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## The effects of marketing capabilities on export performance using resource-based view: assessment on manufacturing companies

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### Abstract

For the last years, under increasing intensive competitive conditions, manufacturing firms have been seeking ways to create advantages against their competitors that lead them to change their product-oriented strategy to adopt market-oriented strategy. Thus, it is important for those firms to define their activities better and to use their resources to increase their export performance. In this study, using resource-based view, important resources and marketing capabilities of manufacturing companies which play key roles in their export performance were examined. Then, in order to understand the effects of various defined resources and marketing capabilities on manufacturing firms' export performance in depth, export activities of 14 Turkish manufacturing firms in different sectors were investigated using critical incident method.

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### 1. Introduction

Manufacturers operating in international markets have been facing many strategic and corporate difficulties. Mostly low-cost competing products urge manufacturers to employ different strategies. Researchers believe that the most profitable strategies are basically those based on differentiation advantages (MacMillan, Ian C. and Rita Gunther McGrath, 1997). The two main ways, which lead to differentiation are products and services. Although the significance of the latter is proven, its role on differentiation is generally ignored (Asugman, Gulden, Jean L. Johnson and James McCullough, 1997), (Balabanis, George, 2000), (Cloninger, Peggy A. and Benjamin Oviatt, 2007), (Skaggs, Bruce C. and Scott B. Droege, 2004). In order to differentiate in given services, it is necessary for firms to adopt market-oriented strategy with understanding of market dynamics. However, accessing market

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information in export markets could be restricted compared to local markets and when a market is complicated, it would be more difficult to perform successful market-oriented activities. Therefore, while building their competition strategies, firms need to take into account implications of their resources and capabilities in support of how they will compete for target customers and how they will achieve their goals (Cavusgil, S. T., & Zou, S., 1994).

Although various distinctions have been attributed to the resources, the main idea is that when brought together in an efficient way, resources will be leading in terms of development of organizational skills and capabilities. While capabilities are regarded as hidden assets, management capabilities (Hadjimanolis, A., 2000) are regarded as essential information resource that firm has that can be translated into an organizational skill (Moingeon, B., B. Ramanantsoa, E. Metais ve J. D. Orton, 1998) and an essential feature which distinguish them from their competitors. Therefore, it is critical that these resources and capabilities should not be reproducible, transferable and accessible. This paper recognizes the distinction between resources and capabilities (Day, G. S., 1994). Many resources are accessible by exporters. Yet, two of them pose significance for this study, which are “Informational Resources” and “Financial Resources”. Considering the competitive advantage of the capabilities that arise out of firm’s current resources, “Management Capabilities” and “Customer Relations Capabilities” which are regarded to be holding key roles in export performance effect comprise another important part of the paper.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1. The goal, model and method of the research*

The goal of this research is to find out, by means of resource-based view (RBV), to what extent resources and marketing capabilities affect the export performance of manufacturers operating in international markets and to contribute to the development of knowledge in this field. In this paper, by using critical incident method, 14 manufacturing firms will be asked to give detailed information about critical events encountered in the course of managing export market, facilitative and complicating factors to understand their export performance determinants based on their resources and capabilities borne from these resources. Those critical incidents will give more clear information in understanding firms’ management mechanisms and their approach to export markets as it is aimed to make deeper and efficient study.

#### *2.1.1. Selection of firms*

Firms needed to fulfill the following four criteria to be included in this study: it must be an independent Turkish firm; it must be a manufacturer; it must be dealing with export; its international performance for the last four years must be either high or low. Regard to the last criteria, high-performance firms are those having remarkable performance superior to competition, classified in the following way; firms whose international sales average ratio in last four years is at least 35% of total sales chosen in order to study firms which aim growth in export or prioritize international markets. In addition, within their four year of international performance managers were asked about their satisfaction regarding average market share they obtained; average profit return and international benefits they gained; special goals they set in export markets. The managers responded that their goals are accessing to certain or new markets, exceeding the performance of main competitors, rendering services for certain customers or achieving a few of these goals together perceived as high satisfaction.

On the contrary, in the low-performance group, manufacturers whose performance is relatively lower than their competition were chosen. The meaning of this is; firms whose international sales average ratio in the last four years within firm’s total sales is maximum 35% to find out firms which attribute secondary importance to their international existence and international performance was perceived as low in the field stated above.

In the study, “convenience sampling” method was used to access firms where information could be obtained conveniently as most of firms were not willing to share some of their valuable information in the course of data collection. Among market service modes, there is one firm, which has localized warehouse and factory in export market, and others are manufacturers, which have distribution channels like distributors, wholesaler, supermarket and direct customer. This type of structure has been chosen to discover diversity by allowing multiple variants.

### *2.1.2. Data collection and analysis*

Data collection methods include comprehensive interviews with top managers of the firms, analysis of company documents and archive, telephone conversation to clarify some ambiguous points from the former interview and general observation. The use of various methods contributes to general evaluation of organizational features more broadly. Interviews were carried out based on an interview guide by directing open-ended questions specifically chosen for this research and by learning how goals were set when entering export markets, what kind of strategy is specified, how the financial resources are used, how decision mechanisms work and how customer relations are conducted. Moreover, the participants were requested to provide information about export developments they achieved.

The analysis of data was carried out using “fixed comparative analysis method” (Dyer, J. H. and K. Nobeoka, 2000). In line with this method, as the research was carried on and new data were collected, they were categorized, conceptually and theoretically compared with previous data. In systematic combination process, data from firms were compared with theoretical data many times (Dubois, A. and L. E. Gadde, 2002). This process was reiterated till no new category/concept was discovered in the course of conceptual and theoretical comparison with the previous data. In other words, it was repeated till conceptual satiation was achieved.

In order to ensure quality, validity and usefulness of the data, following practices were used: developing a correctible incident study database (Yin, R. K., 1989), using theoretical information in order to prepare interview guide (Oppenheim, A. V., 2000), providing consensus with the firm on the matter of adaptation of incident study reports and the interviews made with each firm’s managers (Healy, M. and C. Perry, 2000).

## **3. Research findings and evaluation**

### *3.1. Export performance*

Information regarding industrial sector, capacity, international experience, international performance and marketing services for those 14 focal firms studied were given on Table 1. On this table, while seven firms (Y1 to Y7) have high performance, the other seven (D1 to D7) have low performance. First five of these firms (Y1 to Y5) can be considered as big size while others are medium and small. Except Y3, Y4 and D3, all others are family companies. With respect to multiple data, it was included firms (Y5, Y6, D1 and D7) manufacturing products require high technology and information and their use of.

The firms (except Y1 and Y7) having high performance started their international activities after an apparent experience in their local market. Also, firms in this study (except Y1 and Y2) are mostly new market-seekers, since their primary starting point is to increase their operation and market share in international markets. Y1 and Y2 are focused on meeting current demand in short term, but still carry on seeking new markets and customers targeting to increase capacity in long term. Among high and low-performance firms, there is a notable difference in terms of performance. It was realized that the international sales of the high-performance group got min. 35% and max. 84% share in average out of total sales in four-year period. Similarly, it is perceived that the participant top managers of the high-performance firms have exceptional to noticeable satisfaction indicated in Table 1. On the contrary, low-performance firms got a maximum share ranging between 25% and 2% in average out of their total sales in four-year period. It was also observed that D1 and D2 among these firms showed a remarkable development in their export works in the last four-year period and increased the share of export within total

revenues and enjoyed a noticeable satisfaction as a result of that. The satisfaction levels of the other low-performance firms were given in Table 1.

Table 1 – Details of investigated firms

Firm	Sector	Number of employees	Average sales in last four years (Million TL)	Number of years in export	Number of export countries	Export sales rate in last four years average sales	Perceived international performance	International distribution channels
Y1	Metal Component	200	25,70	10	3	84%	●	Customer
Y2	Food	250	92,00	5	80	70%	●	Wholesaler, supermarket
Y3	Metal Component	670	90,00	27	7	57%	●	Customer
Y4	Plastic	551	71,00	16	40	56%	●	Warehouse, Factory, Distributor, Customer
Y5	Construction Equipment	250	37,00	7	40	50%	●	Distributor
Y6	Attachments	220	43,50	14	40	35%	■	Distributor
Y7	Forestry Machinery	50	2,30	6	11	36%	■	Distributor
D1	Agricultural Machinery	220	12,00	12	40	25%	■	Distributor, Customer
D2	Metal Component	75	6,90	5	28	24%	■	Distributor, Customer
D3	Packing	110	35,00	12	6	14%	⊙	Distributor, Customer
D4	Food	44	4,30	8	6	8%	⊙	Distributor, Customer
D5	Building Materials	100	15,40	4	3	7%	⊙	Distributor, Customer
D6	Packing	60	6,60	5	6	7%	○	Distributor, Customer
D7	Agricultural Machinery	22	1,30	10	7	2%	○	Distributor, Customer

● Satisfaction exceptionally present   
 ■ Satisfaction noticeably present   
 ⊙ Satisfaction weakly present   
 ○ Satisfaction absent

Table 2 shows descriptive matrices, which are based on incidents that are defined according to firms' use of studied resources and capabilities mechanisms described in details under below headings.

Table 2 – Use of resources and capabilities mechanisms in investigated firms

Firm	Sector	<i>Use of Informational Resource Mechanism</i>						<i>Use of Management Capabilities Mechanism</i>					
		Access to market information		Access to competitors information		Use of information		Perception		Risk taking		Decision making	
		Situational	Result Oriented	Situational	Result Oriented	Situational	Result Oriented	Centralized	Result Oriented	Centralized	Result Oriented	Centralized	Result Oriented
Y1	Metal Component		●		■		●		●		●		●
Y2	Food		●		■		●		●		●		●
Y3	Metal Component		●		■		●		●		●		●
Y4	Plastic		●		■		●		●		●		●
Y5	Construction Equipment		●		■		●		●		●		●
Y6	Attachments		■		■		■		■		■		■
Y7	Forestry Machinery		■		■		■		■		■		■
D1	Agricultural Machinery	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	
D2	Metal Component	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	
D3	Packing	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	
D4	Food	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	
D5	Building Materials	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	
D6	Packing	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	
D7	Agricultural Machinery	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	

  

Firm	Sector	<i>Use of Financial Resource Mechanism</i>				<i>Use of Customer Relations Capabilities Mechanism</i>							
		Use of financial resources		Benefiting from Government incentives		Performance monitoring		Awareness		Information exchange		Sustainability	
		Situational	Planned	Situational	Planned	Situational	Planned	Situational	Result Oriented	Situational	Result Oriented	Situational	Result Oriented
Y1	Metal Component		●		⊙		●		●		●		●
Y2	Food		●		⊙		●		●		●		●
Y3	Metal Component		●		⊙		●		●		●		●
Y4	Plastic		●		⊙		●		●		●		●
Y5	Construction Equipment		●		⊙		●		●		●		●
Y6	Attachments		■		■		■		■		■		■
Y7	Forestry Machinery		■		■		■		■		■		■
D1	Agricultural Machinery	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	
D2	Metal Component	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	
D3	Packing	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	
D4	Food	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	
D5	Building Materials	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	
D6	Packing	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	
D7	Agricultural Machinery	⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙		⊙	

● Mechanism present to a high degree   
 ■ Mechanism present to an intermediate degree   
 ⊙ Mechanism present to a low degree

### 3.1.1. Informational resources

All managers who were interviewed consider their informational resources as key for their international activities. Firms stated that at the beginning of international activities, they usually research demographical and economic variables of the international markets, the demands for the product, competitors, whether there is local production or not and what legal legislation is to identify their market access strategies. Yet, the interviews carried out suggest that high and low-performance firms differ in terms of access to informational resources and information use. Our findings showed that there are two distinct categories within use of informational resource mechanisms showing that high-performance firms exhibit “*Result-oriented*” behavior while low-performance firms act in a “*Situational*” manner. In this paper, result-oriented behavior is defined as the determinant for the fact that high-performance firms know what they want to have to reach their goals, act fast and efficiently and are oriented to the core of the matter. Situational behaviour is defined as the determinant of the fact that low performance firms act instantly or are focused particular situation to reach their goals usually for short term.

It was observed that high-performance firms have primary starting point to combine different information and skills and to create an information-based view (Grant, R. M., 1996b), (Grant, R. M. and C. Baden Fuller, 2004). It is pointed out that international networks are frequently used as instruments of obtaining and spreading information during export processes. High-performance firm Y1 practices special long-term relations with its customers based on contract, so its behaviour mechanism to access to information is specified as intermediate degree. In this way, it is understood that those with high-performance are in contact with their partners for situations where learning is crucial and where making research gains importance (rather than just practicing) (Koza, M.P. and A.Y.Lewin, 1998).

Although low-performance firms, which internationalized have communication means and information systems, their attempts to get information from markets and to use information are regarded as situational. It was understood that as a result of this manner, low-performance firms could not define market access strategies in product, competition and prices due to lack of access to important information available in export markets.

Perceptions of implementation goals aiming to obtain and use of information for low-performance firms was observed as situational while high-performance firms brings up research goals for creating new networks or obtaining information which are crucial for competition. Apparently, result-oriented informational resource use mechanism provides qualitative valuable information flow for high-performance firms. The findings of this study indicate that result-oriented mechanisms are associated with obtaining information directly or via networks, spreading information and with positive interactions based on competition.

### 3.1.2. Financial resources

During the interviews, it was discovered that the basic goal of high-performance firms with regard to their financial resource use approach are activities such as accessing to market information in shorter time, integration with business partners and customers, understanding product and market requirements, accessing to information of competitors, taking new opportunities and establishing new partnerships, and that these activities compose informational resource when firms directing their strategies. Our findings comply with the discovery of Kaleka (2011) who suggests that financial resources of firms with regard to export performance have high significance in both their informational skill acquisition and in relations with their customers. Furthermore, as Seringhaus and Rosson (1998) noted, in spite of their being expensive, activities such as data collection, participation in fairs and visits to potential foreign markets mean obtaining valuable export market information.

It was observed that high-performance firms act in a “*Planned*” manner with regard to use of financial resources and benefitting from Government incentives in parallel with this. In this paper, the term planned behavior is defined as the method that firms follow to reach their goals being aware of their desire and as the determinant of the fact that they act in reference to the fundamentals of the matter. At this point, it was understood that high-performance firms do not avoid allocating resources for export activities geared toward their

goals. Firms told that their planned spending were usually made in matters such as participation in fairs in operating or target countries, dealer and customer visits and promotion works. Besides these, firms informed us that there are other activities such as accessing to market information, contacting trade counselors and subscribing business websites all of which are required by desk studies. These activities of high-performance firms, which are active in foreign markets are essentially planned to integrate into a market and to transform information gained into strategies for growing in export markets.

While an efficient resource management without planning is not possible, it was observed that low-performance firm generally behave timidly in financial resource allocation for various reasons, that their observation abilities are low and that they are in dilemma with regard to goals as they are at different information levels. Those low-performance firms (D5 to D7) which focus mostly on researches conducted in their offices from secondary data sources expressed that as they could not obtain short-term results from foreign fairs or travels by means of their limited budget, they became generally hesitant in their next attempts. This usually causes low-performance firms to obtain and use simpler data for accessing market and of competitor information and spend more time on this work. In this study, we regard this behavior of low-performance firms as situational.

In addition to their financial resource framework prepared at the beginning of a year, high-performance firms (except Y1) act in planned manner to benefit from Government incentives in same perspective. It was seen that Y1, which has high performance only benefits from some of the Government incentives due to the fact that it is not a market-seeker and it has filled its capacity with its current customers. It was noted that other high-performance firms fulfilled many comprehensive procedures in order to expand the scope of benefitting from Government incentives. On the contrary, it was observed that low-performance firms act in a situational manner as they benefitted from these supports in a more limited and situational manner and mostly for short terms. It was found out that they could only benefit from some of these supports due to lack of information or due to the fact that they refrain from dealing with detailed procedures of such supports.

In the process of monitoring expenditures made by firms, it was observed that high-performance firm acted in a result-oriented manner while low-performance firms could only make situational assessments. It was seen that along the year, high-performance firms monitor export spending which are planned in line with their goals set at the beginning of the year. Low-performance firms on the other hand can only assess the result of the spending which they made due to the situation in reference to the result brought by that situation.

### 3.1.3. Management capabilities

Market perception level of firms' managers has a significant function in firms' specifying their export strategies. However, it must be emphasized that acquisition of management skills and becoming expertise require special efforts and time. Anderson and Paine (1975) suggest that differences with regard to management perception in a certain situation are key factors in explaining the existence of different decision-making structures and strategies specified for the same goals.

It was observed that firms with high export perception tend to exhibit more open and sensitive approaches towards export market stimuli and barriers. In this study, it was associated this approach with high-performance firms, and discovered that the perception, risk-taking and decision-making mechanisms of these firms worked in result-oriented manner. In that regard, it was observed that high-performance firms collaborate with their managers who have knowledge specific to a market in the course of decision-making with regard to their activities abroad. As a result, the determinant in decision-making process in high-performance firms is mostly attributed to the one who has specific information in the field rather than to the person who is the head. On the other hand, it was seen a more "Centralized" behavior in perception, risk-taking and decision-making mechanisms of low-performance firms. This study defines central behavior as the determinant of the fact that low-performance firms act in a way to retain the rights of making decisions for achieving goals.

It was observed that low-performance firms follow a centralized decision-making method in low levels or high levels, and the top management tend to retain the authority of decision-making within their powers beyond anything. It is suggested that this tendency arise out of the fact that in most family companies, there is insufficient team works in international activities, and there is the desire to engage in export or the need to retain the control.

#### *3.1.4. Customer relations capabilities*

It was generally observed that although firms render different services in foreign markets, they are similar in terms of the importance they put on customers and behavior they exhibit in this matter. Brouthers and Bamossy (2006) discovered that successful international partnerships can be achieved by both official and social mechanisms. Although there is not an exact agreement on which mechanism is essentially more dominant, the cases where these two are intricate were mostly encountered. It was also observed that firms basically enter into collaboration in order to exchange information (Grant, R. M., 1996b), (Grant, R. M. and C. Baden Fuller, 2004). The awareness of high-performance firms in this study on the fact that the reflections of their relations with their business partners on accessing market and competitors information, customer feedback about products, developing new products for the market and on other matters suggests that these relations constitutes one of an important drives of firms' export works. Efficient use of high-performance firms' skills to develop relations for their business partners and for incident helps firms to overcome the barriers existing in the market.

As a result of this situation, the quality of the relations that high-performance firms establish with their business partners and the response they give to their expectations are effective in appearance of some unforeseen opportunities. It was discovered that especially the satisfaction obtained as a result of the service provided creates positive references for high-performance firms. On the other hand, low-performance firms develop relations with their business partners while at the same time these relations remains superficial and cannot be used for the goal which as a result restricts access to information, and leaves firms alone in the market. This situation is attributed to low-performance firms' acting in a Situational manner. Especially taking into account that the information obtained from business partners makes great contributions to the development of the firms, failure to manage relations properly will result in a situation, which prevents low-performance firms from accessing a large amount of important information.

As a result, Result-oriented approaches of high-performance firms indicate that they pay attention to establish and sustain relations with customers or business partners in a manner, which will support long-term information exchange. Situational approaches of low-performance firms on the other hand suggest that the relations generally remain superficial and basic benefits of information functions cannot be obtained.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study generally suggest that looking through firms' resource use up to their marketing capabilities, use of informational and financial resource intermingles with management and customer relations capabilities. At the same time, it shows the effect of these factors on export performance for succeeding in different levels in international markets.

*As the initial analysis of our research with regard to our questions for use of informational resources, successful management of mechanisms of accessing to market and competitor information and using these information has positive effects on the export performance was discovered. From this viewpoint, firms' result oriented behavior in accessing and using information will activate the dynamics within the firm and will cause the information obtained to be used to increase export performance. The fact that low-performance firms act according to the situation without pursuing a goal creates chaos and ambiguity in accessing and use of information. Therefore, lack of information causes failure to see the entirety of the market, which at the same time can distract firms from possible opportunities.*

*With regard to the use of financial resource which composes the second part of the research*, it was observed cases where high-performance firms do not refrain from using their resources for export activities which are homogeneously geared toward their goals, and they act in a more planned way, and their performance monitoring depends on the results. High-performance firms, which are active in markets abroad, have the main goal of integrating into markets and transforming the information they gained into strategies, which aim growth. Low-performance firms on the other hand opt for using resources depending on the situation. The most important reason behind this practice is described as the attempt to use limited resources optimally, and the fact that situational spending due to lack of information is wide of the mark was reflected in the long-term as spending which produce no outcome or spending which creates temporary outcomes.

*With regard to the use of management capabilities, which compose another part of this paper*, it was observed that management approach of firms which have high export perception showed more open and sensitive approaches to the export market stimuli and barriers. In that regard, findings obtained in connection with management practices of high-performance firms showed that firms employ a series of mechanisms in decision-making process work in a result-oriented manner in collaboration with managers who are well-versed in the field. On the contrary, focal firms, which have low-performance pursue central management mode, and they retain decision-making rights with the focal firm.

*With regard to the use of customer relation capabilities*, another important data obtained in this study is the fact that relations established with the foreign business partners have great significance. These relations may be connected with the type of partnership and rates of the international performance achieved. Yet, considering their possible effects on the performance, it was observed that the information obtained from business partners contributes a lot to the development of firms. Nevertheless, as the distinction between social and official dimensions of these relations is insufficient, information-based perspective was used in order to clarify this insufficiency. Information-based perspective is actually adopted by high-performance firms in their relations, and the information obtained is efficiently used to satisfy customer expectations.

#### *4.1. Restrictions and recommendations for future research*

In this study, as firms refrained from sharing some of their valuable information during data collection process, convenience sampling method was used to access firms and obtain information more conveniently. Thus, to what extent the findings could be extrapolated when using other methods or selecting different scale of firms remains ambiguous. Nevertheless, firms with similar management type described here can perform a more efficient management on their international activities but this requires also assessment by empirical methods.

Moreover, considering opinions, expectations and performances of foreign business partners, one can get a more general view of the subject matter of the research. In this way, the research can be furthered by also taking into account the standpoint of the international business partner. Furthermore, it is possible to carry out a more detailed study by adding different marketing capabilities into this study. As a result, the effect of future analyses on international performance can include other variables. This performance can also be analyzed with parameters originating in local and foreign country concepts as much as with organizational environment of firms. Considering along with other variables, a comprehensive research similar to this will contribute in order to discover to what extent management mechanisms enrich firms' performance in international markets.

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