THE DETERMINANTS OF THE EXPORT PERFORMANCE:
AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FORCES
INTO TAIWAN'S ELECTRONICS EXPORTERS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to explore why some Taiwan's electronics exporters have better export performance than others and to investigate both internal and external forces affecting the export performance. The comprehensive empirical study initially applied the viewpoint of the joint influence of environment, organization, and strategy in international business and the internal and external forces affecting the export performance and to search out the appropriate match between these factors that best facilitates the Taiwan's electronics exporters and examine which factors are important to export performance. There were totally 13 factors affecting the export performance by this research including both internal forces and external forces. Internal forces include firm characteristics, firm competencies, managerial characteristics, product characteristics and export marketing strategy, and external forces include industry characteristics, export market characteristics, and government export assistance. In this empirical investigation which seeks to provide insights into the internal and external forces and to examine all factors affecting the export performance by simple and multiple regression analysis. Empirical tests of the hypotheses were conducted using mail questionnaire and follow-up call interviews data collected from 200 Taiwan's electronics exporters. The sample was selected form a list of Taiwan's electronics exporters included in TEEMA (Taiwan Electrical and Electronics Manufacturers' Association 2000 – 2001). The sampling selection used a stratified systematic process. Data was analyzed using simple and multiple regression analysis. The statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 9.01 was used in this analysis.

The results of hypotheses testing were firm's size, level of export involvement, firm experience, firm commitment, firm export perceptions, product characteristics, export marketing strategies, and industry characteristics. The findings of this study can help both exporters and government sector plan the appropriate strategies in improving the exporter competition advantage to copy with the challenges for enhancing the exporter export performance

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INTRODUCTION

The economic development in Taiwan in recent years is regarded throughout the world as a model for developing countries. Its economic growth rate has been a miracle, and its brilliant accomplishments have been confirmed by renowned international economists. Recently, the economic environment in Taiwan faces changes. The severe handicap for Taiwan's expansion has been the lace of formal diplomatic relations with many of the developed countries of the world. The unfavorable trade imbalance with Japan has also been expanding with negative affect upon Taiwan's foreign trade. Protectionism has become a very serious threat from overseas markets for Taiwanese exporters, and competition in the market is getting much more difficult than before. Incomes have also been rising quickly and Taiwan is no longer a cheap wage area by comparison with some other developing countries. In addition, after China's economic reform, the export-oriented sector was aggressive for growth and is competing with Taiwan's exports'. Taiwan's electronics manufacturers must learn how to compete more advantageously in international markets which are turning increasingly competitive and enhancing their export performance.

In order to achieve the objective of increasing export performance, their success does not depend on any single factor whether advantageous environment, correct strategy or appropriate structure. The present study explores why some Taiwanese electronics exporters had better export performance than others, it also examines the determinants of export performance by analyzing the internal and external forces of the exporters (Aaby & Slater, 1989; Cavusgil & Zou, 1994; Zou & Stan, 1998). The degree of coalignment of these forces affects the results of export performance (Porter, 1980).

Problem Background

Taiwan is a small country with a population of only 23 million people, its influence up on the world has been much grater than its size, which has considerably more importance on the world electronics manufacturing and trading activities than most other countries. Recent figures show Taiwan to be the world's 19th largest economy, the gross national product in 1999 came to US\$ 290.8 billion, and it is also the 12th biggest exporter of electronics manufactured products. Taiwan has transformed itself from a wholly agricultural society to a leader in the group of newly developing country. Taiwan's economy is based on manufacturing and trading. It performed remarkably well in the 1980s and is continuing to grow at about 7 percent annually. Taiwan has gained wide attention as one of the most dynamic economies within the Asian region. Together with Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea, it is one of the 'Four Tigers' or New Industrialized Countries (NICs) that have achieved impressive economic results.

Taiwan natural resources are scarce and most raw materials and critical industrial equipment have to bought from other countries. What has made the Taiwan economy prosperous? The economic development of Taiwan in the past decades has been regarded as a model for developing countries? The only answer is exporting. Exporting has been one of the fastest growing economic activities consistently exceeding the rate of growth in world economic output over the past two decades (IMF, 1995). Over the years, exporting has been identified as one of the major activities in Taiwan's business operation, it plays a vital role in Taiwan's economic affairs and development.

Now, one severe handicap for Taiwan's export expansion has been the lace of formal diplomatic relations with many of the developed countries of the world, only 29 countries now keep official diplomatic relation with Taiwan. Notwithstanding, this Taiwan's export market now embraces more than 150 countries. It may be odd

that numerous countries have no official diplomatic tie with Taiwan. nevertheless. they continue to increase their trade with the country. Taiwan's exporters have to improve their effort to keep going under high global competition around the world market.

Recently. the economic environment in Taiwan has undergone tremendous changes. Unfavorable trade imbalances with Japan have been expanding rapidly for many years. causing very negative effects upon Taiwan's foreign trade. Thirdly. the protectionism has become a very serious threat from overseas markets to Taiwan exporter. and competition in the market is getting much difficult than before. Taiwan must face the reality that direct and indirect trade barriers have been imposed to restrict foreign goods and to protect domestic markets.

Fourthly. Income has been rising quickly and Taiwan's labor cost and operation overhead are not longer cheap by comparison with some other developing countries. Finally. after China's economic reform. the export-sector is aggressing. China has succeeded in this effort because of competition in the export sector. constant improvement in export incentives. openness to foreign traders and it is competing with Taiwan directly (The world bank. 1992). Consequently. Taiwan's electronics manufacturer must learn how to compete more advantageously in international markets. In this period of high instability. Taiwan's electronics manufacturer must seek out new overseas markets and develop appropriate strategies to cope with these challenges in order to enhance export performance.

Exports plays a predominant role in Taiwan's economic development. The electronics industry is Taiwan's most important industrial category and the role of the government is crucial in its development. In order to explore why some Taiwanese electronics exporters have better export performance than others. and to examine the determinants of export performance. the resent research attempts to examine the relationship between environment. strategy. firm characteristics and the managerial characteristics of the firms engaged in export marketing and their export performance. Export performance can be conceptualized as a strategic response by management to the interplay of internal and external forces (Cavusgil & Zou. 1994). The internal forces relate to organizational characteristics such as firm characteristics. product characteristics. and type of management. and the external forces include industry characteristics. export market characteristics. and government supporting relationships. The degree of coalignment of these forces with the strategy of the firm determines the results of export performance. in line with the strategy-environment coalignment principle (Porter. 1980).

Literature Review

A number of studies have sought to identify what makes some exporters successful and others not. One of the most important measures is export performance. and many studies have researched the determinants of export performance. Over time. seven board groups of determinants of export performance have been identified. They can be conceptualized as a strategic response by management to the interplay of internal and external forces (Cavusgil & Zou. 1994). The internal forces relate to organizational characteristics such as firm characteristics (Cavusgil & Zou. 1994: Cooper & Kleinschmidt. 1985). firm competencies (Aaby & Slater. 1989: Naidu & Prasad. 1994). managerial characteristics (Aaby & Slater. 1989: Axinn. 1988: and Madsen. 1994). product characteristics (Cavusgil & Zou. 1994: Cooper & Kleinschmidt. 1985: and McGuinness & Little. 1981). and export marketing strategy (Aaby & Slater. 1989: Cavusgil & Zou. 1994: Cooper & Kleinschmidt. 1985: Koh & Robicheaux. 1988: Madsen. 1989: and Samiee & Walters. 1990). The external forces include industry characteristics (Ayal & Raban. 1987: Cauvsgil & Zou. 1994: and Ito & Pucik. 1993). export market characteristics

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(Cauvsgil & Zou, 1994; Kaynak & Kuan. 1993) and Government export supporting (Crick & Czinkota. 1995: Dauglas, 1996; and Weaver, Berkowitz, & Davies, 1998). The degree of coalignment of these forces with the strategy of the firm determines the results of the export performance (Porter, 1990).

Export performance has been a central role in the study of international business and export marketing. Cavusgil and Zou (1994) defined export performance as the extent to which a firm's objectives, both economic and strategic with respect to exporting a product into a foreign market, are achieved through planning and execution of export marketing. Export performance has been measured by a myriad of indicators. including export sales, export growth. export profitability, export market share, attainment of export goals, export intensity, and perceived success, among others (Zou, Taylor. Osland, & Gregory, 1998). The most commonly used measures have been export sales, intensity exports as a percent of total sales, and growth as the trend in export sales.

The literature review of theories of export performance is a review of empirical studies of export performance at the firm level. The issue considered in the present, the review is the impact of different factors on firms' export performance. Five theoretical models refering to export performance are reviewed were in: Cooper & Kleinschmidt .1985: Aaby & Slater. 1989: Walters & Samiee,1990: Cavusgil . & Zou, 1994: and Naidu & Prasad, 1994.

Cooper and Kleinschmidt (1985) developed a strategic model where export performance of a firm is a function of the direct and interaction effects of the nature of the firm. nature of the markets and the industry, and especially the firms' export strategy. This research addressed the export performance as affected by the export strategy, the types of foreign markets selected, segmentation strategies and product strategies are a pronounced impact on export sales and export growth.

Aaby and Slater (1989) attempted excellent effort to review and synthesize the export performance literature between 1978 and 1988. They identified a wide range of variables associated with a firm's success factors in exporting, and defined two board categories of independent variables: environment parameters outside the firm's influence, and managerial factors. The latter span: 1.) firm characteristics: 2.) strategy: and 3.) firm competencies that increase the effectiveness of export strategy. Their strategic export model proposed direct relationships between both competencies and strategy, and performance. and indirect relationship between firm characteristics and performance. with strategy as an intervening variable. The weaknesses in their review seemed to be limited to the management influences, which left out the external environment.

Walters and Samiee (1990) presented a model that integrates the concepts of export strategy, export commitment, and administrative arrangements as critical variables affecting the firm's export performance. The linkages between administrative arrangement in the firm. export related organizational structures and processes and export success have been identified, the results of their research indicated that the export strategy variables. management commitment. and administrative arrangements are important for export performance.

Cavusgil and Zou (1994) made an important research contribution in order to overcome the weakness in previous reviews and focused on export performance by including both internal and external determinants of export performance. They suggested that exporting can be conceptualized as a strategic response by management to the interplay of internal and external forces. Internal forces relate to organizational characteristics such as firm and product, and external forces include industry and export market characteristics.

The strategic management models also consider strategy and resources as factors which are firm-

specific that exert influence on performance. Naidu and Prasad (1991) presented a conceptual framework for export development strategy and performance. They note that a firm's resources and competencies exert a major influence on a firm's export development strategy, which in turn, in interacts with the international marketing environment, leading to performance.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study was to explore the reason why some of Taiwan's electronics exporters have a better export performance than others. This study seeks to explore and describe some answers and to learn whether export performance varies in accordance with the interplay of internal and external forces in the firm.

Research Questions and Research Hypotheses

The following are the research problem of the present study:

1. What is the relationship between the firm characteristics of Taiwan's electronics exporters and their export performance?

2. What is the relationship between the firm competencies of Taiwan's electronics exporters and their export performance?

3. What is the relationship between the managerial characteristics of Taiwan's electronics exporters and their export performance?

4. What is the relationship between the product characteristics of Taiwan's electronics exporters and their export performance?

5. What is the relationship between the export marketing strategy of Taiwan's electronics exporters and their export performance?

6. What is the relationship between the industry characteristics of Taiwan's electronics exporters and their export performance?

7. What is the relationship between the export market characteristics of Taiwan's electronics exporters and their export performance?

8. What is the relationship between Taiwan government export assistance and Taiwan's electronics exporters' export performance?

Hypotheses

H1a: There is no relationship between the size of firms and the export performance of Taiwan's electronics exporters.

H1b: There is no relationship between the export involvement of firms and the export performance of Taiwan's electronics exporters.

H1c: There is no relationship between the export experience of firms and the export performance of Taiwan's electronics exporters.

H2: There is no relationship between the competencies of firms and the export performance of Taiwan's electronics exporters.

H3a: There is no relationship between firms' motivations to export and the export performance of Taiwan's electronics exporters.

H3b: There is no relationship between firms' export commitments and the export performance of Taiwan's electronics exporters.

H3c: There is no relationship between firms' export perceptions and the export performance of Taiwan's electronics exporters.

H3d: There is no relationship between the personal characteristics of managers of firms and the export performance of Taiwan's electronics exporters.

H4: There is no relationship between the product characteristics of firms and the export performance of Taiwan's electronics exporters.

H5: There is no relationship between the export marketing strategy of firms and the export performance of Taiwan's electronics exporters.

H6: There is no relationship between the industry characteristics of firms and the export performance of Taiwan's electronics exporters.

H7: There is no relationship between the export market characteristics of firms and the export performance of Taiwan's electronics exporters.

H8: There is no relationship between Taiwan government export assistance programs and the export performance of Taiwan'
s electronics exporters.

Limitations/Delimitations

It must be acknowledged that the focus on electronics exporters in this study raises questions about the generalizability of the results. The generalization of the findings from this study was limited to simple groups. Although a lot of effort was put into ensuring the generalizability of the research results, a few other limitations in this study must be acknowledged.

A significant limitation of this study is the Taiwanese society, which is very Chinese and very conservative. The society impacts on the survey may be significant at the return rates and unusable rates. The mail survey for Taiwan's electronics exporters have been followed by 100% follow-up telephone calls. but the return rates is still around 35%.

Since questionnaires were delivered by mail, some respondents, puzzled by doubtful questions. might not have enough time to communicate further. This uncertainly might have influenced the exactness of their answers. In order to try to overcome this difficulty. a pretest was conducted with the questionnaire in order to simply and clarify the formal questionnaire.

In addition, the respondents might be export department managers who could been busy with their business operations. This limitation might have resulted in a low respondent rate which again might have generated a bias in the statistical analysis. Besides. the respondents might not have been managers of their exporting departments, and this could create some bias for data analysis. The results may also limited by the personal perceptions of the person who answered the questionnaire have been.

There was also a possibility that the questionnaire was too long and that the respondents felt bored in answering the questionnaire. The topic of this research might have too mood and objects investigated too wide so that this research lacked depth.

Finally, as was mentioned, the range of this study was limited to Taiwan's electronics exporters. and electronics products, according to the product classifications form TEEMA. The results may not be generalized beyond this group.

Research Design

The intent of this study was to investigate the export performance of Taiwan's electronics exporters. the objectives of the research design were to make the research samples representative of the research population despite the costs and research constraints involved by classifying firms into various groups based on their major exporting products.

The research population in this study consisted of those electronics products manufacturers listed in a membership directory gathered and published by the TEEMA (Taiwan Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers' Association 2000-2001) engaged in exporting for at least one year. The sampling frame used to select participants was derived from TEEMA's membership list. There are 15 product categories in TEEMA's listing. 8 categories for electric products. and 7 categories for electronics products. the sample size of 550 electronics exporters (about 20%) were chosen from 2.733 electronics exporters of TEEMA's registered firms using a stratified sample method to select the sample.

The subjects of this study were randomly selected from the membership of the Taiwan Electrical and Electronic Manufacturers' Association, regardless of the

size of firm, the number of employees, age of the company, total sales of the company and so forth. Management level positions (top managers or exporting managers), involved in electronics and electronics manufacturers, were selected as the respondents.

The research instrument here was designed to obtain information specially needed to conduct this study and to measure the variables listed in the three sections of the research hypotheses. The questionnaire utilized in this study was developed by the researcher to successfully achieve the main objectives of this study.

Validity and Reliability

In order to improve the effectiveness of the measurement instrument, content validity and reliability tests of the Chinese version of the questionnaire were conducted. The content validity of a measuring instrument is the extent to which it provides adequate coverage of the topic under study (Cooper & Schindler, 1998; Emory, 1985). It focuses on the adequacy with which the domain of the characteristic is captured by the measure (Churchill, 1991). The content validity index (CVI), the ratio of items given a rating of quite or very relevant (Waltz, Strickland, & Lenz, 1991), of this questionnaire was calculated and showed an 85 % agreement, which means that these two experts agreed on 85 % of the questionnaire, and this 85% was considered enough to ensure the validity on the content of the questionnaire (Chandprapalert, 1999).

This pre-test was conducted in order to establish the reliability of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was pre-tested at three stages. First, the dissertation committee members from the university of Sarasota, knowledgeable of the literature and the process of questionnaire design, reviewed the questionnaire and commented on its clarity. Second the questionnaire has been reviewed for its clarity and relevance by many experts in the field. Finally, the Chinese questionnaire which was performed by discussing it with a group of 21 exporting managers selected by systematic sampling from Taiwan's electronics exporters to conduct the pilot test. This pre-test permitted checking for possible misunderstandings and to examine reactions to the questionnaire. This sampling process helped insure the similarity of the subjects in the pre-test and actual research study.

Following the pre-test with subjects, an internal consistency reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of each sub-scale was calculated using the SPSS statistical processing package. In the pre-test, the results from the Cronbach Alpha showed each section of questionnaire had relatively high coefficient alphas around 0.87. The score of the fourteen constructs were 0.7050, 0.7280, 0.6715, 0.8704, 0.8728, 0.8732, 0.8728 0.8729, 0.8729, 0.8729, 0.8728, 0.8727, 0.8731, and 0.8734 (Table 1)

Table 1

The Consistency Reliability of Pre-test Study

Sub-Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Export Performance	1	0.7050
Firm Size	2	0.7280
Export Involvement	1	0.6715
Export Experience	1	0.8704
Firm Competencies	4	0.8728
Export Motivation	5	0.8732
Export Commitment	2	0.8728
Export Perception	3	0.8729
Personal Characteristics of Managers	4	0.8729
Product Characteristics	6	0.8729
Export Marketing Strategy	4	0.8728
Industry Characteristics	3	0.8727
Export Market Characteristics	5	0.8731
Government Export Assistance	3	0.8734

The data was collected using a mailed questionnaire and follow-up personal calls to export marketing managers who were involved in the exporting operations of exporters. The four-page questionnaire was pre-tested with experts and non-experts to check primarily for the wording and understanding of this research study. The follow-up personal calls interviews were used in order to get a higher response rate for this research study.

Data Processing and Analysis

The SPSS software package was utilized to analyze the data. Frequency distributions and percentages of categorical data were calculated for each variable. Table 4 shows the statistical techniques that were used to analyze the variables. The data was analyzed by multiple linear regression analysis.

Research Findings

Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of export performance, and was used to determine whether the internal and external forces were useful in explaining the export performance of the firms in the sample. Export sales was the measures of export performance. The firm size, export involvement, export experience, firm competencies, export motivation, export commitment, export perception, personal characteristics of manager, product characteristics, export market strategy, industry characteristics, export market characteristics, and government export assistance were used as independent variables in the multiple regression equation in order to find the most predictive variables for export performance. The regression equation for predicting the export performance was:

Predicting Export Performance = 5.406 + 0.314 (Firm Size) + 0.228 (Export Involvement) + 3.394 (Export Experience) + 2.239 (Firm Competencies) - 12.150 (Export Motivation) + 15.129 (Export Commitment) + 11.517 (Export Perception) + 6.357 (Personal Characteristics of Manager) - 20.176 (Product Characteristics) - 27.148 (Export Market Strategy) + 19.853 (Industry Characteristics) - 3.498 (Export Market Characteristics) + 8.597 (Government Export Assistance).

The multiple regression equation was highly significant (F = 24.540, p = 0.000), with an R square of 0.636 and on adjusted R square of 0.610. Table 23 shows the results of the multiple regression, which includes all regression coefficients, the standard betas, t values, and each p values. The most predictive variables when all variables were considered together were the size of the firm, export involvement, and export experience which were the most statistically significant variables in the regression equation (significant t = 0.000).

Table 2
Summary of the Multiple Regression Analysis

R = 0.797

R square = 0.63

Adjusted R square = 0.610

Standard Error = 69.8021

Analysis of Variance

	Sum of Square	DF	Mean	F	Sig. F
Regression	1554394.3	13	119568.79	24.540	0.000
Residual	891636.28	183	4837.329		
Total	2446030.6	196			

Variable in Equation

Variable	B	SE B	Standardized Beta	t	Sig
Firm Size	0.314	0.027	0.064	11.532	0.000
Export Involvement	0.228	0.062	0.178	3.672	0.000
Export Experience	3.394	0.731	0.233	4.643	0.000
Firm Competencies	2.239	5.631	0.019	0.398	0.691
Export Motivation	-12.150	12.258	-0.057	-0.991	0.323
Export Commitment	15.129	7.478	0.107	2.023	0.045
Export Perception	11.517	12.170	0.065	0.946	0.026
Personal characteristics of Manager	6.357	9.661	0.037	0.658	0.511
Product Characteristics	-20.176	11.679	-0.095	-1.728	0.036
Export Marketing Strategy	-27.148	13.756	-0.131	-1.974	0.049
Industry Characteristics	19.853	9.786	0.133	2.029	0.044
Export Market Characteristics	-3.498	9.345	-0.021	-0.374	0.709
Government Export Assistance	8.597	6.713	0.072	1.281	0.202

Discussion of the Results

Based on the results of the simple regression and multiple regression analysis, the findings showed that firm size, export involvement, export experience, expert commitment, export perception, product characteristics, export marketing strategy, and industry characteristics have a direct impact on export performance. The results revealed that export performance stemmed from relationships with many different factors. Neither operation environment, firm managerial characteristics, nor export marketing strategy acting alone could sufficiently explain the differences in export performance.

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