

The Effect of Export Stimuli on Export Performance: The Case of the Tunisian Industrial Firms

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Abstract

The main objective of this article is to determine the effects of the perception of export stimuli on export performance. The empirical part was applied to a sample of 120 companies belonging to the three Tunisian pillar industries: Mechanic and Electronic Industry, Clothing and Textile Industry and Food Industry. Research results show that the perception of export stimuli varies with the firm size but does not vary according to the sector in which it operates. However, only the proactive stimuli reflecting the deliberate behavior of firm to export have impacts on export performance. These stimuli are: existence of special managerial interest, identification of better opportunities abroad, possession of exclusive information on foreign markets and favorable exchange rate.

Keywords: *Export stimuli, Business segment, Firm size and Exports Performance.*

Introduction

During the last three decades, several marketing researchers were interested in topics related to exporting companies, following the remarkable increase in international transactions. In fact, globalization continuously affects all the markets. New exchange forms see the light and competition pressure at both national and international levels appear and become so fierce that no firm can escape it. Consequently, it is imperative, and even vital, for companies to seize new opportunities abroad.

A considerable number of works have particularly studied the concept of export performance. In this perspective, the authors overall agreed on one essential ground: exportation is a very beneficial activity. In fact, it can be advantageous to the financial situation of a firm, its growth and its competitive position, not to mention the level of its managerial competences by improving the use of its production capacities (Kuppasamy and Anantharaman, 2008). But in spite of these conclusions, we notice that a significant number of small and medium enterprises (SME) that cannot easily venture in international markets actually prefer to minimize the risk of failure and operate only in the domestic market (Leonidas et al., 2007). It is in fact the case of companies in developing countries and/or of those in transition phase.

In addition, the literature review shows that the variables influencing the export performance of a firm were examined in previous studies (Baldauf et al., 2000; Haahi et al., 2005; Lages 2003; Sousa et al., 2008; Zou

and Stan 1998). In fact, the identification of these variables helps decision makers to establish, develop and maintain their exporting activities (Bilkey, 1978; Katsikeas and Piercy, 1991; Seifert and Ford 1989). This abundance in research raises two highly important issues. We notice, on the one hand, a significant diversity of the treated variables and, on the other; we observe a divergence in the previous results that are at times contradictory. To some extent, the various used measures, the difference in context studies and even the period of the study itself can justify the divergence of the obtained results. Consequently, even if exportation was considered by some authors to be the simplest way to commit at the international level (Leonidas et al., 2007), identifying the principal determinants of the export performance and the way to measure this variable remain two themes that need further study.

In this respect, it is deemed interesting to separately and comprehensively study each determining factor able to influence exporting companies for a better understanding of the export activity. We thereby limit our research to explain one variable that has always attracted marketing researchers' interest. We more precisely seek to explain the variable related to the perception of export stimuli, a variable that, in our understanding, can be qualified as a « dynamic » variable in the long run. This article aims thus at studying the relation between the perception of export stimuli and the export performance. For the purpose, we retained the example of Tunisian industrial companies. In fact, when reviewing past literature, we notice that the number of the works realized in developed countries is highly significant. Our study, on the other hand, was conducted in a very distinctive frame: Tunisia, an emerging country in transition phase.

Being the first to sign a free trade agreement with the EU in 1995 and being pioneer at adopting policies that favor its progressive integration in global economy, this country has a strategic geographical position in the Mediterranean, enjoys the support of the EU and the international community and vividly encourages companies to export. From another perspective, our empirical application rests on the study of three pillar sectors of the Tunisian industry in an attempt at verifying the existence of certain specificity in each field and evaluating the different exporters' behaviors.

We will first start by developing the conceptual framework of the research; then, we will present and discuss the results of our empirical study in order to ultimately conclude the managerial implications and the limits of and/or horizons for future studies.

1. Literature Review

In this part, researchers have analyzed some previous works done on export performance, stimuli perception and firm characteristics. This literature analysis will allow us to present our research hypotheses.

1.1. Export Performance: Concept and Measures

According to Tookey (1964), export performance is the object of abundant literature. Actually, some authors were interested in export performance indicators of SME (Katsikeas et al., 2000; Dess and Robinson, 1984; Venkatraman and Ramanujam, 1986; Lages and Lages, 2004; Sousa, 2004); others were inclined to study its determinants (Bilkey, 1978; Aabyet Slater, 1989; Koh, 1991; Madsen, 1989; Styleset Ambler, 1994).

The definitions that were advanced by the authors are diverse. As per Cavusgil and Zou (1994), export performance is defined as the degree of realization of the objectives of the firm through the exportation of its products. The same was concluded by Shoham (1996), export performance is the result of all the undertaken actions on the foreign market.

The literature considers export performance as a multi-dimensional concept (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994; Styles, 1998; Sousa, 2004; Diamantopoulos and Kakkos, 2007; Dominguez and Sequeira, 1993; Bijmolt and Zwart 1994; Zou et al. (1998); Zou and Stan, 1998; Shoham, 1998, Bouzlama, 2008). However, there is no consensus yet over its measurement (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994; Zou, Taylor, and Osland, 1998). It can be apprehended in three ways:

- Objective measures of economic nature (export intensity, export profit, export growth) and those of non economic nature (number of exportation markets).
- Subjective measures related to the manager's satisfaction with regards to export performance and the perception of export profitability.

- The hybrid or composite measures that represent both the use of objective and subjective measures (Bousslama, 2008; O'Sullivan and Butler, 2009).

Among these three measures, objective performance and subjective performance are the most cited by the authors (Dess and Robinson, 1984; Venkatraman and Ramanujam, 1986; Lages and Lages, 2004; Sousa, 2004). The majority of recent studies nevertheless use subjective measures more than objective ones (Bousslama, 2008).

1.2. Export Stimuli

Studying export stimuli consists of analyzing the motivation of the managers to committing to exporting activities. This research field has attracted the interest of researchers in international marketing for a long time (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994); but a few studies were interested in studying export stimuli of a developing country (Le and Luong, 2009).

Export stimuli «refer to all the factors that favor the firm's decision to initiate and develop exporting activities» (Wiedersheim-Paul et al., 1978). These motives are numerous and diversified. Most authors agree on the fact that the reception of an unsolicited foreign order is the triggering factor (Le and Luong, 2009).

The literature review identifies two classifications of export stimuli. On the one hand, some authors based their study on the origin of the stimuli. They therefore differentiated between internal and external stimuli (BrooksetRosson, 1982; Gibiat, 1994):

- Internal stimuli concern factors that are endogenous to the firm such as expansion needs and unique product characteristics.

- External stimuli are linked to the environment in which operates the firm such as governmental programs that promote exportation and the reception of an unsolicited foreign order.

This stimuli typology is the most used in literature. In fact, several studies demonstrated that the exportation decision of most of the SME was taken following an external stimulus (Bilkey, 1978).

On the other hand, some authors based their studies on the companies' export behavior.

They differentiate between proactive stimuli and reactive ones (Johnston and Czinkota, 1982; Morgan, 1997; Katsikeas, 1996; Pope, 2002):

- The first family, called the *pull* factors, is linked to internal and unique competences of the firm. These are factors linked to positive opportunities in a foreign market (Keynak and Stevenson, 1982). The behavior is aggressive and active.

- The second family, called the *push* factors, concerns the responses to environmental pressures or to changes that are external to the firm. These are the factors that push the firm to be international in order to face current or predictable problems such as saturation of the domestic market, intensity of the existing competition, unfavorable economic context in the same market, reception of a foreign order and existence of an unexploited production capacity. This behavior is called passive.

From this classification, Keynak and Stevenson (1982) advance that proactive stimuli are sometimes estimated by the managers of SME to be more significant than reactive stimuli.

Within the scope of our research, we opted for this second classification that seems to us to be the most relevant. In fact, these two types of motivation can engender two different types of attitude and behavior. Thus, and as highlighted by Bellaaj and Akrouf (2005), they can influence export performance in a different way. Thus, we will test the following hypothesis:

H1: The perception of export stimuli positively influences export performance.

1.3. Firm Characteristics

According to Leonidou (1995), three factors affect the perception of stimuli: the manager's profile, the characteristics of the firm and those of the environment in which it operates. In the present study, we will focus on the firm's characteristics and mainly on its business sector and its size, which are among the most studied characteristics in literature yet producing contradictory results.

1.3.1. Business Sector

The business sector to which a firm belongs facilitates or inhibits the export activity. For instance, the companies that produce unsustainable consumption goods can henceforth have exporting difficulties the fact that renders them reluctant to commit to export activities due to the requirements of sophisticated marketing systems and adaptations to foreign customers (Christensen et al., 1987). Additionally, companies that operate in seasonal industries, such as beverages and leisure items, are more likely to export to compensate the fluctuations of their production cycle and ensure a continuous growth of the firm's profitability (Wiedersheim-Paul et al. 1978; Cavusgil, 1980). Fernández et al. (2005), Ruigrok et al. (2003) as well as Hsu et al. (2003) used the business sector as a control variable in order to analyze the degree of internationalization of export companies. Belso-Martinez (2006) shed the light on the determining role of the global orientation of the sector on the decision and export intensity. Additionally, and as highlighted by Barrios et al. (2003), companies that belong to a sector in which there is a significant presence of national exporting firms are more likely to become exporters. We therefore suggest the following hypothesis:

H2: The perception of export stimuli varies according to the firm's business sector.

1.3.2. The size of the firm

The study of the impact of the firm's size on the perception of stimuli was considerably researched by literature specialized in international marketing (Bricout, 1991; Scherrer, 1998). The results are mixed in this regard. The contradiction of the results with regards to the relation between the two variables can be explained by the nature of the measurement of the size (Zou and Stan, 1998). The authors distinguished a positive relation when the size is measured in terms of the turnover and a negative relation when the size is measured in terms of number of employees.

Certain studies confirm that the firm's size plays a major role in the decision to export (Dbanaraj and Beamish, 2003; Verwaal and Donkers, 2002). In fact, the bigger the firm the higher its probability to export (Thérin, 1995). This stand is shared by Bonaccorsi (1992) and Reid (1982) who stipulate that the small size of a firm is generally perceived as a problem in exportation. Calof (1994) estimates that size help the firm access necessary pieces of information for the export operation. Giraud (1991) highlights that the exporting activity is above all related to size. Finally, a few studies have found a relationship between the size of a firm and the probability to export (Yunus, 2004). We will thus verify the following hypothesis:

H3: the perception of export stimuli varies according to the firm's size.

2. Research Methodology

Throughout this part, researchers have presented the methodology they adopted in their empirical quest.

2.1. Realization of the Survey

Given the fact that the variety of marketing research dedicated to export is generally conducted in developed countries, it seems more interesting to realize an empirical study in countries that are either emerging or in transition phase. Therefore, our study was conducted in Tunisia. It is an emerging country where economy largely depends on export. The latter contributes at a rate of 46,4% to GDP (CEPEX, 2010). Each year, the number of exporting companies increases and consequently the country experiences a noticeable average evolution of its exportations 13.1% (CEPEX, 2010).

For the purpose of our study, we conducted a questionnaire survey. Starting from a list provided by the Centre for the Promotion of Exportations (CEPEX), we selected our sample following the quota method. The selected business sector was considered a control variable. This empirical study concerns three pillar sectors in Tunisian industry, namely Electronic and Mechanic Industry (EMI), Textile and Clothing Industry (TCI) and Food Industry (FI) (API, 2012). These sectors realize 87% of total Tunisian exports (API, 2012) and therefore allow for a better representation of Tunisian industry in general. A total of 120 questionnaires were comprehensive enough to be used in our data analysis.

2.2. Measures Used

We included a list of 20 export stimuli in our questionnaire, a list elaborated by Leonidou in 1998 and then adopted by several researchers in marketing. This motivational measure is in fact a four points importance scale (1= with no importance to 4= very important).

To measure the performance export variable we opted for the use of subjective measures. In fact, the interviewees do not generally desire to provide financial data (Robertson and Chetty, 2000; Leonidou et al., 2002; Bellaaj and Akrouf, 2005). The latter are not available to public use which renders the verification of the exactitude of the presented numbers impossible (Robertson and Chetty, 2000). In table 1, we will summarize the set of the measures used:

Table 1 : Scales of measurement

Variable	Scale of measurement
Firm size	Number of employees in the firm
Business segment	Nominal scale
Export stimuli	4-point scale
Export performance -Sales volume -Market share -Export profitability	5-point scale

3. Results and Analyses

3.1. Description of the Sample

It is first necessary to describe the characteristics of the interviewed companies (see table 2).

Table 2: Sample's characteristics

Characteristics	Percentages
Business segment	21% Mechanic and electronic industry (MEI)
	55% Clothing and textile industry (CTI)
	24% Food industry (FI)
Firm size	74 % SME

According to this table, SME represent 74 % of our sample which approximately represents the percentage of SME in Tunisia. It is necessary to remind that Tunisian SME/SMI is defined as an enterprise employing from 10 to 200 people according to the API (Agency for Promotion of Industry) (2012). We then verified the conditions of our sampling method per quota. In fact, companies operating in the EMI constitute 21% of our sample. Companies in the TCI sector constitute 55% and the rest comprises companies of the FI.

3.2. Analysis of Export Stimuli

The analysis of export stimuli is twofold. First, it is necessary to classify these stimuli and then to analyze the effects of the size and the business sector on the degree of perception of the stimuli by exporting companies.

3.2.1. Classification of Export Stimuli

We first classified export stimuli by order of importance, i.e. according to « important » and « highly important ». Then we compared this classification with the results of the study realized by Leonidou (1998) on Cypriote companies and with works of Le and Luong (2009) conducted on Vietnamese companies (see table 3).

Table 3: Rank order of export stimuli

Export stimuli (ranked in ascending order of frequency importance)	Mean*	Rate (%) of the 1 answers 'important' and 'very important'	Rank order according to Le and Luong (2009)	Rank order according to Leonidou (1998)
1. Potential for extra sales/profits resulting from exports	3.44	97.5	3	1
2. Potential for growth resulting from exports	3.32	90.8	2	2
3. Existence of special managerial interest/urge	2.75	67.5	4	3
4. Saturation/shrinkage of domestic market	2.78	66.7	19	9
5. Need to reduce dependence of domestic market	2.81	65.8	9	7
6. Intense competition in domestic market	3.09	64.2	7	14
7. Identification of better opportunities abroad	2.70	64.1	6	4
8. Saturation /shrinkage in domestic sales/profits	2.72	63.3	14	11
9. Possession of exclusive information on foreign markets	2.70	62.5	15	8
10. Favourable exchange rate	2.6	61.7	16	12
11. Availability of unutilised production capacity	2.53	51.7	13	11
12. Government assistance to export	2.49	41.7	10	16
13. Possession of particular competitive advantage	2.20	40	5	6
14. Contact established during an international fair	2.04	35.9	17	10
15. Initiation of exporters by domestic competitors	2.18	32.5	8	17
16. Achievement of economies of scale from exporting	2.11	31.6	12	5
17. Receipt of unsolicited orders from abroad	2.01	31	1	15
18. Production of goods with unique qualities	2.14	27.5	11	8
19. Encouragement by external agents/partners	1.19	24.2	18	18
20. Need to offset sales of a seasonal product	1.79	21.6	20	13

*Scored on a four-point scale with anchors 1= and “with no importance” and 4= “very important”.

11 stimuli seem to be important drives to export. The analysis of the motivations of Tunisian companies to commit to export indicates that the majority of interviewees (97,5%) think that export is a source of sales and additional profit. The firm's growth need is a highly important motivation for 90% of Tunisian companies. These two stimuli reflect an active attitude and a voluntary behavior of Tunisian companies to look for international opportunities. At this stage, our classification parallels the works of Leonidou (1998) whereas it differs from the classification concluded by Le and Luong (2009). These two authors deduced that the first drive to export is the reception of an unsolicited order and thus reflects the passive attitude of Vietnamese companies. In addition, results show that managers give much importance to export (67,5%) knowing that the domestic market is very tight.

Actually, Tunisian companies (66,7%) are attracted to export as the domestic market is saturated. Besides, many respondents (65,8%) wish to reduce their dependence on the domestic market and think their local sales are saturated and are even in decline (63,3%). They (64,2%) also think that competitive pressure on the domestic market drives them to conquer new markets. The discovery of foreign opportunities (64,1%) will thus have a high importance. The exchange rate is also a highly important motivation for Tunisian companies. Ranked in the 10th place, this stimulus is very frequently cited with a rate of 61,7%. In fact, this interest is justified by the fact that principal foreign clients are from Europe (CEPEX, 2010) which is the case for three industrial sectors treated in this study. Equally, 51,7% of the interviewees find that export allows them to profit from an unexploited production capacity. The rest of the stimuli are less important to Tunisian managers. Finally, and by comparing our results with those of Leonidou (1998) and Le and Luong's (2009), we believe that the stimulus «particular competitive advantage » is very important for Cypriote and Vietnamese companies which is not the case for Tunisian companies (with the rate of 40%). After having classified these stimuli, we conducted a correlation test between the different stimuli. Many relations seem to be interesting mainly those that concern the stimuli that are classified as the most important. In fact, we found that companies that think export represents a potential for sales and additional profit are those that think export allows them to profit from an unexploited production capacity ($r= 0,322$ and $p=0,002$). Managers who also give particular interest to export are those who discovered a foreign opportunity ($r=0,902$ and $p=0,000$), those who have exclusive information on the foreign market ($r=0,673$ and $p=0,000$) and those who are attracted by a favorable exchange rate during foreign transactions ($r=0,611$ and $p=0,008$). However, this stimulus «particular interest of export managers» and the stimulus «contact established during an international fair» are correlated, but this correlation is very low ($r=0,195$ $p=0,008$). On the other hand, the reduction of the stimulus related to the dependence on the domestic market is highly correlated with the saturation of the local market ($r=0,714$ and $p=0,000$) and with the competitive pressure in the domestic market ($r=0,769$ and $p=0,000$).

3.2.2. Impact of the Size and the Business Sector

We realized a factorial analysis (Analysis in Principal Components APC) including the most important stimuli, i.e. the stimuli for which the proportion of answers that are “important” and “highly important” is superior to 50%. The results are described in table 4.

Table 4: Factor analysis applied to export stimuli

Les stimuli	Factor		
	S1	S2	S3
Existence of special managerial interest/urge	0.911		
Identification of better opportunities abroad	0.946		
Possession of exclusive information on foreign markets	0.879		
Favourable exchange rate	0.643		
Saturation/ shrinkage of domestic market		0.892	
Intense competition in domestic market		0.944	
Need to reduce dependence of domestic market		0.916	
Saturation /shrinkage in domestic sales/ profits		0.601	
Potential for extra sales /profits resulting from exporting			0.758
Potential for growth resulting from exporting			0.616
Availability of unutilised production capacity			0.528
Variance	3.214	2.757	1.297
% of variance	27.671	26.096	12.305
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0.694		
Cronbach's alpha	0.877	0.856	0.615

The APC with Varimax rotation on motivational variables produces three axes that explain 66,071% of the total variance. In addition, the KMO index with a value of 0,694 attests of the pertinence of this APC. The Cronbach alphas of the three discovered dimensions are satisfactory and are respectively (0,877), (0,856) and (0,615). The three axes are described as follows:

- The 1st axis with a proper value of 3,214 explains 27,67% of the phenomenon and regroups the stimuli that indicate the degree of interest of the export manager and his commitment to look for information about foreign markets.
- The 2nd axis with a proper value of 2,757 explains 26,09% of the phenomenon and regroups the stimuli relative to the characteristics of the domestic market.
- The 3rd axis with a proper value of 1,297 explains 12,309% of the phenomenon and regroups the stimuli that represent the potential of export development.

Once the factorial analysis done, we conducted a correlation test between the three motivational axes issued from the APC and the size of the firm. We found that the size variable is correlated with the first motivational axis ($r=0.209$; $p=0.002$). Consequently, hypothesis H3 is confirmed.

While an ANOVA realized between the motivational factors retained of the ACP and the business sector provided insignificant results, it shows that the perception of export stimuli is the same for different interviewed companies. Consequently, hypothesis H2 is rejected. We can therefore conclude that Tunisian industrial companies have generally an active attitude and a voluntary and intentional behavior aiming at seeking new foreign opportunities.

3.3. Stimuli and Export Performance

3.3.1. Factorial Analysis of the Performance Scale

In order to check the relation stimuli/performance, we first integrated the three items related to the performance variable in the APC. The factorial analysis revealed the existence of one factor (see table 5). The KMO index (of 0.695) shows the pertinence of the APC and the Cronbach Alpha of 0.792 indicates the reliability of the used scale.

Table5: Factor analysis applied to export performance

Items	Mean*	Facteur 1
Sales volume	2,9615	0,965
Export profitability	3,0288	0,961
Market share	2,9903	0,528
Variance	2.133	
% of variance	71.103	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)	0.695	
Cronbach's alpha	0.792	

* Scored on a five-point scale with anchors 1= “much less satisfied” and with 5 = “much more satisfied”.

3.3.2. Verification of the Relation Stimuli/Performance

Furthermore, we proceeded to a regression test between the variables stimuli and export performance (see table 6). The factorial scores of the APC treating the stimuli and export performance were introduced in the analysis of the ascending multiple regression.

Table6: Multiple regression_ Stimuli / Performance

Independent variables	t	p	R ²	F
Model 1 STIMULI 1	5.747	0.000	0.22	33.030 (p=0.00)

Following the results indicated in table 6, we can observe that the obtained model is statistically significant ($F=33.030$; $p=0.000$) with a percentage of explained variance equal to 22%. Hypothesis H1 is therefore confirmed. In fact, factor 1, which indicates the managers' attraction to export markets (representing 4 stimuli: particular interest of the manager in export, discovery of foreign opportunities, exclusive information on a foreign market, favorable exchange rate) constitutes, according to our results, the only motivational factor of the export performance.

4. Discussions and Managerial Implications

Exportation remains a topic of interest to many companies and is always of great significance to researchers in international marketing. Within this scope, the present work's principal objective is to verify the impact of the perception of export stimuli on the performance of an industrial exporting firm.

One of the specificities of this research is that the empirical study rests on three industrial business sectors and permits to formulate conclusions about the particularities of the country in transition treated in this article which is Tunisia; when previous studies generally treated one business sector and are conducted in developed countries.

First, the obtained classification of the stimuli underlines the voluntary behavior of Tunisian companies to seize an opportunity in the international market. Actually, proactive stimuli are more significant with regards to international commitment which signifies that export has become a major necessity in the Tunisian context. This necessity is also justified by our empirical findings which indicated the importance of the factors related to the market's characteristics. Several stimuli are to be taken into consideration here. Companies primarily find in export an enormous potential for sales, additional profit and a better solution for their growth needs. Determined by a proactive attitude and a particular interest in export, they are highly committed to seek information and discover new markets. This conclusion highlights the specificities of the Tunisian context knowing that we confirm the findings of Bellaaj and Akrouf (2005) who consider export activities of Tunisian companies to be the result of occasional opportunities when they are rather a product of an intentional and proactive decision. At the same time, we notice a difference with Le and Luong (2009) who affirm that Vietnamese companies' first international steps generally start following an unsolicited foreign order. The latter have a passive attitude limited to an accidental exportation. In fact, Asian companies, such as Vietnamese companies,—even with less export experience—are generally more solicited because of their relatively low, and therefore more attractive, labor costs, which is not usually the case for Tunisian companies. It is true that globalization rendered markets more accessible yet at the same time it made competition fiercer. Competition from low labor cost Asian countries is more and more significant. These companies easily managed to impose themselves on the international market principally thanks to this competitive advantage. Tunisian industry was particularly affected by this competitiveness especially in Textile and Clothing, one of the pillar industries in Tunisia that suffered from a decrease in exportation (CEPEX, 2010). This decrease can also be referred to the impact the macro-environment, mainly economic, had on countries in transition during the last three years. Consequently, adjusting export marketing strategies by highlighting quality remains one of the best solutions for the international expansion of Tunisian companies.

Consequently, and considering the concluded classification, we examined the link that could exist between the stimuli and the two variables of size and business sector. The results demonstrated that the interviewed companies operating in the three treated sectors perceive export stimuli in the same manner. In reality and no matter the sector in which they operate, Tunisian industrials have to be motivated to export their activities in response to the tightness of the local market to face competitive pressure and market maturity.

Seen from another perspective, we concluded that size positively affects the perception of the stimuli having a proactive aspect. In fact, the more the size increases the more the firm is interested in export and highly committed to seek information on foreign markets; a result that coincides with those of Calof (1994). Thus, the voluntary attitude to export is largely linked to the firm's resources. However, this last result must be carefully used. In fact, it is true that resources can help a firm commit to export but this factor must not be considered as an obstacle to exportation since several small size companies showed a poignant success in international markets (Leonidou et al., 2002).

Finally, we found that motivations to export and more importantly the stimuli relative to the degree of the manager's interest in export, the possession of exclusive information on the foreign market, the discovery of opportunity and market appeal (favorable exchange rate) affect export performance; consequently, being proactive and deliberate in looking for opportunities abroad can only boost the profitability of the firm. However, adopting a passive behavior and doing fortuitous exports will not have any effect on the improvement of the export activity. As demonstrated by Katsikeas (1996), proactive behavior that is generally caused by the managers' high interest in international business can facilitate and maintain an export activity. In other words, the more the managers perceive proactive stimuli the more it favors a better performance (Katsikeas et al., 1996). This result drives the managers to further invest notably in the market study in order to detect the best opportunities and thus favor their chances of success at the international level.

5. Limits and Areas for future Research

This article, as every piece of research has its own limitations. We used subjective measures for the export performance variable; however, it would be interesting, for future research, to use more objective data. Besides, we suggest to conduct a longitudinal study in order to understand the dynamics of the relation stimuli-performance. This complementary study will be more interesting if it focuses on one industrial business sector.

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