

# **Export Performance and the Relevance of Resources and Inter-organizational Relations**

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**ABSTRACT:** This article offers an in-depth analysis of the existing literature on export performance, highlighting challenges and opportunities in this area of research. The study highlights the fragmentation and lack of theorizing in the current literature, as well as the need to develop more solid and coherent theoretical frameworks. Moreover, the importance of inter-organizational relations for export performance, often neglected in the literature, is highlighted. The article concludes by emphasizing the need for more rigorous future research, particularly in the context of developing countries, and by calling for more nuanced and robust approaches to measuring export performance.

**KEY WORDS:** export performance, inter-organisational relations,

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The internationalization of companies is a phenomenon that has grown considerably over the last century, giving rise to growing academic interest in the field of management sciences. More specifically, the emphasis was placed on the export performance of companies, a concept that has become central in the study of company behavior on international markets.

In the first stages of the research, the work mainly focused on observing the behavior of exporting companies, with particular attention paid to the triggering factors of the decision to export (Bilkey and Tesar, 1979), the choices of modes of internationalization (Anderson and Gatignon 1986) and stages of the internationalization process (Douglas and Craig, 1983). However, export performance itself was not directly at the heart of these studies, leading to a lack of precise and nuanced understanding of this crucial concept.

As the field of research evolved, attention gradually shifted towards a deeper exploration of export performance. Researchers have begun to address questions such as the precise definition of export performance, how to measure it effectively and accurately, and what are the most appropriate levels of analysis to study it. These questions, which form the core of our discussion, have given rise to a variety of perspectives and approaches in the literature, revealing a wealth of knowledge, but also a series of contradictions and gaps.

In this article, we propose to delve into this rich and sometimes confusing literature to provide a critical synthesis of current research on export performance. We will examine in detail the various definitions and measures of export performance, the quantitative and qualitative criteria used to assess it, and the appropriate units of analysis. In addition, we will address the issue of the importance of resources and customer relationships in export performance, an aspect which, although recognized as crucial, has often been overlooked in the existing literature.

Beyond this critical synthesis, we will also seek to identify gaps and opportunities for future research. We hope that our work will contribute to enriching the understanding of export performance and provide a solid foundation for future research in this essential area of management science.

## II. EXPORT PERFORMANCE: DEFINITION, MEASUREMENT AND LEVELS OF ANALYSIS

The internationalization of companies has attracted the attention of researchers since the sixties of the last century, in particular with the work of Tookey (1964)<sup>1</sup>. The first studies focused on the behavior of exporting companies without directly worrying about performance<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the precursor works focused on the factors at the origin of the decision to export ( Bilkey and Tesar , 1979)<sup>3</sup>, the choice of mode of internationalization (Anderson and Gatignon 1986)<sup>4</sup> or even on the stages of the process of internationalization ( *Stages model* ) with the work of Douglas and Craig (1983)<sup>5</sup>.

The eighties of the last century marked the real boom in export performance as a specific field of research. This concept, originally developed by research in marketing and strategic management (Maurel, 2009)<sup>6</sup>, is generally apprehended through two angles of research which are its determination and its evaluation. Which are obviously linked to the definition of the concept of export performance as well as to its theoretical anchoring. We first approach a presentation of our understanding of export performance and the issues related to its measurement. Thereafter, we present a critical assessment of the state of the art of research on the subject; we will present conceptual models that have marked the history of research in this area.

### 2.1 THE DEFINITION OF EXPORT PERFORMANCE

The academic literature is well documented on the subject of export performance. It seems that the last decade has seen a profusion of research around this issue (Sousa, Martínez , & Coelho, 2008; Wheeler, Ibeh , & Dimitratos , 2008, Ruppenthal & Beauch , 2009)<sup>7</sup>. However, no consensual definition of this concept seems to have emerged from the literature. Paradoxically, by the amount of published research, the subject is seen as one of the “*most documented and least understood*” areas of marketing (Sousa et al. 2008. p375)<sup>8</sup>. These authors comment on this observation by stating that “*no other concept in the history of marketing has shown itself so stubbornly resistant to conceptualization, definition or operationalization*”<sup>9</sup>. This same observation is confirmed more recently by Ruppenthal and Beauch (2009, p.239), who note that ambiguity still hangs over the literature on export performance and that “*no clear image has emerged so far*”<sup>10</sup>.

To circumvent the pitfall of the rhetorical nature of literature, we start from the universal definition of performance; the Larousse dictionary defines this notion as “*any form of recognized achievement*”. Starting from this definition, defining export performance would amount to describing what the export activity was able to “achieve”. However, the question does not seem to be equally evident in the literature; export performance, and the achievement associated with it, have been assessed in several ways depending on the perspectives of the researchers (Zou et al. 1998)<sup>11</sup>. The result is that we are now witnessing a real problem of consistency between the different meanings of the authors, judging by the variety of possible approaches, the respective qualities and limits of which still remain highly controversial ( Katsikeas , Leonidou , & Morgan, 2000; Sousa, 2004; Wheeler, Ibeh , & Dimitratos , 2008)<sup>12</sup>. Our purpose in this research is not to return to the quarrels of the conceptualization

<sup>1</sup>Tookey DA. (1964): “*Factors associated with success in exporting*”. Journal of Management Studies 1: 48-66.

<sup>2</sup>Dans les années soixante-dix, Bilkey (1978) a effectué une revue de la littérature sur quarante-trois exportateurs études, qui comprenait seulement quatre études visant à expliquer la performance export. .

<sup>3</sup>Bilkey, W. et G. Tesar (1977), “*The export behaviour of smaller sized Wisconsin manufacturing firms*”, *Journal of International Business Studies*, vol.8, n° 1, p. 93-98

<sup>4</sup>Anderson, A. & Gatignon, H. (1986) - “*Modes of Foreign Entry: A Transaction Cost Analysis and Propositions*” - Journal of International Business Studies, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 1-26

<sup>5</sup>Douglas, Susan P. and CS Craig, (1983), “*International Market Research*”, Prentice Hall.

<sup>6</sup>Carol Maurel (2009), “*Determinants of export performance in French wine SMEs*” , *International Journal of Wine Business Research*, 21(2):118-142.

<sup>7</sup>Wheeler C, Ibeh K, & Dimitratos P (2008). “*UK export performance research: Review and implications* ”. *Int Small. Bus. J.* 26(2): 207-239.

Ruppenthal , T and Bausch, A. (2009) , “*Research on export performance over the past 10 years: a narrative review* ”, *European Journal on international management*, 3(3), 328-364

<sup>8</sup>Sousa CMP, Martínez-López FJ, & Coelho F (2008). “*The determinants of export performance: a review of the research in the literature between 1998 and 2005* ”. *Int. J. Manage. Rev.* 10(4): 343-374.

<sup>9</sup>Free translation of “*Perhaps no other concept in marketing's short history has proved as stubbornly resistant to conceptualization, definition, or application*” .( page 38)

<sup>10</sup>Free translation of: “*Looking at the export performance construct, no clear picture has emerged to date* ”

<sup>11</sup>Zou, S., & Stan, S. (1998): “*The determinants of export performance: A review of the empirical literature between 1987 and 1997* ”, *International Marketing Review*, 5,333-356.

<sup>12</sup>Aaby , Nils-Erik and Stanley F. Slater (1989): “*Management Influences on Export Performance: A Review of the Empirical Literature 1978-1988* ”, *International Marketing Review* , 6 (4), 53-68.

of export performance, which have been widely documented. We will content ourselves with ensuring the consistency of our understanding of this concept with those established by the specialized literature. Also, it seems important, in order to recapture in what context and for what reasons the different measures of export performance are appropriate, to briefly review the approaches for capturing and measuring this construct.

## 2.2 MEASUREMENT AND OPERATIONALIZATION OF EXPORT PERFORMANCE

Two classifications are often proposed in the literature to measure export performance. The first is based on the nature of the criteria used; a distinction is made between quantitative and qualitative criteria. The second classification focuses on the operational reference of this construct; subjective measurements are contrasted with so-called objective ones. It should be noted that the debate over the most appropriate measure continues to arise in the literature.

Based on the typology introduced above, three categories of criteria are used to measure export performance: the first category includes quantitative indicators relating to the scale and profitability of export activities. It is associated with the amount of exported sales, the average of exported sales, the growth rate of exported sales, the share of exported sales in total sales, the average of the share of exported sales, the growth rate of the share of exports, amount of sales/share of profit generated by exports, number of export transactions and number of overseas markets served. The second category refers to indicators that are also quantitative in nature but linked to the growth of the company. Four indicators relate to this: the amount of total sales, the growth rate of total sales, the amount/share of profits on total sales, and the growth rate of personnel. The last category, for its part, refers to indicators of a subjective nature, measuring the perception of success or the satisfaction of managers with regard to the achievements of their company. These include satisfaction with exports, market share, sales growth and profit margin by market, perceived profitability of exports versus local sales, perceived growth of exports versus to competitors and the perceived suitability of products to markets. Faced with the multidimensional character of the export performance construct, many authors have insisted on the need to use several indicators in order to grasp the different dimensions of export performance ( Shoham , 1998) <sup>13</sup>. This is how export performance measurement scales appeared. The following table presents the different measurement scales frequently cited in the literature.

**Table 1: Summary presentation of some export performance measurement scales**

Scale references	dimensions retained
Cavusgil and Zou (1994) <sup>14</sup>	Achievement of strategic objectives Annual growth rate over 5 years Overall profitability over the 5 years Success of the export project perceived by the manager
Shoham (1996) <sup>15</sup>	Sales Profit Changes
Zou, Taylor and Osland (1998) <sup>16</sup> EXPERF- Scale <sup>17</sup>	Financial export performance Strategic export performance Perceived export performance
Lages and Lages (2004) <sup>18</sup> STEP- Scale	Satisfaction linked to the improvement in short-term export performance Improvement of export intensity in the short term Expected export performance improvement

According to the table above, there are three subjective and dynamic scales, that is to say integrating the perception, by the respondent, of the evolution of performance. The composite scale of Shoham (1998) is built around the notions of intensity, profitability and change. It incorporates, among other things, an approach to the "intensity" of export activity by the ratio of export sales to total sales, the satisfaction expressed with regard to

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<sup>13</sup> Shoham , A. (1998). “ *Export Performance: a conceptualization and empirical assessment*”, Journal of International Marketing, Vol. 6, No. 3, p. 59-81.

<sup>14</sup> Cavusgil , ST and Zou, S., 1994, “ *Marketing Strategy-Performance Relationship: An Investigation of the Empirical Link in Export Market Ventures* ”. Journal of Marketing 58, 1-21.

<sup>15</sup> Shoham , Aviv (1996): “ *Marketing-Mix Standardization: Determinants of Export Performance* ” Journal of Global Marketing, 10(2), 53-73.

<sup>16</sup>Zou, S., CR Taylor & GE Osland (1998): “ *The EXPERF-Scale: a cross-national generalized export performance measure* ”, Journal of International Marketing, 6 (3), 37-58.

<sup>17</sup>EXPERF-scale : «export performance scale ou échelle de performance export. STEP-scale ou short term export performance scale ou échelle de performance export à court terme.

<sup>18</sup>Lages, LF, and Lages, CR (2004 ): “ *The STEP scale: a measure of short-term export performance improvement* ”. Journal of International Marketing, 12(1), 36-56.

export sales or the change perceived in performance over a five-year period. The EXPERF scale, also composite in nature, focuses on the notion of satisfaction (Zou *et al.* 1998). Finally, based on the work of Madsen (1998), according to which managers adopt a short-term perspective when evaluating the performance of an export operation (*export venture*). Lages and Lages (2004), for their part, propose a scale, called *STEP Scale*, intended to measure the perception of the short-term improvement in export performance. Purely subjective and dynamic, this scale revolves around the dimensions "Satisfaction with the improvement in short-term performance", "Improvement in the intensity of export activity in the short term" and "Improvement performance expectation in the short term".

**a. The relevance of the subjective measurement of export performance**

What measure would be the most appropriate to capture the export performance of an SME? We discovered that the literature informs us that this construct could be apprehended through three types of criteria: first, quantitative criteria measuring the scale and profitability of international activities, second, quantitative criteria measuring the overall growth of companies, and finally, qualitative criteria measuring the satisfaction of managers with regard to the achievements of their company.

Although they recognize the "neutral" and rigorous nature of objective criteria, Cavusgil and Zou (1994)<sup>19</sup> have minimized the value of this type of measure for capturing export performance. These authors consider that such a way of measuring export performance does not take into account the fact that exporting companies could pursue different objectives and strategic concerns. We find these criticisms particularly relevant in the context of SMEs, because of the diversity of strategic choices and organizational contexts that underlie the involvement of each of them abroad. By minimizing the relevance of objective measures, these same authors (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994) have demonstrated the relevance of taking into account criteria such as executives' satisfaction with achievements abroad, their perception of the success of activities and the achievement objectives, etc. Taking into account these criteria, of a strategic nature, makes it possible to put the weight of quantitative factors into perspective. It also facilitates comparison between companies that do not belong to the same sector of activity, do not have the same resources, or are not at the same stage in their internationalization process.

Proponents of subjective measurement suggest that by measuring perceived performance, rather than performance itself, one can capture the degree to which performance aligns with business objectives. We can thus draw a virtual border, specific to each company, separating success from failure. Performance is recorded when this psychological threshold is exceeded (Lages and Jap, 2003)<sup>20</sup>.

**b. Export performance analysis units:**

The choice of the appropriate unit of export performance analysis has also been one of the recurring topics of discussion in the literature. Generally, two units of analysis are considered by the authors, namely the company and the export project or "*export venture*".

• **The company as a unit of analysis**

The company has been the historic unit for measuring export performance. In their literature review, Sousa *et al.* (2008)<sup>21</sup> found that in three-quarters of the fifty-two studies reviewed, the firm was chosen as the unit of analysis. Proponents of this unit posit that, in imperfect markets, firms should internalize own benefits, tangible and intangible, to extract the maximum economic rent. The export performance should then be studied at the level of the company, because the advantages of the company come not only in the development and the commercialization of a particular product, but also from the whole of the processes of management of the business (Rugman, 1980)<sup>22</sup>.

• **The export project or "*export venture*" as a unit of analysis**

Other scholars argue that the appropriate unit of analysis in export performance research should be the export project, which consists of "*a single product or range of products exported to a single foreign market*" (Cavusgil

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<sup>19</sup> Cavusgil and Zou (1994) Op.Cit .

<sup>20</sup> Lages, Luis Filipe & Sandy D. Jap (2003). "*The relationship among past performance, marketing mix adaptation, and current export performance improvement in global marketing relationships*", in Joep WC Arts, Sumitro Banerjee and Jeroen LG Binken, Global Marketing, Marketing Science Institute Report No. 03-116, pp. 97-98.

<sup>21</sup> Sousa, CMP, F. Martínez-López and F. Coelho (2008). "*The Determinants of export performance: a review of the research in the literature between 1998 and 2005*", International Journal of Management Review, Vol.10, No. 4, pp. 343-374.

<sup>22</sup> Rugman, AM (1980): "*A new theory of the multinational enterprise: internationalization versus internalization*". Columbia Journal of World Business, **15** (1), 23-29



and Zou, 1994; Morgan et al. 2004; Theodosiou and Leonidou , 2003). These authors consider that the export project - as a unit of analysis - could allow a deeper insight into the key factors of export success ( Cavusgil and Zou, 1994; Sousa, 2004). Furthermore, for followers of this unit, considerable variation in performance often exists across various export projects (or product/market pairs) of the same firm, and therefore it is unlikely that the same marketing strategy can lead to the same results in all export projects ( Theodosiou and Leonidou , 2003). Overall, it is clear that there is no consensus in the literature regarding the most appropriate level of analysis. Zou and Stan (1998) point out that the "correct level" of analysis depends on the objective of the study: if this objective revolves around determining the overall performance of the firm, the company would be the level suitable analysis. This is not the case when it comes to examining the impact of corporate strategy at the level of a specific market. If so, the export project would be the most appropriate unit of analysis.

For this research, we retain “ *the export venture* ” as the unit of analysis. This unit has been adopted by several researchers (eg Bilkey , 1982; Madsen, 1989; Cavusgil and Kirpalani , 1993; Cavusgil and Zou, 1994). It is particularly suitable for research where it is a question of verifying in a precise manner the link between export performance and its antecedents (Lage, 1998).

### 2.3 FORTY YEARS OF RESEARCH ON THE DETERMINANTS OF EXPORT PERFORMANCE

“ *Overconfidence has stupefied research on export performance* ”<sup>23</sup>, it is in these remarks that Leonidou , Katsikeas , and Hadjimarcou (2002, page 97)<sup>24</sup> expressed their dissatisfaction with the state of knowledge about the determinants of export performance. Indeed, despite the abundance of studies available on the subject, this literature continues to give the impression of a “ *rather disjointed heap* ”<sup>25</sup>. This may explain the proliferation of a branch of research that can be described as “meta-research”. Indeed, a large fringe of the literature has been devoted to meta-analyses and literature reviews. The objective of such an enterprise is to be able to aggregate the initially disparate results with a view to proposing well-founded and above all operational models in the eyes of managers ( Leonidou , Katsikeas & Samiee , 2002)<sup>26</sup>. These synthesis works have also endeavored to provide a critical reading of the conceptual, methodological and empirical choices of the published studies. Some of these works have even been proposed as attempts to model export performance, in particular the work of Aaby & Slater (1989); Styles & Ambler, (1994); Zou & Stan, (1998); Leonidou , Katsikeas & Piercy , (1998); Leonidou , Katsikeas & Samiee , (2002) and more recently, Sousa et al, (2008).

In terms of typologies of determinants, the first reviews of the empirical work of Madsen (1978) and the most recent ( Ruppenthal and Bausch, 2009)<sup>27</sup> do not present any significant differences. In the two reviews, two main types of factors can be identified: on the one hand, external factors which concern the characteristics of the industry, the characteristics of the foreign market and those of the domestic market; and on the other hand, internal factors which are linked to export strategies, perceptions, attitudes, management characteristics and firm skills. Table 4 presents some famous synthesis works on export performance. This list is not exhaustive ; we have privileged the works that we have particularly exploited in this research.

**Table 2: A collection of some literature reviews on the determinants of export performance**

Study	Kind	Period covered	Number of studies reviewed	Type of research
Madsen (1987)	Narrative review	1967-1987	17	Synthesis of different conceptualizations and empirical research results
Aaby and Slater (1989)	Narrative review	1978-1988	55	Proposal for an integrative model and classification of the results of a decade of research according to this model

<sup>23</sup>“ *Over reliance has stultified research on export performance* ”.( free translation )

<sup>24</sup> Leonidou LC, CS Katsikeas , and JS Hadjimarcou (2002), " *Building successful export business relationships: A behavioral perspective* ", Journal of International Marketing, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 96-115.

<sup>25</sup>Cette expression utilisée par Stern et Reve (1980, p. 52) pour observer la pluralité des travaux sur les relations client-fournisseur semble, à notre sens, valable également pour décrire le cas de la performance export.

<sup>26</sup> Leonidou , Leonidas C, Constantine S Katsikeas , and Saeed Samiee . 2002. “ *Marketing Strategy Determinants of Export Performance: A Meta-Analysis* .” Journal of Business Research 55(1): 51-67.

<sup>27</sup> Ruppenthal , T. and Bausch, A. (2009), “ *Research on export performance over the past 10 years: a narrative review* ”, European Journal of International Management, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 328-364. Solomon, R.

Leonidou et al. (2002)	Meta-analysis	1964-1998	36	Evaluation of the relationship between export performance and marketing strategy variables
Sousa et al. (2008)	Meta analysis	1998-2005	52	proposal of an integrated export performance model

Two major criticisms could be leveled at the current literature on export performance: the first is related to the fragmented nature of the research, which makes it difficult to bring the different conclusions into line within a coherent conceptual framework (Sousa et al, 2008), the second criticism refers to the concentration of studies published in developed countries.

- **A-theoretical literature**

It would seem that the specialized literature is still dominated by empirical studies that draw on a variety of analytical techniques and different methodological approaches. In a relatively recent review, Ruppenthal & Bauch (2009) noted that few studies started from a preliminary theoretical framework and that theoretical in-depth studies are still insufficient. This situation persists despite recurrent calls from researchers for research on export performance to be theoretically more elaborate (Morgan et al, 2004).<sup>28</sup>

- **Research concentrated in developed countries**

Compared to the geographical location of the studies, the examination of the various literature reviews shows that research on export performance is mainly concentrated in developed countries . The first reviews (eg Aaby & Slater, 1989; Zou & Stan, 1998) note that the United States was the main field of studies on export performance. This trend is less reported in recent reviews, which are more marked by the upsurge in Europe and Asia-Pacific countries as a field of study (eg Sousa et al, 2008; Ruppenthal and Beausch , 2010 ) . Furthermore, it is clear that certain regions such as South Asia and Central America, or the countries of Africa have received little attention from researchers.

In what follows, we provide a brief presentation of certain attempts to model the determinants of export performance. From this historical exploitation of the literature, we intend to achieve two objectives: on the one hand, we want to carry out a review of the different determinants suggested by the literature as well as the different typologies associated with them; on the other hand, we strive to highlight the lines of fracture shown by the enrichment of "transactional" models by approaches advocated by "relational" models, as well as the passage from a logic of strategies to a resource logic.

### 2.3.1 The Works of Madsen (1987)

By synthesizing 17 studies published between 1964 and 1985, Madsen (1987) was one of the first researchers to propose a literature review on export performance. It ranks the variables operationalized in the studies reviewed as indicators of twenty concepts that relate to three broad general categories. This is how he proceeded to classify the identified determinants according to the Strategy-Structure-Performance logic . The following table presents a summary of the variables classified by Madsen (1987<sup>29</sup>):

**Table 3 : The determinants of export performance according to Madsen (1987)<sup>30</sup>**

<b>The structure of the environment (E-structure)</b>
The attractiveness of the export market ( <i>Export market attractiveness</i> )
Trade barriers _ _
<i>Physical distance to market</i>
Psychic and cultural distance ( <i>Psychological /cultural distance</i> )
Type of market _
<b>The structure of the organization (O-structure)</b>

<sup>28</sup>“ Research on export performance should be more theoretically substantiated to make it possible to integrate findings from different studies into a coherent body of knowledge” (p. 90).

Morgan, Neil A., Anna Kaleka, and Constantine S. Katsikeas . (2004). “ *Antecedents of Export Venture Performance: A Theoretical Model and Empirical Assessment* ”. Journal of Marketing 68 (1): 90-108

<sup>29</sup>Madsen, TK (1987). “ *Empirical export performance studies: a review of conceptualizations and findings, in Advances in international marketing*”, 2, ST Cavusgil , Ed. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 177-198. Majocchi ,

<sup>30</sup> Free translation

General resources of the firm ( <i>General company resources</i> )
Knowledge export marketing _
Management support
The status of the export in the organization ( <i>Status export organization</i> )
Technological intensity ( <i>Technological strength</i> )
<b>The strategy of the organization (O-strategy)</b>
Market Research Intensity ( <i>Market research strength</i> )
Price competitiveness _ _
Product quality ( <i>Product strength</i> )
Channel support ( <i>Channel support</i> )
Communication intensity _ _

During his analysis, Madsen (1988) reports that the confirmation of a significant relationship with export performance was only possible for a few determinants. For the author, this can be partly explained by the fact that, in the studies examined, the operationalization of the variables was done in different ways. The author also noted several structural limitations in the studies reviewed, in particular the fact that these studies did not take into account the possible interaction effects between the different independent variables. Furthermore, in relation to the number of variables used, Madsen (1998) argues that no study could claim to be exhaustive. Thus, according to the author, these shortcomings seriously affect the value of the studies. To overcome them, Madsen (1987, p 197) recognizes that “ *obviously, only (very) thorough studies could cope with all these requirements at the same time. Which could, if necessary, further advance research on export performance* » .

**2.3.2 Zou & Stan (1998), the controllable/uncontrollable variables dichotomy**

The motivation declared by Zou & Stan (1998) <sup>31</sup>is to be able to improve the work started by Aaby & Slater (1989) by first adding the external environment, and updating their literature review. This new review focused on fifty articles published between 1987 and 1997. The determinants of performance were classified according to two criteria: the criterion of localization and that of controllability. The first criterion makes it possible to distinguish between external and internal determinants; the second, for its part, distinguishes the controllable variables from the others said to be uncontrollable by the company. Thus, the classification proposed by Zou & Stan (1998) is as follows:

**Table 4 : The determinants of export performance according to Zou & Stan (1998)<sup>32</sup>**

	Internal Determinants	External Determinants
Controllable	<p><b>Export marketing strategy</b>                      General export strategy                      Use of market studies                      Product quality                      Price competitiveness                      Promotional intensity                      Adaptation of the distribution network</p> <p><b>Management attitudes and perceptions</b>                      Export commitment                      International orientation                      The perceived benefits of exporting                      Perceived barriers to exporting</p>	
Uncontrollable	<p><b>Management characteristics</b>                      International management experience                      The level of education and experience of the management</p> <p><b>Skills and characteristics of the firm</b>                      size of the company                      International competence                      The age of the firm                      The capabilities and skills of the firm</p>	<p><b>Industry characteristics</b>                      The technological intensity of the industry                      The level of stability of the industry</p> <p><b>Characteristics of the foreign market</b>                      Market attractiveness                      Market competitiveness                      Export barriers</p>

In their analysis, the authors report that for many variables, the presumed links with export performance have not been confirmed, especially for those related to industry characteristics. By questioning the absence of

<sup>31</sup>Zou, S. and S. Stan (1998): “ *The determinants of export performance: a review of the empirical literature between 1987 and 1997* ”, International Marketing Review, Vol. 15, No. 5, p. 333-35

<sup>32</sup> *ibid* . Page 337

highlighting any negative relationships between the variables identified and export performance, the authors point out that the published studies pay little attention to negative relationships, thus favoring the highlighting of positive relationships. or not significant. In some cases, the positive relationships clearly outweigh the non-significant ones (eg general export strategy, export planning, intensity of promotion, export commitment, international orientation, perceived export advantages, international management experience and the firm's international competence).

Moreover, if we look at the classification of variables suggested by Zou and Stan (1998), we find a typology based on the location and controllability of the determinants. It is obvious that there are no factors that are both external and controllable; the environment imposes itself largely on managers, especially of SMEs, at least from a short-term perspective. In our view, one of the essential contributions of the Zou & Stan (1998) study is that it allows us to emphasize that export performance is under the control, at least partially, of the company and its managers. Such a way of apprehending the subject suggests that not only better export performance can be attributed to the action of managers, but also that a lower performance could also be imputed to them. This same idea is observed in Leonidou , Katsikeas & Piercy (1998) <sup>33</sup>who devoted an article to the particular examination of the characteristics of managers likely to influence the export performance of their companies.

On another level, Zou & Stan (1998) underlined that the heterogeneity of the theoretical frameworks mobilized by researchers leads to competing explanations of export performance. This theoretical inconsistency is due, according to the authors, to differences in the conceptualization of the constructs and in the operationalization of the variables. Recalling the need for the use of multivariate data analyzes and cross-cultural studies , Zou & Stan (1998, page 333) conclude their review by stating that " *research on the determinants of export performance should and could achieve progress towards the theory mature in the next few decades.* »<sup>34</sup>

### 2.3.3 Leonidou , Katsikeas & Piercy (1998) <sup>35</sup>, emphasis on the role of management

In their literature review, Leonidou , Katsikeas & Piercy (1998) analyzed forty-six empirical studies published between 1960 and 1995. The particularity of this review lies in the emphasis placed by the researchers on a special category of determinants, namely the characteristics of management. These management characteristics are classified according to two dimensions: objective vs subjective and general vs specific. According to the authors' conclusions, the empirical studies examined indicate particularly positive results for the variables: "manager's level of education" and "foreign language proficiency". For the other determinants, the authors consider that the number of studies is low enough to draw significant conclusions.

**Table 3: Classification of the determinants of export performance as proposed by Leonidou , Katsikeas & Piercy (1998)**

	General	specific
<b>Objectives</b>	Age Level of education Professional experience	Ethnicity Language skills Time spent abroad Trips abroad
<b>Subjective</b>	Risk tolerance Innovation Flexibility Commitment Dynamism	Perception of risk Perception of cost Perception of profit Perception of complexity

In their analysis, the authors also point out the ad hoc nature and a-cultural orientation of most of the studies in their review. They also underline the insufficiency of operationalization, the diffuse nature of the studies and the emphasis placed on objective variables. Finally, they state that future empirical research should place more emphasis on the behavioral dimensions of doing business internationally.

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<sup>33</sup> Leonidou , LC, Katsikeas , CS, Piercy, NF, (1998): " *Identifying managerial issues on exporting: Past research and future directions.* " Journal of International Marketing (6) 2, 74-102.

<sup>34</sup>Free translation

<sup>35</sup>L'étude de Leonidou, Katsikeas & Piercy (1998) a été publiée durant la même année que celle de Zou et Stan (1998). Nous avons tenu à exploiter ses résultats en raison de l'emphase particulier mis par les chercheurs sur le rôle des caractéristiques du management;



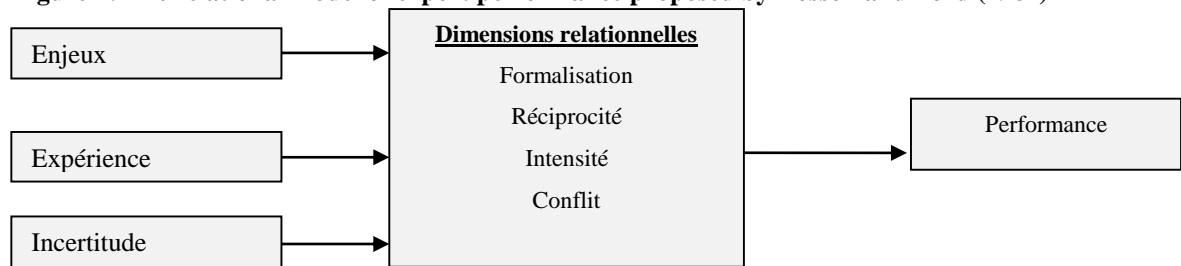
**2.3.4 Relational models of export performance**

The first research on international customer/supplier relations was initiated by the IMP group (Leonidou, Barnes and Talias 2006; Samiee and Walters, 2003)<sup>36</sup>. The first works of the 1980s, such as those of Cunningham (1980), Håkansson (1982) and Leonidou (1989), testify to the awareness by researchers of the role of interactions between customers and suppliers in an international context. With regard to the specific question of export performance, two studies are landmarks: that of Rosson and Ford (1982) and that of Style and Ambler (1994).

**a. Rosson and Ford (1982), the legitimate precursors of relational models of export performance**

The interest in the relational dimension of export performance can be attributed to the precursors Rosson and Ford (1982)<sup>37</sup>. Their article marked the beginning of the recognition of the relational dimension in international success. In their study, the authors assessed the impact of relationships between UK exporters and their Canadian importers. They were able to establish the positive link between the relational dimension, operationalized through four variables, namely formalization, reciprocity, intensity and conflict, and export performance as a variable to be explained. The authors also integrated into their analysis, situational variables such as the stakes of the relationship, the uncertainty and the experience of the partners of the exchange. The model developed by Rosson and Ford is as follows:

**Figure 1: The relational model of export performance proposed by Rosson and Ford (1982)**



Rosson and Ford 's model could be considered a first attempt to highlight the importance of relational phenomena in export success. However, because of the idiosyncratic nature of the study, this model does not seem to have caught the attention of researchers who were still preoccupied with the transactional factors of export success. In fact, it was with the work of Style and Ambler (1994) that customer-supplier relations, and the associated issues, were “officially” integrated into the modeling of export performance.

**b. Style and Ambler (1994)<sup>38</sup>, the “historical” model of relational determinants of export performance**

In their article, recognized in reverse, Style and Ambler (1994) analyzed a number of models developed within the relational paradigm such as that of the IMP group (Anderson & Narus, 1990; Heide & John, 1988 )<sup>39</sup> and other models<sup>40</sup> of the customer-supplier relationship (Dwyer, Schurr & Oh, 1987)<sup>41</sup>. They found that these models focus on relational processes and their dynamics without directly worrying about their implications in terms of performance<sup>42</sup>. Starting from this limit, Style and Ambler conducted a study where they asked a panel of managers to evaluate the importance of their international success factors among a list of twenty-six criteria . The analysis revealed that, on average, high scores were assigned to factors such as personal customer visits, after-

<sup>36</sup> Leonidou LC, BR Barnes and MA Talias (2006): " *Export-import relationship quality: The inhibiting role of uncertainty, distance, and conflict* ", Industrial Marketing Management (Special issue on Global marketing of industrial products), Vol.35, No .x, pp. 576-589.

<sup>37</sup>Rosson, PJ and ID Ford (1982): “ *Manufacturer-Overseas Distributor Relations and Export Performance* ,” *Journal of International Business Studies* , 57

<sup>38</sup>Styles, Chris and Tim Ambler (1994): " *Successful Export Practice: The UK Experience* ," *International Marketing Review*, 11 (6), 23-47.

<sup>39</sup>Anderson, JC- Narus , JA (1990): “ *A model of distributor firm and manufacturer firm working partnerships* ”: *Journal of Marketing* Volume 54, No.1, pp.42-58

<sup>40</sup>Heide, JB and John G. (1988): ' *The role of dependence balancing in safeguarding relationship-specific assets in conventional channels* ', *Journal of Marketing*, 52, pp.20-35

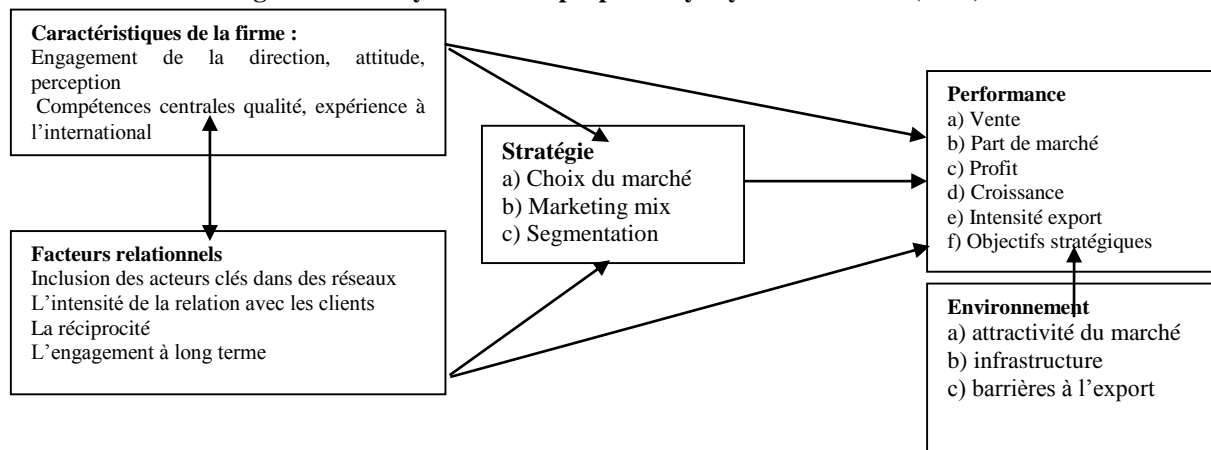
<sup>41</sup>Dwyer Robert, Schurr Paul and Oh Sejo (1987): “ *Developing Buyer-Seller Relationships* ” *Journal of Marketing* 52, 21-34

<sup>42</sup>*These models aim to explain and predict relationship processes and outcomes, but not marketing performance* ' (Styles & Ambler, 1994, p. 24).

sales service, oral communication and trust. The authors used this evidence to underline the importance of the relational dimension in export success.

Starting from the psychic distance theory of Johanson and Vahlne's (1977<sup>43</sup>), where "the company begins its export process by forming relationships that provide it with knowledge and experiential knowledge in the market", Styles & Ambler (1994) proposed a "revised hybrid model suitable for future testing", rooted in the work of Rosson & Ford (1984) and Aaby & Slater (1989). The novelty that gives this model its hybrid character with respect to later models lies in the inclusion of the concept of "Relation", alongside the classic concepts: "Environment", "Company" and "Strategy". This hybrid model is rooted in the relational paradigm which the authors describe in the following terms: "In defense of their idea, the authors argue that 'the relational paradigm affirms that relationships and experience are paramount and are complemented by objective analyses, rather than the reverse.'" The model proposed by Style and Ambler is as follows:

Figure 2 : The hybrid model proposed by Style and Ambler (1994)<sup>44</sup>



Despite the appearance of several recent studies that deal with export performance from a relational perspective, the model of Style and Ambler (1994) remains the reference on which many studies are rooted. In our view, this model owes its originality to the fact that it suggests that the intervention of relational variables should be considered at the scale of three levels:

- **The first:** a direct relationship with export performance, where relational variables act as direct explanatory variables.
- **The second:** a relationship mediated by the component of the marketing strategy: the model being based on that of Aaby and Slater (1989), the contribution of Style and Ambler is that of suggesting a relationship between the relational dimension and the marketing strategy of the exporter.
- **The third:** is that of the interaction between the relational variables and the characteristics of the firm, in particular commitment and management skills.

## II. GENERAL DISCUSSION

The detailed analysis of the existing literature on export performance reveals a panoply of perspectives and methodological approaches, making the understanding and appreciation of this concept particularly complex. A first major observation is that the literature is largely fragmented and a-theoretical. Many studies have adopted empirical approaches, relying on various analytical techniques without necessarily relying on pre-existing theoretical frameworks. This trend has hampered the ability to extract strong and unified theoretical models that could more effectively inform export performance.

Another important finding is the predominance of studies conducted in developed countries. This geographic concentration has left a void in our understanding of export performance in the context of developing countries. The economic, cultural and institutional dynamics specific to these countries can offer unique insights into export performance, highlighting factors and mechanisms that may not be as relevant or visible in developed countries.

<sup>43</sup> Johanson J. & Vahlne JE. (1977): "The Internationalization process of the firm – a model of knowledge development and increasing foreign market commitments", Journal of International Business Studies, 8(1): 23-31

<sup>44</sup> Style and Ambler (1994), page 4 (free translation)

Moreover, although the importance of customer relations in export performance is widely recognized, it seems that this dimension has not been fully integrated into the study of export performance. Customer relationships can have profound implications for export performance, influencing a company's ability to access valuable information, develop a deep understanding of foreign markets, and build a strong reputation and trust with foreign customers.

In addition, the question of export performance measurement remains a subject of debate. Quantitative and qualitative approaches offer distinct advantages and disadvantages, and there is no clear consensus on which approach is most appropriate. It is crucial that future research address this issue more systematically, exploring the benefits and limitations of different measurements and seeking to develop more nuanced and robust measurement approaches.

Finally, the choice of the appropriate unit of analysis to study export performance also remains a subject of discussion. The company and the export project or "export venture" are often considered the two main units of analysis, each with distinct advantages and disadvantages. A better understanding of the implications of these choices on our understanding of export performance is needed.

Overall, the current literature on export performance offers a wealth of knowledge, but also leaves a number of questions unanswered. It is imperative that future research work address these questions in a more systematic and rigorous way.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, our review of the existing literature on export performance revealed a variety of perspectives and approaches, highlighting the complexity and richness of this area of research. However, several gaps and challenges persist, highlighting the need for more rigorous and systematic future research. One of the main contributions of our work has been to highlight the fragmentation and the lack of theorization of the current literature. This observation highlights the need for future research that seeks to develop stronger and more consistent theoretical frameworks for export performance.

Furthermore, our work has highlighted the importance of customer relationships in export performance, an aspect that has often been overlooked in the existing literature. This observation suggests that future research should pay more attention to this aspect and explore in more detail how customer relationships can influence export performance. However, our study has some limitations. First, our analysis is based on the existing literature, which means that it is limited by the same biases and shortcomings as these studies. Moreover, our analysis is mainly descriptive and synthetic, and does not propose new empirical data or new theories.

In terms of research perspectives, several promising directions emerge. First, it is crucial to conduct more research in the context of developing countries, in order to understand more fully the export performance in these specific contexts. Second, it would be beneficial to develop more nuanced and robust measurement approaches for export performance that consider both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Finally, future research work should seek to integrate customer relations more systematically into the study of export performance.

In sum, our research provides a solid foundation for the understanding and future study of export performance. We hope it will help stimulate new research in this crucial area of management science.

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