembom and Schwens, 2018). In early internationalising SMEs, decision-makers play a central role in internationalisation endeavours (Dimitratos et al., 2011). Entrepreneurs and top management often significantly control decision making (Hambrick and Mason, 1984). In uncertain situations, such as internationalisation, individuals tend to rely on prior experience to manage novel and complex situations (Figueira-de-Lemos et al., 2011). Therefore, decision-makers tend to approach internationalisation initiatives by

relying on their own experience (Michailova and Wilson, 2008). The prior international experience of founders and decision-makers expedites the firm's speed of learning and internationalisation (Oviatt and McDougall, 1997), which can also be extended to their use of EMA. Thus, the entrepreneur's international experience becomes a decisive factor in selecting the country/countries to be internationalised (Zahra et al., 2005). Because entrepreneurs with prior international experience begin with basic knowledge about internationalisation and the government's pro-internationalisation policy and assistance for a particular industry, they are prone to acquire new knowledge about internationalisation and EMA. Furthermore, knowledgeable individuals are more conscious about information needs and the wide array of information available. They are better able to trace, locate and process relevant information to exploit international opportunities in an opportune moment (Yeoh, 2005), leading to higher levels of exporting (Jones and Coviello, 2005). The more complex the decision, the more the manager utilises his/her prior experience in searching for external information, and the greater the involvement in information search, the greater the likelihood of using external information sources (Pineda et al., 1998). This discussion leads to our first proposition:

Proposition 1: The greater the prior international experience of an entrepreneur, the greater the use of EMA; thus, prior international experience is an important antecedent of the use of EMA.

Psychic Distance as a Moderator

Psychic distance (PD) is described as managers' perceptions of environmental factors that influence their decisions (Nebus and Chai, 2014). PD is conceived in a subjective manner and deals with managerial cognition and perceptions (Evans and Mavondo, 2002) of country-

specific diversities (Nebus and Chai, 2014). PD describes, more specifically, the perceived dissimilarity between the home and host market due to the vagaries of environmental factors. Johanson and Vahlne (1977) conceptualised PD “as the sum of factors preventing the flow of information from and to market”, factors that include ‘differences in language, education, business practices, culture, and industrial development’ (p.24). PD is regarded as an explanatory factor, *inter alia*, in the firm’s subsequent decisions on modes of entry into foreign markets (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977), foreign market selection (Magnani et al., 2018) and international marketing strategies (Tan and Sousa, 2013).

Although internationalisation activities involve varying levels of perceived risk and uncertainty, the levels are higher for early internationalising SMEs (Ojala, 2015) because they lack experience and have resource constraints. Foreign markets at a higher perceived PD may reflect more uncertain environments than foreign markets at a lower perceived PD (Evans and Mavondo, 2002). According to information processing perspectives scanning activity is increased in response to increased environmental uncertainty (Hough and White, 2004), represented by a higher level of PD. Entrepreneurs conduct these scanning activities in both external environments and within the internal circumstances of their firms (Garg et al., 2003). Since the implementation of internal functions with respect to heightened requirements of psychically distant markets requires more resources, entrepreneurs look to external sources for additional resources, which can be obtained from government agencies. The frequency of the information search varies depending on the degree of market familiarity (Cooper et al., 1995). Entrepreneurs who perceive more market dynamism and uncertainty will look for more resources – informational and experiential – to reduce PD and uncertainty. In psychically distant markets, the costs of acquiring information and knowledge are high (Liesch and Knight, 1999). Therefore, entrepreneurs who are resource-constrained often search for and

use information from governmental sources and participate in government-sponsored trade fairs and missions to reduce this PD in a cost-effective manner. Thus, the relationship between prior international experience and EMA will be stronger in a distant market characterised by a higher level of uncertainty arising from differences in political, geographic, social, information, commercial and economic development (Freeman et al., 2012). This brings us to the next proposition:

Proposition 2: The higher the PD, the stronger the relationship between an entrepreneur's prior international experience and use of EMA.

Networks as a Moderator

Networks are relationships between individuals, groups and organisations (Dubini and Aldrich, 1991). Networking is an effective utensil for entrepreneurs. In today's business environment, entrepreneurs are increasingly creative network operators and managers (Nijkamp, 2003). Scholars have investigated the role of networks in providing access to markets, information and other resources and in identifying and exploiting internationalisation opportunities. Because networks provide knowledge and opportunities to connect with other network partners, current network embeddedness may determine the use of external assistance, based on the entrepreneur's prior international experience.

Personal or social networks are informal structures formed through 'family, marriage, schooling' [Zhao and Hsu, (2007), p.823] and living experiences in foreign countries consisting of all persons with whom the entrepreneur has a direct personal relationship and from whom he/she obtains advice, service, and moral support (Dubini and Aldrich, 1991). Examples

include partners, suppliers, customers, financiers/creditors, distributors, trade associations and family members. These networks, characterised as strong, cohesive, identity-based and informal, are built on reputation and trust (Hite and Hesterly, 2001). Entrepreneurs can access resources through the wider social networks in which their direct ties are embedded (Kim and Aldrich, 2005). Entrepreneurs develop social capital from such networks of social relationships (Adler and Kwon, 2002), which they bring as an initial capital endowment to the new venture (Sasi and Arenius, 2008). Social capital embedded in these networks generates value by allowing privileged access to intellectual, financial and cultural resources. However, social capital can also yield negative consequences, such as the ‘exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward levelling norms’ [Portes, (1998), p.15]. While an entrepreneur’s cohesive social networks provide support and resources, the obligations resulting from these benefits curtail the entrepreneur’s ability to pursue new opportunities. Thus, social capital becomes a liability that hinders the entrepreneur’s performance (Gargiulo and Benassi, 2000). Strong social networks also promote social self-efficacy (Syna Desivilya and Eizen, 2005). Therefore, entrepreneurs with large, strong and cohesive social networks tend to avoid contacts outside their networks’ boundaries and remain contained within the group. Thus, these entrepreneurs miss opportunities to broaden their existing network boundaries and fail to use resources from other external sources, including the government. Thus, we propose:

Proposition 3: The personal network of an entrepreneur will weaken the relationship between prior international experience and the use of EMA.

Export Marketing Assistance and Export Performance

Export assistance 'refers to all public measures designed to encourage and assist exporting activities of individual firms and/or specific domestic industries' [Gençtürk, (2010), p.1]. Gençtürk (2010) classified export assistance as direct or indirect. He considered government support that is designed not to increase exports but, instead, to promote a favourable export environment, for example, innovation, research and development (R&D) and productivity assistance programmes, as indirect assistance; he classified all programmes designed to increase export activities and competitiveness as direct assistance. Direct export assistance can be divided into two types: financial and EMA. Export financial assistance is straightforward and includes direct and indirect financial incentives, including lower taxes, export credit at lower than market rates, duty-free import/export provisions and cash incentives (Faroque and Takahashi, 2015). EMA is aimed at providing and facilitating informational requirements to reduce uncertainty, enabling a firm's export competitiveness (Diamantopoulos et al., 1993). EMA includes information, trade mobility and training and education programmes related to export. Government information services provide exporters with country data, reports on foreign firms, opportunity identification bulletins, information on relevant home and host government regulations and identification of potential foreign buyers/distributors for various products in different countries, among other data (Gençtürk, 2010). Trade mobility services provide assistance with trade show/exhibition participation and trade missions in foreign markets and offer support through trade offices abroad (Leonidou et al., 2011). Training and education programmes assist by facilitating seminars/conferences and training on export and export documentation and by providing counselling and foreign language support (Leonidou et al., 2011). EMA can be classified as either standardised or customised (Diamantopoulos et al., 1993). Standardised information is typical in nature and is obtained from government agencies, embassies or trade missions in print or via the Internet. Customised information, also

called experiential assistance, is gathered by personal contact through mediation of a government-supported trade mission or trade fair.

EMA plays a critical role in converting risks and opportunities in the export market environment into perspective, driving a firm's interest and commitment to export and providing knowledge and experience as an external resource (Seringhaus, 1986). It exerts a substantially favourable impact on the export performance of assisted firms (Bonner and McGuinness, 2007), a finding supported by multiple researchers (Faroque and Takahashi, 2015; Leonidou et al., 2011). Thus, existing encyclopaedism proves that there is a positive relationship between EMA and export performance.

Export Market Orientation as a Moderator

Export market orientation (EMO) refers to '(a) the generation of market intelligence pertinent to the firm's exporting operations, (b) the dissemination of this information to appropriate decision-makers, and (c) the design and implementation of responses directed towards export customers, export competitors, and other extraneous export market factors which affect the firm and its ability to provide superior value for export customers' [Cadogan et al., (2002), p.616]. EMO is particularly important in an international context because foreign markets are far more complex than domestic markets due to underlying differences in many dimensions, including technological, economic, political, cultural and social, which results in increased demand for market intelligence generation, dissemination and responsiveness.

Researchers agree that MO, in addition to being a global phenomenon (e.g. Anwar, 2019), has a significant and positive effect on overall export marketing performance specifically (Herath

and Karunaratne, 2018; Julian et al., 2014). However, EMO may play a moderating role (Phattarawan et al., 2010) regarding the use of EMA in achieving a performance advantage. Although EMA may provide a performance advantage, internal restrictions, such as deficient market intelligence, a core element of MO, may prevent firms from making the best use of such assistance. A firm that is deficient in market intelligence generation may fail to utilise the information gathered from governmental assistance programmes to suit the vagaries of each country's market (Navarro-García et al., 2014). These firms may even be unaware of the availability of assistance programmes due to their weak market intelligence or failure to adjust to the idiosyncrasies of each country's market, impeding their progress (Navarro-García et al., 2014). Despite the firms' awareness of and need for governmental marketing assistance, internal constraints on processing market intelligence could hinder making such decisions. EMO makes the export firm more proactive in gathering and disseminating information and implementing responses towards customers' needs (Calantone et al., 2006). For resource-constrained firms, the use of export assistance may be necessary for internationalisation; however, this action may be insufficient. A firm's strategic business decisions, such as internationalisation and selection of an appropriate international market (Leonidou and Theodosiou, 2004), should be regulated by the firm's market-oriented philosophy and activities. Hence, EMO is treated as an important determinant for the company to make appropriate decisions regarding the use of marketing assistance to improve export performance. Internationalising firms, which have a strong market-oriented capability, can achieve more performance advantage (He and Wei, 2011) using EMA. Therefore, we present our next proposition:

Proposition 4: EMO will strengthen the relationship between EMA and export performance.

International Entrepreneurial Orientation as a Moderator

Entrepreneurship has often been examined from individual, group, firm and other perspectives. A core component of firm-level analysis is entrepreneurial orientation (EO). Miller (1983) defined an entrepreneurial firm as one that ‘engages in product market innovation, undertakes somewhat risky ventures, and is first to come up with “proactive” innovations, beating competitors to the punch’ p.771. In an EO, the entrepreneurship process is more important than the actors involved (Miller, 1983). EO has become a predominant concept in entrepreneurship and has received significant research attention (Arshi et al., 2020; Rauch et al., 2009) and is relevant for SMEs specifically (Rufaidah, 2019). EO has recently been linked to export performance (Monteiro et al., 2017), but overall, the concept has been adopted in international entrepreneurship literature with special attention to the international business environment and is widely known as IEO in this context (Covin and Miller, 2014). It also focuses on three key entrepreneurial components: innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking.

In an internationalisation context, innovativeness implies a firm’s capacity to generate novel and creative ideas, products and services and to adopt new administrative techniques and technologies (Knight, 2001). Proactiveness reflects forward looking perspectives and actively seeking opportunities to introduce something new to the market. International proactiveness ‘relates to aggressive posturing relative to competitors, with emphasis on execution and follow-up of tasks in pursuit of the firm’s objectives’ [Knight, (2001), p.160]. Boso et al. (2017) defined international proactiveness as a ‘tendency to recognize and exploit international market opportunities ahead of foreign market competitors’ p.7. Risk-taking in international entrepreneurship entails a firm’s willingness to undertake risky ventures in a foreign market, entailing a fair chance of costly failure (Davis et al., 1991). Research on both entrepreneurship

and international entrepreneurship reflects that EO or IEO influences a firm's performance positively (Celec et al., 2014). Research suggests that EO may also be an enabling agent for dissecting how differences in EO impact key relationships (Wales, 2015; Wales et al., 2013). The impact of export assistance may be examined concurrently with management actions and a firm's strategic processes (Cavusgil and Yeoh, 1994). Management actions and strategic processes are integral parts of EO that determine the performance advantage of receiving marketing assistance.

EMA can serve 'as an external resource to build knowledge and experience for successful foreign market involvement' [Seringhaus, (1986), p.55]. However, resources are of no real value to a firm unless they are combined or aligned strategically with the firm's idiosyncratic dynamic capabilities (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000), such as its IEO (Jiang et al., 2018; Swoboda and Olejnik, 2019). These resources can only produce performance outcomes if aligned with entrepreneurially oriented strategic processes inherent in the IEO. EO can be a resource-consuming strategic orientation (Chirico et al., 2011). Therefore exporting SMEs, which usually face resource constraints, especially those that internationalise early, look for external resources, especially from the government, to facilitate their entrepreneurially oriented behaviour. Thus, one could draw a sweeping conclusion that EO will strengthen the relationship between EMA and export performance.

However, export firms with a greater IEO tend to possess more creative resources and seek the maximum possible output from their available resources (Stevenson and Gumpert, 1985). These firms with a more proactive strategic orientation are more capable of acquiring external knowledge (Liao et al., 2003). They are competitively aggressive and can afford to devote considerable resources to export operations having unknown outcomes (Boso et al., 2018).

Additionally, due to a high level of IEO, firms are able to improve their export performance, intensifying their information utilisation efforts (Keh et al., 2007). They give less priority to collecting information through external market intelligence to solve their problems; rather, they are more prone to trust their internal R&D competence (Bhuian et al., 2005). Utilisation of 'external networks is more beneficial to conservative, risk-averse firms than bold, entrepreneurial firms' [Baker et al., (2016), p.2]. Baker et al. (2016) found that 'weaker EO firms are likely to benefit more from higher external network utilization than firms with stronger EO because they are more likely to suffer from learning deficits that external networks can mitigate' p.2. In the same study, Baker et al. (2016) found that EO negatively moderates the relationship between external network utilisation and foreign market success. On a similar ground, it can be argued that export firms with a weaker EO are more likely to seek and benefit from external EMA than firms with a stronger EO. Thus, our next proposition is:

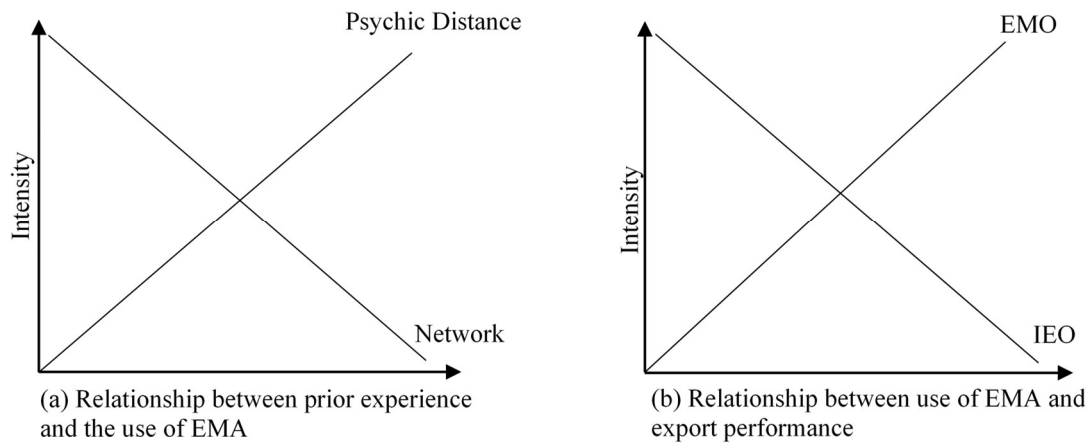
Proposition 6: IEO will weaken the relationship between EMA and export performance.

Discussion and Implications

This study prompted the development of a framework to determine the critical antecedent to the use of EMA, the factors that moderate the use of EMA and those that influence the effectiveness of EMA in achieving performance advantage. Our research framework suggests that an entrepreneur's prior international experience is an important determinant of EMA use and that PD strengthens this relationship, whereas networks weaken it. We also suggest that EMO strengthens the relationship between EMA and export performance, while IEO weakens this relationship. The findings are summarised in Figure 2. As illustrated in Figure 2(a), the relationship between prior experience and the use of EMA strengthens as the degree of PD

increases and the degree of network intensity decreases. Figure 2(b) shows that the relationship between the use of EMA and export performance strengthens as the degree of EMO increases and the degree of IEO decreases.

Fig. 2 *The Use and Effectiveness of EMA*



Theoretical Contributions

The main contribution of this study is delineating a conceptual framework for EMA that accounts for its use and effectiveness. Unlike other models for EMA, the contribution of this study lies in incorporating the central theories and perspectives from international business, marketing and international entrepreneurship, thus making the model more pervasive. In doing so, this study incorporated two levels of analysis – individual and firm – as well as two stages of analysis – use and effectiveness of EMA. In the first stage, we illustrated the relationship between an entrepreneur’s prior international experience and the use of EMA at the individual level. In the second stage, we identified firm level factors that can strengthen/weaken the effectiveness of EMA.

More specifically, four main theoretical contributions can be highlighted. First, while the importance of networks in internationalisation is uncontested (Jones et al., 2011), the existing models of internationalisation have mostly limited their view to network relationships between organisations (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009). This study accounted for the individual unit of analysis in networks by proposing that an entrepreneur's personal networks will weaken the relationship between prior international experience and the use of EMA. Networking is an entrepreneurial act (Engel et al., 2017), and entrepreneurs, especially in early internationalising SMEs, develop networks to compensate for their resource limitations (Vasilchenko and Morrish, 2011). However, research also showed that networks have negative effects on external information searches and on resource mobilisation initiatives beyond the existing network boundary [Portes, (1998), p.15]. Therefore, an overreliance on existing networks may prevent entrepreneurs from seeking assistance from government agencies. This reflects another contribution of this study, as it imported this boundary condition in the EMA literature and showed how networks limit EMA use.

Second, by including IEO, this study introduced entrepreneurship insights into the EMA literature. Entrepreneurially oriented firms have explicit corporate cultures that facilitates innovative and risky behaviours (Wang and Zang, 2005) that enable employees to stay abreast with changing environment (Schuler, 1986). Therefore, high EO firms are inward-looking (cf. Arshi et al., 2020), and even if EMA is used in these firms, the assistance is inefficiently used because these firms fail to realise the importance of such assistance and, thus, fail to integrate it into their intelligence generation. This study shows that EO firms are reluctant to use such assistance since they are already highly entrepreneurial, thus helping to widen the discussion on the role of EO on export performance (see Monteiro et al., 2017) and highlighting a firm's EO as an influential factor for EMA effectiveness.

Third, the inclusion of MO as a firm level strategic orientation in the framework places this study in the mainstream marketing literature. Managers and employees of a market-oriented firm tend to seek and utilise external information to generate customer intelligence. Therefore, whether the managers and employees of the firm utilise EMA depends largely on the firm's MO.

Finally, the inclusion of prior international experience from international entrepreneurship literature as an antecedent to the use of EMA, and the application of PD from international business as a moderating factor in the relationship between prior international experience and the use of EMA, underscore the importance of interdisciplinary research between international entrepreneurship and international business in better understanding EMA. Moderation effects are important mechanisms in explaining firms' initial inclination to internationalise (e.g. Masroor et al., 2020), and this conceptual model accounts for the moderative impact of the central theoretical constructs for EMA.

Managerial Implications

Entrepreneurs and managers can derive important implications from this study. Entrepreneurs with prior international experience are more knowledgeable about the availability of EMA and make use of it. Therefore, if entrepreneurs lack prior international experience and knowledge, they can hire managers with such experience to mitigate the weaknesses of their own experience. Entrepreneurs need to emphasise the prior experience and network relationships through which they can access information and government assistance. They also need to be

cognizant of the dark side of their social and business networks that may limit their external information and resource search.

Especially when entrepreneurs perceive higher PD, they need to resort to external assistance to reduce their mental barriers. Entrepreneurs should seek to develop market-oriented and entrepreneurial-oriented dynamic capabilities and understand the complex mechanisms that convert assistance-related resources into international performance. If entrepreneurs have pre-existing EMO and IEO, they can capitalise on external resources by improving these dynamic capabilities.

Furthermore, market-oriented firms have an advantage in extracting performance benefits from EMA usage. Firms with a higher level of IEO may be able to mobilise resources through their entrepreneurial spirit without much reliance on government assistance. However, managers of low EO firms should utilise more assistance to realise more internationalisation benefits.

Policy Implications

Public policymakers should be more selective in choosing the companies that receive EMA. The limited resources available can be used more efficiently by focusing on entrepreneurs who are expected to use the resources. The conceptual model presented in this study can be especially beneficial to policymakers in terms of detecting the ‘individual level’ as well as ‘firm level’ boundary conditions that impact the use and effectiveness of EMA programmes. An entrepreneur’s prior international experience can be a useful criterion for identifying entrepreneurs willing to accept EMA. Policymakers, thus, can avoid the most debated and ineffective standard of prior export experience for targeting firms for such assistance. From a

policy perspective, government agencies should focus on less experienced entrepreneurs because more experienced entrepreneurs already know about and use government assistance programmes. This could be done through marketing efforts aimed directly at new enterprises and through university entrepreneurship education programmes.

Aside from the individual factor, policymakers should also consider two organisational level criteria: EMO and IEO. Our conceptual model reveals that a high level of EMO is beneficial to extracting more benefits from EMA. EMO can indicate the willingness of actual or potential exporters to engage in exporting activities, enabling export promotion agencies to target them as potential service recipients (Dichtl et al., 1990). Therefore, policymakers should target firms with a higher level of MO and should have a mechanism to appropriately detect such firms. Again, since firms with a higher level of IEO may not be interested in EMA, policymakers may direct their assistance towards firms with lower IEO. This also squashes the practice of boosting export entrepreneurship by targeting firms with a sufficient level of EO. Therefore, EMO with IEO can be used as a yardstick to measure the qualifying criteria for EMA.

Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study is our research is restricted to government-provided EMA without considering other types of export assistance. Additionally, our research focused mainly on early internationalising SMEs, since they are more likely to use EMA. We used only two entrepreneurial competencies (prior international experience and network ties) and two firm level factors (EMO and IEO) as moderating factors. Future research may find direction from the limitations of this study.

Research in export assistance has mostly had a unilateral focus on government assistance providers, which may potentially suffer from omitted variable bias. Assistance provided by quasi-government exporters' associations and other private firms and network partners (e.g. importers, distributors, export trading firms, banking and insurance companies and so on) has been largely overlooked. Therefore, future research could integrate network theory to explore the contributions of different networks as assistance providers. Another important area that can be integrated with EMA is an opportunity-based view in entrepreneurship and international entrepreneurship. Since entrepreneurship is about exploring and exploiting opportunities, how EMA influences international opportunity exploration and exploitation in international markets may constitute a very interesting future research agenda (Faroque et al., 2021). Other strategic orientations, such as learning orientation, an organisation-wide practice of generating and using knowledge to enhance competitive advantage (Calantone et al., 2006), could be integrated with EMA literature. Learning orientation regulates what type of information is gathered and how it is interpreted, evaluated and shared. Informational and experiential assistance cannot be effective if not integrated with the learning orientation of entrepreneurs. Moreover, since entrepreneurs are by definition leaders (Ensley et al., 2006), the role of leadership styles could also be interesting to investigate in relation to EMA.

Future research can also be done to test our findings empirically. Though we postulate a positive relationship exists between prior international experience and EMA, we have not yet confirmed whether this relationship is linear. The level of significance of the effects of moderating variables could be ascertained by partaking empirical analysis. Furthermore, our findings suggest that high level IEO negatively moderates the relationship between EMA and export performance. Future research may attempt to uncover the inherent reason for this effect.

Conclusion

We have taken an interdisciplinary approach to explain the uses and effectiveness of EMA. In this regard, our model resorts to both individual and firm level factors. Individual factors were considered to suggest the antecedent and moderators of EMA use, whereas firm level factors were used to put forward the moderators of the effectiveness of EMA. Hence, this study attempts to incorporate concepts from marketing, international business and international entrepreneurship. Based on the study, we argue that prior international experience is an antecedent of EMA, in which PD and network work as moderators conversely. We also insist that the relationship between EMA and export performance is not straightforward. Moderating factors, such as EMO and IEO, can affect this relationship substantially and conversely. This model, in its present form, appears to offer ample opportunities for research into EMA from interdisciplinary perspectives. We also believe our findings will guide managers and policymakers in using EMA more judiciously.

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