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## The impact of internal and external determinants on export performance with the mediation role of organizational capabilities

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### ABSTRACT

One of the important and effective ways to increase exports is to improve export performance, and marketing capabilities, especially in SMEs, play an important role in their success in inter-national markets. The purpose of this research is to determine the impact of internal and external determinants of export performance and the role of organizational capabilities in SMEs. This research is applied research that has been conducted using a descriptive survey method. The statistical population of this study consists of managers of SMEs that export their manufactured goods. Given that the population size is 4188 people, 352 people were determined as the sample size using the Cochran formula. The sampling method was carried out in a non-random manner. A standard questionnaire was used to collect data, the validity of which was confirmed by determining the CVR index for all items, and its reliability was confirmed by calculating Cronbach's alpha. The collected data were analyzed in two parts: descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Structural equation modeling and AMOS software were used to test the hypotheses. The conclusion of the study indicates that the tendency towards international entrepreneurship and marketing capabilities have an impact on export performance, and competition in the domestic market has an impact on technical capabilities and marketing capabilities.

**Keywords:** export performance; marketing capabilities; technical capabilities; international entrepreneurship orientation; domestic market competition

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Today, strengthening non-oil exports is one of the country's strategic goals, which brings special attention to economic growth and employment. On the other hand, one of the important and effective ways to increase exports is to improve the export performance of SMEs. In this regard, this study examines the impact of internal and external determinants on export performance with the mediating role of organizational capabilities on the export performance of SMEs.

One of the important thoughts in the export process is the orientation of export entrepreneurship, which is an exploratory and market-oriented behavior and enables economic enterprises to shape the market structure and meet the hidden needs of customers worldwide. Therefore, one of the dimensions of the present study is to examine the impact of this type of entrepreneurship on the export performance of SMEs. On the other hand, a high degree of competition in domestic markets often leads to improvements in product efficiency, innovation, and better pricing of

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the company (Goodwin et al., 2015). Previous studies (Fan and Phan, 2007; Yiu et al., 2007) show that competition in the domestic market increases internationalization, creates a higher share of direct exports to total sales, and ultimately higher export performance. Thus, higher competition in the domestic market is a reason for companies to be motivated to export and achieve higher performance. However, the literature on the subject is lacking on why and how higher competition in the domestic market is related to export performance. Therefore, another dimension of the present study is to examine this issue. These two categories are related to domestic and foreign antecedents, which are considered as one of the main axes of the present study by the researcher. However, the research issue does not end there and the researcher intends to consider the impact of organizational capabilities on the export performance of SMEs based on the study of Jin and Cho (2018). Organizational capabilities play a vital role in the success of the enterprise in international markets. According to the resource-based view (RBV), organizational capabilities are related to the set of skills and knowledge within an organizational approach that serves as the main source of competitive advantage of that organization (Jin and Cho, 2018). The importance of organizational capabilities is crucial for SMEs that want to compete in international markets with limited resources. The dynamic capabilities related to SME internationalization often include technology, marketing, innovation, network, and re-adaptation capabilities. Among these, technical and marketing capabilities are usually the most important for SMEs (Zhou et al., 2010).

Export performance is the extent to which a company achieves its objectives when exporting its products to foreign markets. Export performance is the extent to which the firm's objectives (including strategic objectives and economic objectives) for exporting a product are achieved through the planning and implementation of export marketing strategies. Export performance also has various dimensions that cannot be explained by a single indicator or factor. Walker and Ruckert (1987) suggested that the relevance and importance of performance dimensions vary among different stakeholders (investors, employees, customers) and depend on whether the focus is on the short or long term. They highlighted three main dimensions of performance. The first is the effectiveness of the firm's product and programs vis-à-vis competitors. Indicators such as sales growth can indicate effectiveness. The second dimension is efficiency, which focuses on the outputs of a business relative to its inputs. Profitability is the main indicator that shows this dimension. The third dimension is adaptability, which means how the business responds to changing conditions and opportunities in the environment.

Walker and Ruckert (1987) divide the factors affecting export performance into factors related to the external environment and factors related to the internal environment. In their model, export performance is influenced by three groups of internal variables, namely, company characteristics (such as company size and management's attitude towards exports), company capabilities (such as marketing knowledge and technology), and international marketing strategy (such as target markets, entry method, and adaptation of the marketing mix to target markets). In addition, these two researchers emphasize that a company's export performance is also influenced by external variables. Leonidou et al. (2002) have classified the factors affecting successful export performance into five groups by reviewing 36 empirical studies. These factors are: Management factors (personal, experience, attitude and attitude, behavioral and characteristics related to decision-makers of exporting companies), organizational factors (elements related to the characteristics, operations, resources and objectives of the organization), environmental factors (factors that shape the operational and macro environment of exporting companies), export market targeting (identification and selection of international target markets. Marketing mix variables (product strategy, price, distribution and promotion) (Jin and Cho, 2018).

Export performance is measured based on the degree or scale to which the company has achieved its export goals. These scales include financial performance, satisfaction with exports, strategic performance and production performance. This study specifically examined marketing and technical capabilities to understand the export performance of SMEs. As mentioned, the present study is conducted among SMEs. The reason for choosing this environment for research is the importance of the success of small businesses in the economic development of countries. SMEs have a high share in the industrial activities of different countries around the world. However, unfortunately, the importance and position of this sector have not been addressed significantly in scientific fields in Iran, and this is in a situation where a high percentage of the country's economic enterprises are SMEs. Despite the high capacities that these enterprises have, they have not yet been able to assert themselves in an acceptable way in the international arena, and the export performance of these companies is very low. The purpose of this research is to determine the impact of internal and external determinants of export performance and the role of organizational capabilities in SMEs.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurial firms are tasked with exploiting uncertain opportunities through innovative ideas and risk-taking resources, including technological capabilities, or the firm's ability to develop new products. Knight and Koshgil

(2004) empirically found that a firm's entrepreneurship is shaped by the facilitation of technological competency development orientation. Several studies have shown that SMEs with a strong entrepreneurial orientation are more likely to engage in new product exploration and discovery of new innovations that are different from existing products (Cevin et al., 2006; Dayan et al., 2016). However, apart from these examples, very few studies have provided empirical evidence of the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and technological capability development. SMEs with limited financial resources struggle to compete in international markets without effective technological advancement. The continuation of this activity allows SMEs to develop technologically advanced products ahead of the competition and, instead of reacting negatively to market changes, take steps to acquire new technological knowledge and meet the various hidden needs of international customers. In addition to building technical capabilities, international entrepreneurship orientation is likely to facilitate the development of marketing capabilities. SMEs strong in international entrepreneurship orientations seek strategies to achieve higher performance in international markets (Knight, 2001). When SMEs enter international markets, marketing capabilities are considered to meet consumer needs, differentiate products and services from competitors, and achieve strategic goals. As a result, SMEs with an international entrepreneurial orientation invest resources and efforts in developing their marketing capabilities in international markets. The relationship between entrepreneurial insight and marketing capabilities has been confirmed in significant settings compared to that between entrepreneurial orientation and technological capabilities.

### *2.1 Export Performance*

In today's world, national development is unthinkable without considering foreign trade. A study of the economic developments of the world's nations after the Industrial Revolution shows that the developed countries of the world have been able to increase their political and economic power by using the important and influential part of exports. Exports are one of the most important initial steps for organizations to develop and invest in order to enter global markets and expand their international activities. Today, it has become clear that there is a close relationship between economic growth and exports of each country. International economic theorists, with their extraordinary belief in the role of trade in economic growth and development, call it the engine of growth. Exports are the easiest way to enter foreign markets. Exports, rather than being a supplement to foreign exchange deficits, should be considered as a central strategy in the country, so that oil revenues are used only for infrastructure investments, and by exporting non-oil goods, foreign exchange needs are met and the production cycle becomes more productive (Janes, 1998).

### *2.2 Organizational capability*

The ability of a company to use its resources, whether material or immaterial, to carry out a task or activity in order to enhance performance is known as organizational capacities (Inan and Bititci, 2015). Individual capacities and their interactions with organizational context are the source of organizational capability, according to research (Wang and Zeng, 2017). Organizational competence is defined by Inan and Bititci (2015) as an organization's capacity to carry out a coordinated set of actions while utilizing organizational resources in order to achieve a specific end result. Organizational capabilities are essential for businesses to successfully address their organizational issues (Inan and Bititci, 2015).

### *2.2 Marketing capability*

In the resource-originality perspective, capabilities are the skills a company needs to take full advantage of the resources at its disposal. These skills are embedded in the procedures of an organization and include the way in which the company makes decisions and manages internal processes to achieve organizational goals. An organization's capabilities are actually the product of its structure and control systems. These factors determine how and at what level of the company decisions are made, determine the behavior that is desirable from the company's point of view, and express the company's cultural norms and values. The success of the company depends on the development of capabilities and relationships that are unique to the company and are maintained in the medium to long term. Day (1994) divided organizational capabilities into four categories: 1) internal-external capabilities; These capabilities allow the company to keep its costs low and/or differentiate its offerings from those of competitors. 2) External-internal capabilities; These provide the company with important information and allow it to better respond to changes in customer needs. These capabilities allow the company to more effectively exploit internal-external capabilities; 3) Marketing capabilities; These allow the company to gain benefits from internal-external and external-internal

capabilities by effectively implementing marketing programs; 4) Information technology capabilities. This capability allows the company to effectively disseminate market information among all functional departments. The role of marketing capabilities as a source of sustainable competitive advantage has been previously discussed in the field of marketing strategy.

Marketing capabilities are an integrated process in which companies use tangible and intangible resources to understand the complexity of specific customer needs, achieve relative differentiation in products for competitive advantage and ultimately achieve appropriate quality. Marketing capabilities are integrated and coherent processes that are designed to apply the collective skills, knowledge and resources of the company and identify market needs and improve the value of the company's goods and services. With the help of these capabilities, the company is able to adapt to changing market conditions and use market opportunities to deal with competitive threats. A company can develop its marketing capabilities when it has the ability to combine the individual skills and knowledge of its employees with available resources.

### *2.3 Technical capability*

In a competitive market, there is an urgent need to develop and improve the flexibility and responsiveness of the organization. Today, many organizations and companies are facing increasingly stable and uncertain competition, which has been intensified by technological innovations, changing market environments, and changing customer needs. This critical situation has led to major reforms in the organization's strategic vision, business priorities, and the revision of traditional and even relatively contemporary models in order to achieve competitive advantage in such environments (Azar and Ciabusch, 2017). Bardvig examined IT resources from three perspectives: IT infrastructure, IT human resources, and IT with intangible capabilities, and concluded that the effective and efficient use of IT is an important factor in differentiating successful companies from less successful ones. IT can serve as the backbone of the supply chain business structure to transfer and process the information necessary for simultaneous decisions. In the past half century, modern organizations have invested more in information technology (Azar and Ciabusch, 2017).

### *2.4 Internal and foreign determinants*

This study refers to the variables of international entrepreneurship orientation and domestic market competition as internal and external determinants.

#### *2.4.1 International entrepreneurship orientation*

International entrepreneurship is a topic of interest to academics, businesses, and governments today. However, the term was first coined in an article by Maro (Gil-Pechuan et al., 2013). International entrepreneurship involves the discovery, adoption, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities across national borders to create future goods and services. International entrepreneurship is sometimes stimulated by demand for a firm's products across international borders (Fernhaber et al., 2008). In fact, international entrepreneurship and domestic entrepreneurship are similar. Domestic entrepreneurship involves the pursuit of domestic entrepreneurial opportunities, while international entrepreneurship involves the pursuit of international entrepreneurial opportunities. The location of an opportunity determines whether the opportunity is exploited domestically or internationally (Oyson and Whittaker, 2010). In general, it can be said that international entrepreneurship is a combination of innovative, proactive and risk-taking behaviors that seek value in organizations by crossing borders. Many authors believe that entrepreneurship has two parts: 1) Opportunities, and 2) People who are trying to use these opportunities.

#### *2.4.2 Domestic market competition*

In general, competition occurs when there are changes in supply and demand. These changes initially disrupt the supply relative to demand and vice versa. Competitor orientation is defined as understanding the strengths, weaknesses, capabilities, and strategies of competitors and responding to their activities. There are several reasons why competitor orientation may help a company's performance; first, an organization should consider not only how its products fit customer needs, but also how they perform relative to competitors' products. Second, competitors may sometimes be a good source of new product ideas. Third, understanding competitors' strengths or strategies may help an organization understand which product markets or market segments to enter or avoid. Finally, the actions of competitors may affect an organization, and efforts to understand their strengths, weaknesses, and strategies may

allow the organization to be prepared to counter competitors' activities and reduce the negative effects of their activities. A competitor-oriented organization is an organization that adjusts its actions and activities heavily influenced by the actions and reactions of competitors. In such a situation, a competitor-oriented company spends more of its time following the movements of competitors and important market categories and tries to find policies that can be used against them. In such a situation, the organization trains its marketers to always be on the alert and be aware of their own potential weaknesses and not to ignore the weaknesses of competitors. Organizational decision makers must collect and interpret information about competitors. Then, they disseminate and use this information in different parts of the organization, which requires establishing a competitive news and information system in the organization (Boso et al., 2012).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to determine the impact of internal and external determinants of export performance and the role of organizational capabilities in SMEs. The statistical population consists of managers of 4188 SMEs in industrial parks. Accordingly, the sample size is equivalent to 352 managers, and a questionnaire was distributed and collected among them using a non-probability method. The data of this study were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS software.

### 4. FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Questionnaire reliability

The measurement tool (questionnaire) yields the same results under the same conditions. Based on the results of the reliability test in SPSS software, the Cronbach's alpha of the international entrepreneurship orientation variable is (0.744), domestic market competition (0.724), technical capabilities (0.743), marketing capabilities (0.755), and export performance (0.768).

#### 4.2 Data normality test

To check the normality of the data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed using SPSS software. If the significance level in this test is greater than the error value, i.e. 0.05, we conclude that the data are normal. Table (1) shows the results of this test.

Table (1): Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for variables

Variables	Sig.	P-Value	Results
International Entrepreneurship Orientation	0.05	0.096	Normal
Competition in the Domestic Market	0.05	0.204	Normal
Technical Capabilities	0.05	0.306	Normal
Marketing Capabilities	0.05	0.457	Normal
Export Performance	0.05	0.302	Normal

#### 4.3 Bartlett test

The results of this test in Table (2) show that the number of samples collected for the analysis of the above model in the factor analysis mode is sufficient and the sample adequacy index is significant for these data, therefore, the confirmatory factor analysis method is used to examine the validity of the constructs.

Table (2): Results of the Bartlett Test and the KMO Index

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
KMO		0.766
Bartlett Test	Chi-square Statistics	677.753
	Degrees of Freedom	10
	Significance Level	0.000

#### 4.4 A model for measuring and assessing construct validity

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to assess construct validity and construct validity. If the factor loading of each indicator with its construct has a value higher than 0.4, it has the necessary accuracy to measure that construct or latent trait. In this study, the variables were measured using AMOS software. The results of the factor analysis of the questionnaire items are given in Table (3). The source of the questionnaire for this research is the article Jin and Cho (2018).

Table (3): Factor analysis of questionnaire items

Variables	Indicators	Factor loading
Internal and external determinants International entrepreneurship orientation	Regular attendance at domestic and foreign exhibitions	0.626
	Presence abroad	0.707
	Regular and active contact with suppliers or customers in international markets	0.816
	Regular monitoring of export market trends	0.593
	Active examination of business opportunities abroad	0.654
Domestic market competition	The speed of expansion of activities in the industry sector	0.744
	Fierce competition in industrial activities	0.713
	The presence of multinational companies and joint ventures dominating the scope of industrial activities	0.538
Organizational capabilities		
Technical capabilities	Leadership in industrial activities	0.222
	Creation of existing technologies in the industry	0.750
	Introduction of innovation in new products and approaches compared to competitors	0.824
Marketing capabilities	Export market dominance with known technologies	0.419
	Extensive knowledge of customers and competitors	0.588
	Effective advertising	0.796
	Use of marketing tools for differentiated, competitive products	0.776
Export performance	Effective pricing strategies	0.696
	Achievement of sales growth targets	0.759
	Achievement of market share targets	0.776
	Achievement of profitability targets	0.801
	Achievement of reputation targets in the foreign market	0.429

The fit indices of the measurement model of the variables of this research are as follows in Table (4):

Table (4): Fit indices of the measurement model of the research

Index	Value
Chi-square divided by degrees of freedom	1.346
Non-Non-Firmware Fit Index (NFI)	0.929
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	0.921
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.980
Root-squared Error of Approximation Estimate (RMSEA)	0.098

#### 4.5 Evaluating the Validity of a Measurement Model

##### *Convergent Validity of a Research Measurement Model*

Construct validity is used when the researcher wants to know whether the method or instrument of data collection well represents the theoretical construct or common underlying theories of the variable under investigation and is consistent with it. Table (5) shows the results of the Fornell-Locker test.

Table (5): Results of the Fornell-Locker test

Variables	International entrepreneurship orientation	Domestic market competition	Technical capabilities	Marketing capabilities	Export performance
International entrepreneurship orientation	0.813				
Domestic market competition	0.497	0.808			
Technical capabilities	0.516	0.573	0.794		
Marketing capabilities	0.321	0.366	0.519	0.782	
Export performance	0.494	0.439	0.515	0.685	0.801

The Fornell and Larker criterion refers to the fact that the square root of the explained variance (AVE) values of each construct is greater than the correlation values of that construct with other constructs. The values in the main diagonal of the matrix must be greater than all the values in the corresponding column, which is confirmed by the data in the table above.

#### *Composite Reliability*

While Cronbach's alpha is based on the assumption that all indicators are equally reliable, in structural equation models, the reliability of each indicator is evaluated separately, as a result, a more stable combination can be achieved. If the composite reliability value for each construct is above 0.7, it indicates appropriate internal stability for the measurement model. The obtained composite reliability values of the research variables are given in Table (6).

Table (6): Factor loadings of questions

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
International Entrepreneurship Orientation	0.787	0.791	0.661
Domestic Market Competition	0.711	0.711	0.608
Technical Capabilities	0.824	0.722	0.668
Marketing Capabilities	0.891	0.885	0.609

#### *4.6 Structural Research Model*

The fit indices of the analyzed model are given in Table (7) and the results indicate that the analysis model has a good fit.

Table (7): Structural model fit indices based on the research hypotheses

Index	Fit value	Value
Chi-square divided by degrees of freedom	Less than 4	1.231
Non-Non-Frequency Index (NFI)	More than 0.9	0.956
Incremental Fitness Index (IFI)	More than 0.9	0.993
Comparative Fitness Index (CFI)	More than 0.9	0.991
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation Estimate (RMSEA)	Close to 0	0.010

#### *4.7 Hypothesis Testing Results*

Table (8) shows the results of the structural research models for testing the research hypotheses. The t-statistic shows the significance of the effect of the variables on each other. If the value of this statistic in the output from the AMOS software is greater than 1.96, it means that there is a positive effect and it is significant. If it is between zero and +1.96, there is no significant effect. The path coefficient also indicates the intensity of the effect of the influencing variable on the affected variable. If the path coefficient is above 0.6, it means that there is a strong relationship between the two variables; if it is between 0.3 and 0.6, there is a moderate relationship; and if it is below 0.3, there is a weak relationship. At the same time, negative path coefficients also have the same interpretations and indicate an inverse relationship between the two variables. That is, as the influencing variable increases, the affected variable decreases and vice versa. Therefore, according to Table (8), except for the second and third hypotheses, the other hypotheses of this research are confirmed. Because they obtained a t-statistic of more than 1.96.

Table (8): Results of the analysis of research hypotheses

Hypothesis (Path)		t-Statistics	Path Coefficient	Result
IV	DV			
International entrepreneurship orientation	Export performance	3.552	0.213	Accept
Domestic market competition	Export performance	1.350	0.105	Reject
Entrepreneurship orientation	Technical capabilities	4.316	0.365	Accept
Domestic market competition	Technical capabilities	0.579	4.981	Accept
International entrepreneurship orientation	Marketing capabilities	0.208	3.213	Accept
Domestic market competition	Marketing capabilities	0.362	4.894	Accept
Technical capabilities	Export performance	0.031	0.408	Reject
Marketing capabilities	Export performance	0.739	8.532	Accept

#### 4.8 Sobel Test

The results of the Sobel test for the mediation hypotheses are given in Table (9).

Table (9): Mediation hypothesis test result – Sobel Test

Hypothesis	Test Statistic	Standard coefficient	Result
Technical capability plays a mediating role between the impact of international entrepreneurial orientation on the export performance of SMEs.	3.618	$(0.365 \times 0.031) = 0.011$	Accept
Technical capability plays a mediating role between the impact of competition in the domestic and international markets on the export performance of SMEs.	2.516	$(0.579 \times 0.031) = 0.017$	Accept
Marketing capability plays a mediating role between the effect of international entrepreneurship orientation on the export performance of SMEs.	73.205	$(0.208 \times 0.739) = 0.153$	Accept
Marketing capability plays a mediating role between the impact of competition in the domestic and international markets on the export performance of SMEs.	79.701	$(0.362 \times 0.739) = 0.267$	Accept

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research is to determine the impact of internal and external determinants of export performance and the role of organizational capabilities in SMEs. This research aims to develop a new model in the field of improving the export performance of these firms, which can significantly contribute to their development in the international arena. While SMEs are rapidly emerging and growing, one of the main factors for their continued survival and strong presence in the domestic and foreign economic arenas is their further development and the development of a coherent and organized program in these enterprises. The further development of these businesses increases the productivity of the factors of production and, in the long run, creates wealth and competitive advantage for the economies of countries and ultimately guarantees the survival of sustainable development in each country. It should also be noted that the existence of environmental challenges and fundamental changes in management processes have also made the role of these enterprises more prominent. Therefore, research in various fields that pave the way for identifying effective antecedents in the progress and development of these enterprises is of great importance. SMEs that wish to take advantage of market expansion must create the necessary infrastructure and processes. Firms that cannot adapt to the rapid changes and developments of the present era will stagnate and will undoubtedly not be able to have an active presence in the economic arena in the future and will eventually collapse.

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