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Explaining International Expansion Through Export-Venture Market Orientation: A Perspective of Resource-Advantage Theory of Competition

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Abstract

The present study aims to examine the role of market orientation as an international partnership property. This property, labeled export-venture market orientation, is at the inter-firm level and is related to the new market development (NMD) activities of export-ventures. Specifically, this article is to define the export-venture market orientation; to argue that it is a major factor in NMD export-venture success; and to argue that the resource-advantage (R-A) theory of competition can provide a theoretical foundation for this concept and explain its contribution to export-ventures' international expansion success. This manuscript is conceptual in approach. In their efforts to strengthen relationships, export-ventures may tend to focus so much time on the partnership factors that they miss market opportunities. As a spanning process, NMD should be informed by both external and internal activities. In an export-venture, market orientation helps guide NMD activities from outside to inside and vice versa. As a dynamic and disequilibrium provoking process, the R-A theory can theoretically ground the concept of export-venture market orientation and explain its role in NMD export-venture success. The current study contributes to business marketing theory in three ways: it extends the concept of intra-organizational market orientation to an inter-organizational context; contributes to understanding the role of idiosyncratic resources in export-ventures; and theoretically explains the concept of export-venture market orientation. The present study is the first to extend the concept of market orientation into inter-organizational NMD framework and to examine the role of export-venture market orientation in NMD export-venture success.

Keywords: Export-Ventures, Idiosyncratic Resources, Market Orientation, New Market Development, Resource Management
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Ⅰ. Introduction

New market development (hereinafter referred to as NMD) has been considered the engine of economic growth. For firms in business markets, it is often viewed as the nexus of competition. Although NMD is considered a central way to develop a competitive advantage in markets, reports show that there is a significant gap between the spending on NMD and the results of such spending (Business Week, 2008). Major factors responsible for this gap are the growing complexity and costliness of developing new products, the uncertainty inherent in research and development, and the globalization of industries (Rindfleisch and Moorman, 2001; Sivadas and Dwyer, 2000; Spekman et al., 1999). Therefore, many firms are working across organizational boundaries to develop export-ventures that will reduce the inherent risk associated with NMD. Indeed, NMD export-ventures are becoming a major business model in a wide range of industries.

Nevertheless, many collaborative NMD projects fail to meet the overall performance objectives of their respective NMD export-ventures (Duysters and de Man, 2007). This manuscript posits: (1) a new concept, "export-venture market orientation" can contribute to explaining NMD export-venture success and (2) the R-A theory of competition can ground —that is, provide a theoretical foundation for —this new concept.

At the outset, NMD requires the use of knowledge assets in a dynamic environment. Therefore, as one of the most prominent research streams in knowledge-based asset strategies, market orientation has focused on the generation, dissemination, and utilization of market intelligence by firms (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Slater and Narver, 1995). Likewise, note that, by entering strategic export-ventures to develop new products, export-venture partners concern themselves with obtaining information on the environment (e.g. markets, competition, regulations), engaging in a high-degree of interorganizational information exchange, and making long term decisions (Rindfleisch and Moorman, 2001). Indeed, market orientation's stressing of inter-functional coordination at the organizational level appears to be morphing into a boundaryless activity that highlights inter-firm, inter-functional activities (Johnson et al., 2004; Mason et al., 2006). Therefore, it would seem relevant to consider the market orientation of an export-venture as a potential explanation of the performance of export-ventures' NMD efforts.

Although there has been a growing interest in examining market orientation from a partnership perspective, researchers usually examine market orientation as a single firm's property, rather than an inter-firm partnership property (the works of Elg, 2002, and Grunert et al., 2005, are notable exceptions). Indeed, given the importance of the role of market orientation in firms' innovation activities, it is surprising to find a dearth of research on understanding the dynamics between market orientation in export-ventures and export-ventures' NMD initiatives.

Because the marketing literature has paid little attention to the role of inter-organizational market orientation in NMD and innovation contexts, a major objective of this article is to take an initial step toward a systematic understanding of the export-venture market orientation concept in export-ventures' new product development success. To examine this concept and its contribution to export-ventures' new product development success, we will use the interdisciplinary theory of competition, resource-advantage (hereinafter referred to as R-A) theory, as a theoretical foundation. First, we will discuss the concept of export-venture market orientation. Then, we will provide an overview of the pedigree and structure of R-A theory, before discussing how R-A theory can theoretically ground export-venture market orientation and explain its role in export-ventures' new product development success. Finally, we provide implications for marketing theory and practice.

Ⅱ. Conceptual Framework of Export-Venture Market Orientation

Exchange is a fundamental concept in marketing research. export-venture market orientationng others, more than two decades ago, Hunt (1983, p. 9) posited that "the primary focus of marketing is the exchange relationship". This exchange-based research tradition has informed many inquiries in the domain of inter-organizational relationships, such as the relations between buyers and suppliers (Cannon and Homburg, 2001; Jap and Ganesan, 2000), manufacturers and distributors (Anderson and Narus, 1990; Morgan and Hunt, 1994), service providers and clients (Heide and John, 1988; Moorman et al., 1992), and strategic export-ventures (Kandemir et al., 2006; Luo et al., 2007; Rindfleisch and Moorman, 2001; Vyas et al., 1995). In general terms, inter-organizational relations are regarded as a basis for success in business-to-business markets because they are major determinants of competitive advantage (Gulati, 1999; Hunt, 1997; Hunt et al., 2006; Jap, 1999).

The present study focuses on strategic business export-ventures. An export-venture is defined as the collaborative efforts between two or more firms in which the firms pool their resources in an effort to achieve mutually compatible goals that they could not achieve easily alone (Lambe et al., 2002). Although business export-ventures have been formed for distribution, product bundling, marketing, and other purposes, this article focuses on examining the factors of export-venture success associated with NMD. Although prior studies have incorporated the individual firm's market orientation and investigated its potential effect on firms' NMD success, they have generally ignored the possibility of the concept of export-venture market orientation and its potential effect on inter-organizational NMD success. The paucity of academic research on what we refer to as export-venture market orientation is surprising, because, as Spekman et al. (1999) highlight, there is a notable shift to a more market focused view of export-venture activity in business practice.

Three closely related frameworks have been the foundation for much of market orientation. research: The behavioral perspective (Narver and Slater, 1990), the process-driven perspective (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990), and the system perspective (Becker and Homburg, 1999). Although these perspectives have their differences, marketing researchers have noted that there is a fair amount of conceptual and operational overlap as well (Avlonitis and Gounaris, 1997; Cadogan and Diamantopoulos, 1995; Helfert et al., 2002). The underlying concepts and activities that these three frameworks share

are the understanding of customer wants, the inter-departmental integration and dissemination of intelligence within the firm, and the importance of taking decisive action in response to market opportunities (Noble et al., 2002). We take as points of departure the definitions of market orientation by Kohli et al. (1993) and Narver and Slater (1990) for two reasons. First, Kohli et al.'s (1993) conceptualization of market orientation expands the focus on the market, not just customers, which is an essential ingredient of cooperative product development efforts (Littler and Leverick, 1995). Second, Narver and Slater's (1990) conceptualization is based on three behavioral components (i.e. customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination), and it captures specific behavioral activities of NMD export-ventures (Littler and Leverick, 1995; Perks, 2000; Spekman et al., 1999).

In this manuscript, the conceptualization of export-venture market orientation does not strive to redefine market orientation, but rather attempts to explicate the understanding of how the cooperative, market-oriented behaviors of an export-venture might be used to drive its NMD strategy. We conceptualize export-venture market orientation as a collaborative effort. An export-venture market orientation concept can be supported by Granovetter's (1994) "embeddedness" argument which informs an institutional stream of research that focuses on the role of networks in the economy and the rise of export-ventures and network competition.

Ⅲ. Grounding Theory

In today's complex business environment, many firms collaborate to compete (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Some of these collaborations are able to survive the competitive environment, and some of them are not. Why? Why is there such performance diversity among business export-ventures? Why are some export-ventures, but not others, able to develop creative new products? These business phenomena call for an explanation.

Theories explain and predict. Indeed, "Any construction that purports to be a theory must be capable of explaining and predicting real-world phenomena" Hunt (2002, p. 195). In our case, one should expect that a theory of competition should satisfactorily explain the phenomenon of export-venture performance diversity. As an interdisciplinary theory of competition, resource-advantage theory (R-A theory), developed in Hunt (2000) and Hunt and Morgan (1995, 1996, 1997), shares affinities with diverse theories, research programs, and traditions, such as evolutionary economics, Austrian economics, heterogeneous demand theory, differential advantage theory, resource-based theory, competence based theory, and socio-economics and institutional theory.

First, R-A theory traces to evolutionary economics, which maintains that competition is not consummatory and equilibrium provoking, but that rather it is disequilibrium provoking and process-oriented (Dosi and Nelson, 1994). It is this process of competition that brings creative destruction and accelerates economic growth and productivity (Schumpeter, 1934). Second, Austrian economics views competition as a knowledge discovery process, which means that firms learn through competition as a result of feedback from their financial performances (Mises, 1920). Third, heterogeneous demand theory argues that demand in the overwhelming majority of industries is substantially heterogeneous; therefore, different market offerings are required for different market segments in the same industry (Alderson, 1965, Chamberlin, 1933). Fourth, differential advantage theory asserts that competition is dynamic and firms struggle with each other for advantages. Firms can have either an efficiency advantage (more efficiently producing value) or an effectiveness advantage (efficiently producing more value) or both (more efficiently producing more value) (Alderson, 1965; Clark, 1961; Porter, 1985). Fifth, resource based theory views resources as the tangible and intangible entities available to firms that enable them to produce market offerings that have value for segments. Further it asserts that the successful firms that are able to sustain their performance have not only heterogeneous resources, but also have resources that are not able to be duplicated or imitated precisely by competitor firms (Barney, 1991; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990; Schoemaker and Amit, 1994). Sixth, competence based theory explains how firms develop strategies to effectively and efficiently deploy resources. This theory argues that competition is an ongoing and dynamic process, with the goal of superior financial performance as the major driver of the dynamics nature of competition. Since all competing firms cannot be simultaneously superior in financial performance, competition among firms stimulates both proactive and reactive innovations (Day and Nedungandi, 1994; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990; Teece and Pisano, 1994). Finally, institutional theory recognizes that societal institutions can be independent variables in analyses of competition that can cause changes in economic outcomes (Etzioni, 1988; Granovetter, 1994; Uzzi, 1996). Thereby, they can influence the process of competition, productivity, and economic growth. Indeed, as Hunt (2000) argues in detail, societal institutions that promote trust contribute to wealth creation.

Although R-A theory draws from and shares affinities with several research traditions and theories, it is not simply a composite of these theories. Rather, it draws only on those aspects of the research traditions that fit. R-A theory views competition as a disequilibrium provoking, evolutionary, and never-ending process. In R-A theory, firms and their resources are the hereditary units of evolutionary selection, and it is the process of competition that selects firms and resources. R-A theory defines the process of competition as "the constant struggle among firms for comparative advantages in resources that will yield marketplace positions of competitive advantage for some market segment(s) and, thereby, superior financial performance" (Hunt, 2000, p. 135). R-A theory emphasizes the importance of firms' market segments due to differences in consumers' tastes and preferences. It also stresses the importance of comparative advantages/disadvantages in resources, and the respective marketplace positions of competitive advantages/disadvantages.

The R-A theory views firms as combiners of heterogeneous and imperfectly mobile resources, under conditions of imperfect and costly information, with the primary objective superior financial performance. Due to the heterogeneity and immobility of resources, R-A theory focuses on comparative advantages in resources among organizations. Some firms will have comparative advantages in resources that are available to them, which enable them to effectively and efficiently produce particular market offering(s) that have value for particular market segment(s). When firms have comparative advantages/disadvantages in resources, they will occupy marketplace positions of competitive advantage/disadvantage that will result superior/inferior financial performance.

Furthermore, how well the process of competition fosters productivity and economic growth is significantly influenced by several environmental factors (e.g. the societal resources, the societal institutions, competitors and suppliers, consumers, and public policy decisions). Depending on the level of a firm's relative resource-produced value for some segments and its level of relative resource costs for producing such value, it will either occupy an advantageous, disadvantageous, or indeterminate position, which would in turn affect its financial position.

Ⅳ. Propositional Development

For a theory of competition to provide a theoretical foundation for the concept of export-venture market orientation and its contribution to export-ventures' innovation efforts, the theory must admit at least the possibility that market-oriented relationships among autonomous firms in strategic export-ventures can allow them to be more competitive and, thereby, enhance competition (Hunt, 1997; Powell and Smith-Doerr, 1994). It is posited that market-oriented export-ventures-those export-ventures that jointly gather, coordinate, disseminate, and use market intelligence-are more likely to have a competitive advantage in terms of new product development success than their competitors who are not market oriented. In this argument, we assume that, though NMD export-ventures are common, a market-oriented NMD export-venture is unique, and it may have specific characteristics that are rare, causally ambiguous, highly interconnected, and tacit. Therefore, it may be very challenging for competitors to acquire, duplicate, or find its satisfactory substitutes in the marketplace. What is required for a theory of competition to ground export-venture market orientation is that the theory must be capable of explaining its unique, heterogeneous, and imperfect mobility resource nature. This is precisely what—as an interdisciplinary, integrative theory of competition—the R-A theory does. Our reasoning follows.

First, consistent with the resource-based view of the firm, R-A theory broadens the concept of resources. Resources are defined as the tangible and intangible entities available to the firm that enable it to produce efficiently and/or effectively a market offering that has value for some market segment(s) (Hunt, 2000). The R-A theory categorizes resources as financial, physical, legal, human, organizational, informational, and relational ones. Note that the definition maintains that resources need not be owned by firms, but just be available to them.

It is posited that export-venture market orientation is both an informational and relational resource. It is an informational resource because export-venture market orientation is conceptualized as an export-venture's knowledge-based asset strategy. Indeed, it is about gathering market intelligence, disseminating this intelligence through inter-organizational coordination, and efficiently and effectively responding to the intelligence coordinated and disseminated.

R-A theory posits that investments in informational resources will be undertaken by firms when they expect such investments to contribute to their ability to produce market offerings efficiently/effectively, which may lead to a competitive advantage. As maintained in the market orientation literature, "companies that are better equipped to respond to market requirements and anticipate changing conditions are expected to enjoy long-run competitive advantage and superior profitability" (Day, 1994, p. 37). Therefore, business export-ventures that focus on markets will be investing in their informational resources. Since there are differences in the history of export-ventures with respect to the investments in market-related informational resources, it is expected that these export-venture resources will in some ways be unique to such export-ventures. Furthermore, these informational resources may be tacit, complex, socially created, and embedded deeply into the nature of the export-ventures. Therefore, It is posited that export-venture market orientation is a relational resource because the process of collaboration across organizational boundaries can contribute to export-venture partners' ability to efficiently and/or effectively produce a market offering that has value for some market segment(s). Briefly, export-venture market orientation is a relational resource that is heterogeneous and immobile. Consequently, since export-venture market orientation is posited to be a relational and informational resource, it has the capability of resulting in a marketplace position of competitive advantage, and thereby, earning superior financial performance for the export-venture in the long run.

Second, we conceptualize export-venture market orientation as an idiosyncratic resource, that is, it is created by the export-venture. Idiosyncratic, inter-firm, relationship-specific resources uniquely support the export-venture partners' relationships and can further the export-venture's goals (Williamson, 1985). Idiosyncratic resources can be tangible (e.g. joint manufacturing facility) or intangible (e.g. efficient collaboration process), and nonfungible. The R-A theory supports the view that export-venture market orientation is a collaborative effort, and therefore "makes possible the integration of the partner firms' individual resources, that is, it allows export-ventures to extract the competitive advantage potential from the combination of the partner firms' respective resources" (Lambe et al., 2002, p. 144). Due to the unique, rare, causally ambiguous, highly interconnected, tacit, and time compressed nature of export-venture market orientation, It is posited, competitors will likely find it difficult to acquire, duplicate, or find its substitutes in the marketplace. Therefore, sustainable competitive advantage may result as the direct payoff of an export-venture's market orientation efforts.

Although R-A theory supports the view that sustainability of a competitive advantage of a resource is derived from its being unique, rare, causally ambiguous, highly interconnected, and tacit, this does not mean that members of the dyad cannot form structurally similar inter-organizational arrangements with other firms. However, the specifics of market-oriented export-ventures vary, making this idiosyncratic resource difficult to duplicate precisely. Therefore, sustainable competitive advantage may result as a direct payoff of the idiosyncratic nature of export-venture's market orientation efforts. In summary, because the

R-A theory admits export-venture market orientation as a relational and informational resource, and it also views export-venture market orientation as a significantly immobile and heterogeneous idiosyncratic resource, it can theoretically ground export-venture market orientation. Indeed, the R-A theory supports the claim that export-venture market orientation can be considered to be a higher-order, socially complex, and interconnected combination of tangible and intangible resources. The combination enables an export-venture to efficiently/effectively produce a creative new product such that the characteristics of the product are close to the customer constellation of desirable attributes.

Ⅴ. Discussion

Now consider the phenomenon of NMD export-venture performance diversity. Is the concept of export-venture market orientation capable of explaining and predicting it? How can the current article contribute to business marketing theory? This article contributes to business marketing theory in three ways.

First, this article begins the development of export-venture market orientation as a key inter-organizational construct. Although a number of researchers point to the importance of market orientation in inter-organizational relationships, there is no systematic work to date on market orientation and its role in “expanding the size of the pie” between partner firms (Jap, 1999). Second, as a dynamic and disequilibrium provoking process, the R-A theory of competition can theoretically ground the concept of export-venture market orientation. It contributes to our understanding of why some NMD export-ventures are able to develop products that are close to consumers’ constellations of desirable attributes. The R-A theory explains that it is because of the export-venture market orientation’s idiosyncratic, heterogeneous, and significantly immobile nature that only 30 percent of innovation export-ventures

attain positions of competitive advantage that persevere through time and result in sustained superior performance. Therefore, the R-A theory can both theoretically ground export-venture market orientation and provide insights to develop it further. Third, by conceptualizing export-venture market orientation as an idiosyncratic resource (Lambe et al., 2002), this article also contributes to understanding the role of idiosyncratic resources in export-ventures. As a non-fungible resource, export-venture market orientation is an incentive and motivation to develop and maintain the relationships between partner firms (Williamson, 1985).

What are the implications of export-venture market orientation to export-ventures? How can it contribute to their export-venture’s NMD activities? In terms of business marketing practice, this article suggests a number of implications that enable export-venture participants to increase the efficacy of their collaborative NMD efforts. It is well known that NMD is a knowledge-based asset strategy (Moorman and Miner, 1997). Therefore, it includes knowing the market, sharing the market-related information organization-wide and acting on it in a collaborative manner. It is posited in this article that innovations developed in export-ventures should have things in common with innovations that are successfully developed internally. Having a market focus is one of these commonalities. It is posited that some NMD export-ventures fail because they become concerned excessively with their interorganizational relationships, per se, rather than maintaining a focus on the realities of their markets, which must always be the central concern of the NMD process. It is posited that export- ventures should integrate their internal processes (e.g. meeting with partners, coordinating NMD activities) with their external market intelligence (e.g. customer needs/wants, competitors' actions, new regulations). As Day (1994) points out, NMD as a spanning process should be informed by both external and internal activities, and this ought to be done in both intra-organizational and inter-organizational NMD activities.

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