

CHAPTER 3

MODERN MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGIES

THE INFLUENCE OF MANAGERS' MARKETING CAPABILITIES AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE ON SMES' EXPORT PERFORMANCE: THE MEDIATING EFFECTS OF EXPORT COMMITMENT

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Abstract. *Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) increasingly need to develop their business by entering international markets. SME's managers' international experience as a basis for decision-making, their commitment to exports, striving to obtain information from new markets and the optimal use of resources can help raise these companies' productivity in international activities and improve their export performance. The purpose of this study was to look at the direct and indirect effects of SMEs managers' marketing capabilities and international experience on SMEs' export performance, as well as the mediating roles of managers' export commitment. The interested population of this study included senior, marketing, and sales managers of 39 SMEs in Iran, of which 244 people participated in this study. The data collection tool was a questionnaire whose validity was confirmed by experts and its reliability was confirmed by calculating Cronbach's alpha. Data analysis was performed by SPSS-22 software and research hypothesis were tested by Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) technique using AMOS software. According to the findings, managers' marketing capabilities have a significant and positive impact on their export commitment and performance, and managers' international experience has a strong and positive effect on their export commitment and performance. Meanwhile, in the indirect relation between managers' marketing capabilities and international experience and export performance, managers' commitment plays a mediating role.*

Keywords: *export performance; international experience; marketing capabilities; internationalization; commitment; small and medium sized enterprises.*

JEL Classification: *C40, F19, O11*

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Introduction. SMEs significantly contribute to the economic growth of several countries by increasing their share in GDP, reducing unemployment rate, and improving people's welfare (Blankson, Cowan, & Darley, 2017). During the last decades, SMEs have had charming chances to enter international markets owing to the depletion of business hedges, high-tech communication facilities, and the expansion in mutual governmental agreements (Zaki, 2019). Effective decision-making is important for managers of companies operating in the markets. This means that they must consider the best way to implement performance enhancement strategies by targeting overseas customers (Yang and Gabrielsson, 2017). Exporting is known as the oldest form and the first foreign markets entry mode that SMEs managers think about when they are in the primary stage of their development (Leonidou et al., 2010). Export is a beneficial strategic option for the internationalisation of companies and concurrently, it is still the most popular way to enter foreign markets. Compared to other methods of direct entry into foreign markets; exporting resources involves less risk and cost (Leonidou et al., 2010) in

turn, provides companies with a high degree of flexibility and is a quick and cost-efficient way to quickly penetrate new foreign markets (Sousa et al., 2008). Lin and Ho (2019) are of the opinion that some companies can internationalise just through exports. Based on the resource-based view, export performance is understood as the outcome which managers expected from their company's capabilities (Ricciardi et al., 2018). Export performance refers to achieving the company's goals concerning exporting. Therefore, it can be said that this concept, considering a wide range of strategic and marketing goals, refers to the company's evaluation of its export activities. As a consequence, it is obvious that how export performance has been conceptualized and measured varies greatly in different kinds of literature (Citing Paula Monteiro et al., 2019).

Nowadays, the process of internationalisation is increasingly emphasised regarding managers' experience and commitment. Issues such as being the first to seize opportunities and learn about them through various tools enable companies to quickly become international, regardless of perceived distance from other potential countries (Calvo and Villarreal, 2019). Different decision-makers vary in their commitment concerning foreign markets and make use of different resources along with different capabilities such as knowledge, experience, and networks to facilitate internationalisation in specific ways (Lages et al., 2008). For instance, via the knowledge and experience of current and new decision-makers, communications, external resources such as access to various communities, and export promotion programs (Crick et al., 2020). The export market orientation enables the company to explore emerging opportunities and discover the competencies in the product market to promote export performance (Sundqvist et al., 2012). Additionally, for companies to have a sustainable competitive advantage and to perform better internationalisation, they must also develop capabilities that are appropriate for international market environments. SMEs should find niche markets, adapt themselves to these markets, and/or develop new products that are appropriate for exporting. Along with these marketing activities, exporters need to delineate pricing strategies, select proper distribution channels as well as set suitable promotional activities. An exporter is afforded all these through its marketing capabilities (citing Acikdilli et al, 2020). Recognition of the determinants of export performance and how companies are able to use their ability to be more productive in satisfying the consumers' demands and strengthen their international competitive advantages in comparison with their competitors has always been debated (Monteiro et al., 2019). Katsikeas et al. (2000), Leonidou et al. (2002), Sousa et al. (2008), Leonidou et al. (2010), Mysen (2013), and Chen et al. (2016) are scholars who have provided studies regarding the determinants of export performance.

Due to the expansion of SMEs in Iran, there is the ability and potential that in addition to meeting the demands of domestic markets, in various fields to seek to enter the markets of other countries. A large volume of Iran's exports and GDP is the sale of oil, gas, and minerals, and since these resources are non-refundable, it is necessary to pay special attention to the capabilities of manufacturing companies, so that this country can reap the benefits from the huge export revenues. This issue

requires the adoption of export-oriented policies and the need for SMEs to increase their marketing capabilities and identify target markets and the needs of their customers, as well as improve their experience and knowledge in the international arena that can effectively be present in foreign markets. However, the percentage of presence of SMEs in Iran in foreign countries and exports is limited and most of their focus is on the domestic market. Accordingly, it is necessary for these firms to find ways to develop their capabilities to have an effective role in the market of other countries.

Literature review. Export success is determined by the alignment between export strategies and the context of the marketing environment (Katsikeas et al., 2006). Moreover, some studies identify that export performance is affected by companies' marketing strategies (Chen et al., 2016). Consequently, it can be assumed a positive correlation between performance in international markets and adaptation of individuals, processes, programs, and performance to the needs and expectations of foreign consumers (citing Ngo-Thi-Ngoc et al., 2021). Capabilities must be dynamic in all markets, which means the firm must have the capability to renovate competencies to continually ensure consistency between the business and strategy environment. Recent studies have concentrated on dynamic capabilities as a sustainable resource of competitive advantage (Fernandes et al., 2017).

Most scholars are of the belief that managerial approaches and cognitions affect a company's exports (Sousa et al., 2008). Zou and Stan (1998), in their research, realise that managers' commitment to exports is remarkably associated with export Performance. In this sense, the theory of the internationalisation process suggests that the gradual acquisition of knowledge brings a greater commitment to exports and a superior Export Performance (Welch et al., 2016). Consequently, companies that commit more tangible and intangible resources to export activities are more successful in this company (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994). Leonidou et al. (1998), suggested a managerial features structure and their relationships with the tendency, aggressiveness, performance, and export development. Previous studies and literature demonstrate the manager's export experience as one of the most important determinants of export performance (Love et al., 2016). Evidence shows that SMEs witness a wide variety of issues that potentially lead to uncertainty and hedge to their export (Altintas et al., 2007). On the other hand, managers' export experience has been considered as an important and determining factor in reducing the level of these uncertainties in export processes and activities. By increasing exporting experience, companies are probably facing uncertainty during their exporting process. The theoretical explanation of this issue is that the relationship between manager's export experience and performance is mainly based on concepts such as learning and uncertainty (Forsgren, 2002). The more experienced export managers are, the more inclined they will be to export. Learning through export experience could help companies and their managers to develop their capabilities while enabling them to better understand foreign markets and come up with effective strategies for achieving high-level export performance (Johanson et al., 2009).

Recently, Love and Mariez (2019) state that all previous actions and activities abroad may have contributed to the continuation of the subsequent export activities of the respective companies, although partial and intermittent learning due to the scattered export pattern may affect this. In summary, export experience is an important ability that has shaped the positive attitude of decision-makers towards internationalisation, and this can lead to their commitment to foreign markets (citing Sraha et al., 2020). Sraha et al. (2020) in their research conducted at the level of international companies in Ghana with a business-to-business approach have concluded that the export experience has not a significant direct impact on export performance, but it has a significant and positive effect on commitment, and at the same time, there is a significant relationship between commitment and performance. Commitment fully mediates the relations between international experience and performance of exporting. Sinkovics et al. (2018) in their research conducted at the level of small and medium-sized companies active in the field of export in the United Kingdom have concluded that international experience and commitment have a striking and affirmative impression on export performance. Mahmoud et al. (2020) in a study conducted at 210 companies active in the field of export with a history of using social media in Ghana have found that the ability to market directly and with respect to the mediating role of trust and commitment has an impressive impact on export performance and there is a positive relationship between them. Machado et al. (2018) in their research conducted at the level of SMEs in Brazil have also concluded that the commitment to export has a significant and positive effect on the export performance of the company and in the research conducted by Ismail et al. (2017) performed at the level of SMEs in Malaysia also shows that commitment is directly related to export performance. Acikdilli et al. (2020) in their research conducted by companies active in the field of export in Turkey have concluded that marketing capabilities in the field of product development, pricing, distribution, and advertising have a significant and positive effect on export performance.

Export Performance. Export performance refers to the success or failure of companies in the field of domestic products and services sold in other countries. According to Cavusgil & Zou (1994), companies have started their export activities and actions to achieve specific goals, which can be strategic or economic. Companies' economic goals are associated with increased profits or sales, while strategic goals include indicators such as market diversity, improving the company's market share or the company's brand reputation (citing Hossain et al., 2021). In this regard, the export performance of SMEs is one of the primary indicators of the company's ability and talent to develop its resources and capabilities in the global arena and a tool to create company value (Cadogan et al., 2016) which in turn will lead to more organisational benefits in the form of upgrading the company's production scale and exercising more control over the distribution of products and services (Peng, 2003). Accordingly, export performance can be considered as a structure that provides a good basis for assessing the level of the overall success of the company in foreign markets (Ural, 2009). This action or process based on the development of a company's actions and activities to new foreign markets is generally associated with high levels of risk and

requires companies to offer unique products to the market and at the same time use new strategies to maintain their position and expand their activities in these markets (citing Robb et al., 2020).

Export performance can be measured based on different organisational levels such as company, country, market, export investment portfolio, and production line (Diamantopoulos and Kakkos, 2007). However, most studies have attempted to base their analysis on firm-level analysis (Hult et al., 2008). Some researchers argue that while it may make sense for large organisations to consider other levels, the firm level is particularly appropriate for SMEs, given the smaller size of the business, so measures and actions mean that other sub-levels cannot create accurate and correct insights and perceptions about the company's performance (Oliveira and Cadogan, 2018). Styles (1998) argues that SMEs seek to use aggregate assessments at the firm level because smaller firms have less ability to differentiate the performance of a particular export action as the total export performance or even the entire performance of the company (citing Sadeghi et al., 2021).

Marketing Capabilities. The capability and ability of an organisation are based on its strategy in the market and are accompanied by the identification of its distinctive features and capabilities (Ghauri et al., 2011). Khan (2013) defines organisational and managerial capabilities as activities and actions resulting from a combination of insight and organisational structure that help a company to perform better than its competitors. Capabilities include a set of skills and knowledge that enable companies and their managers to use the internal resources in a sustainable and profitable way and achieve their goals (Andrews et al., 2015). There are several ways to enhance a company's capabilities that are debatable in the terms of components such as business assets (efficiency, scope, and scale, financial condition, brand equity, location), business capabilities (skills and knowledge, ability to do business), core competencies and partnerships (scope and support, multiple business lines) and specific capabilities (excellence in the integration of management, knowledge and learning development) (Cited by Karedza and Govender, 2020).

Marketing capability has been used as a market knowledge management process at different organisational levels, which includes the integration of low-level and high-level knowledge to increase the marketing value of the organisation (Morgan et al., 2018). In general, according to the resource-based view perspective, an organisation's competitive advantage and maintaining profitability, in the long term, depends on the proper use of its resources and capabilities (Haapanen et al., 2016). Similarly, other marketing studies have been conducted in connection with the identification of resources and capabilities in organisational processes to support benchmarking for marketing (Santos-Vijande et al., 2013). In addition, the knowledge-based approach emphasises the principle that the marketing capabilities defined for operating in the domestic market are not sufficient to operate in the process of overseas operations, and rarely a company can derive very specific knowledge management capabilities from a Transfer the applied business unit to another operational unit (cited by Hoque et al., 2021). In a general context, according to Khan (2013), the company's resources include all assets, capabilities,

competencies, reputation, organisational processes, company characteristics, information, knowledge, and other understandable items and strategies that consequently will help to improve the productivity of the company in exporting and is considered as a competitive advantage (Othman et al., 2015). Studies by Morgan et al. (2012) and Murray et al. (2011) show the positive impact of marketing capabilities (such as product, price, distribution, marketing communications, sales, market information management, marketing planning, and execution) on export performance (citing Acikdilli et al., 2020).

Hypothesis (1): Managers' marketing capabilities have a significant and positive effect on SMEs' export performance.

Hypothesis (2): Managers' marketing capabilities have a significant and positive effect on managers' export commitment.

International Experience. Export experience is considered as the main factor in reducing export uncertainty, and according to the evidence, with increasing export experience, companies are more likely to witness conditions based on less uncertainty in their export activities (Sinkovics et al., 2018). Export knowledge and experience is essential to enter international markets (Okpara, 2010). Export knowledge includes ancillary knowledge available to potential exporters in the field of export, knowledge of export market benefits, knowledge of potential markets, availability of skilled and experienced, or trained workforce for export markets, and knowledge of market entry options for export (Okpara, 2010). Having a better understanding of the foreign market helps a company's position in that market. Export knowledge and experience helps a company identify changes in products that lead to greater acceptance and sales (He et al., 2012). If a company's knowledge of foreign markets is insufficient, the process of internationalisation becomes problematic and they may even fail (Sui & Baum, 2014, citing Abban, 2020).

The level of international experience influences the company's decision to choose how to enter international markets. Companies with less international experience are more likely to experience difficulties in managing their activities in foreign markets, and it is expected that such companies will not have the necessary skills and resources to enter and access multiple foreign markets. Accordingly, they are expected to simply select one strategy and focus their efforts in foreign markets on using the methods that have the highest potential for maximum profit and best returns (citing Lin and Ho, 2019). The experience of internationalisation of corporate executives is either based on personal experience or as a result of being hired and working for international companies (Hewerdine & Welch, 2013). Overall, it is accepted that the international experience of company owners affects the speed of internationalisation of a company, and companies whose founders have professional experience abroad or have studied abroad will probably become international very soon. By reducing management's perception of the risks and inherent conditions based on the uncertainty of internationalisation, prior knowledge accelerates the decision to internationalise (Knight & Liesch, 2016; citing De Cock et al., 2020). In general, an international experience determines marketing strategies and enables managers to offer products and services in an international environment by a

continuous commitment to export that meets the needs of the market and customers that finally leads to a high level of export performance (citing Ali et al., 2020).

Hypothesis (3): Managers' international experience has a significant and positive effect on exp SMEs' export performance.

Hypothesis (4): Managers' international experience has a striking and affirmative impact on Managers' export commitment.

Export Commitment. Uppsala Internationalisation Model Process emphasises a company's knowledge of foreign markets and management commitment to these markets. This model assumes that management's high commitment to allocating resources to markets depends on their empirical knowledge of exports. Commitment to export was considered a key concept in the social sciences in the 1960s. This concept is widely studied in various other fields and disciplines (Papadopoulos & Martin, 2010) and is one of the components that emphasise the characteristics of attitude (Sousa et al., 2008) and explains the difference in sales of export companies. Export management commitment can be defined as the general tendency to pursue export market opportunities, avoid international threats, and implement and implement effective marketing strategies that improve export success (Julian & Nhat, 2007). When a company's management or leadership is committed to exports, it is likely to work hard, make special efforts, and regularly allocate production, technical, financial, marketing, and human resources to related activities (Stoian et al., 2011). One of the components that can have a positive and significant impact on the export performance of companies is the commitment to exports. Commitment to export indicates the desire of the company's management to start taking effective and efficient measures actively, which can be interpreted as improving the company's performance. Commitment to export in a company is based on creating a suitable structure to interact with all activities in the field of export and ensuring the travel of company managers to other countries on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, Companies must ensure that adequate budgets are provided for the development of the company's export activities and foreign markets entry, and at the same time, companies must be required to learn about the export procedure, know about export-related matters, and have sufficient knowledge that exists in this field. All these activities indicate that a company has given high priority to its managers' export commitments, which will ultimately lead to the improvement of the company's export performance (Afriyie, 2019). In general, the company's commitment to exports is referred to in various ways, including export commitment, senior management commitment, or managerial commitment (Lages & Montgomery, 2001). Managers' commitment to exports, regardless of performance dimensions, has become one of the main determinants of export performance (Lages et al., 2008).

Hypothesis (5): Managers' export commitment has an effectual influence on SMEs' export performance.

Furthermore, commitment constitutes an important mediating variable that mediates the success of any long-term relational exchange. In other words, commitment is essential for generating outcomes that promote efficiency, and effectiveness at the same time. Commitment defined as the partner's belief in the

significance of the exchange relationship and the exchange partner's enthusiasm to attempt to preserve it (Wang et al., 2015). Likewise, commitment in international marketing is usually defined in terms of managers' enthusiasm to dedicate resources to improve export performance (citing Mahmoud et al., 2020). Increasing commitment is critical to the success of exporters (Leonidou et al., 2014), and although many have argued for a meaningful and direct relationship between commitment and performance (Barnes et al., 2015), there is evidence that this relationship is not always direct and the commitment to influence export performance interacts with other contextual variables such as marketing capabilities (Obadia et al., 2017) and can provide the basis for their impact on export performance (citing Mahmoud et al., 2020).

Hypothesis (6): Managers' export commitment plays a mediating role in the relation between managers' marketing capabilities and SMEs' export performance.

Hypothesis (7): Managers' export commitment has mediated the relations between managers' international experience and SMEs' export performance.

Research's Conceptual Model. In the conceptual model of this research, four variables are considered in which managers' marketing capabilities with communication and information components as an independent variable, managers' international experience as an independent variable, managers' commitment as a mediating variable and export performance as a dependent variable. All relationships in the conceptual model have been theoretically validated according to the research background as well as scientific documentation.

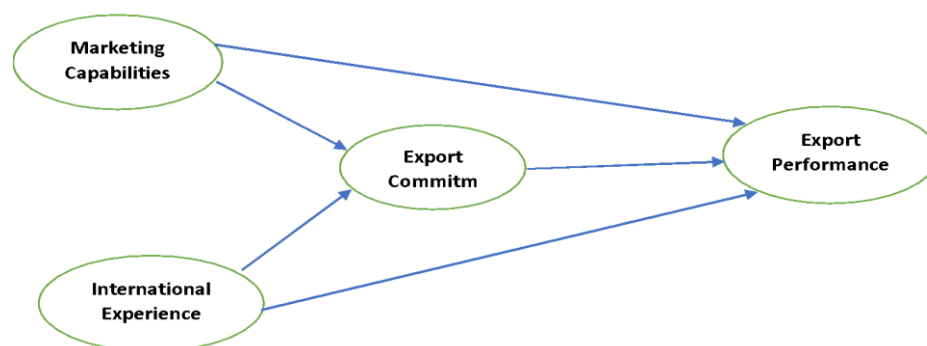


Figure 1. Structural Model

Source: develop by author

Methods. This research has been descriptive-analytical and survey through the distribution of questionnaires and testing of hypotheses. Accordingly, its purpose is to examine the impact of marketing capabilities and international experience on export performance directly and with respect to the mediating role of commitment. The results and findings can be used by managers and decision makers of the study community and other SMEs in Iran and other countries in the field to apply effective marketing policies to communicate with customers and obtain information from them and improve the level of international knowledge and experience, as well as awareness of the importance of adhering to commitments and allocating the necessary resources for exports. In terms of purpose, it is practical, although, this research is done by collecting data and information in a period of 4 months in a cross-sectional manner and finally due to the study of the bilateral relationship between

variables and considering the type of research questions were studied by correlation method.

Statistical Population. The statistical population of this research includes senior managers, marketing, and sales managers of SMEs in Iran. The reason for their selection is the type of variables and concepts used in this research that is related to the field of export and the company's activities. The findings of this study can also be a good reference for many companies that are active in the field of export or want to sell their products in other markets beyond their borders to experience the importance of marketing capabilities, awareness as well as having an export commitment to know and improve their performance during this process.

Statistical Sample and Sampling Method. In this study, 244 senior managers, sales, and marketing managers of 39 SMEs in Iran participated. Dean et al. (1995) performed a lot of studies and agreed that 100 to 150 subjects are satisfactory for performing structural equation models. Velicer and Fava (1998) are of the belief that samples of over 200 subjects are suitable for structural equations modelling. Schumacker & Lomax (1996) stated that the number of samples should be between 200 and 500, but social science research samples are always below 200 or more than 500, and when the sample is less than 200, the test power is reduced. (Rigdon, 2005, Song, 2019). It is not unlikely that sampling will not be random because people included in a sample are available and eager to participate in the study (Taduvana, 2017). The sampling method in this study, which has been done at the level of senior managers, marketing, and sales managers of SMEs in Iran, is in a probabilistic and simple random format. Data collection was done in May and June 2021 and the people who participated in this research had the necessary qualifications to answer the questions according to the subject of the research.

Methods and tools of data collection. Information related to each of the variables and research records was collected through library studies (Articles available on the Internet). Moreover, in order to collect data, a questionnaire was used. At first, questions related to the company's Organisation, type of Organisation, amount of international experience, the field of work, number of employees, and demographic information included Gender, age, level of education, job title, and work experience, followed by questions related to each variable and were sent online to the respondents in Persian version. According to Churchill (1999), the data in the questionnaire was reviewed and corrected to ensure the minimum quality of raw data. Then we assigned ordering numbers to data and entered the software. Lost data were removed before further analysis. In this study, a total of 25 questions were asked in which marketing capabilities (relationship, information) in the form of 10 questions, commitment with 4 questions, export performance with 7 questions, and international experience with 4 questions were examined.

The validity of the research tool is initially approved based on the views of the supervisors and in the form of content, and therefore, it can be said that the questionnaire does not have ambiguity and provides the required information.

Table 1. Structure of the Questionnaire

Variable	Component	Variable Type	No. Questions	Reference
Marketing Capabilities	Relational	Independent	1-5	Mahmoud et al., 2020
	Informational		5-10	
Commitment	---	Mediator	11-14	Mahmoud et al., 2020
Export Performance	---	Dependent	15-21	Mahmoud et al., 2020
International Experience	---	Independent	22-25	Sraha et al., 2020

Source: develop by author

Then the Cronbach's alpha test, which assesses the extent to which research questions measure the same characteristics and should be above 0.7. In order to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire of this research, considering the limited number of samples, a pilot study was conducted as a test of a real questionnaire on a small sample of the population in which the research is conducted and 30 questionnaires by senior managers, marketing and sale of managers SMEs in Iran was completed.

Table 2. Primary Cronbach's alpha Values (pilot)

Variable Name	Component	(α)
Marketing Capabilities	Relational	0.91
	Informational	
Commitment	---	0.82
Export Performance	---	0.86
International Experience	---	0.80

Source: develop by author

Analysis Methodology. Collected data were analysed by a covariance-based approach (CV-SEM). SEM is known as a second-generation statistical technique that enables researchers to test causal relationships between latent variables. Anderson and Gerbing (1988) have recommended a two-stage analytical process in which at first the measurement model is examined, and then an assessment of the structural model would be applied (Hair et al., 2014). Here, Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is implemented to test whether each of the measurement items specified loaded significantly on the latent factor, and whether each factor had discriminant validity between the other criteria (Williams et al., 2009). After that, the SEM was used to evaluate the path significance. Based on Preacher and Hayes's (2004) recommendation, we employed a bootstrap analysis to avoid issues of non-normal distribution in our research. Furthermore, Amos24 was used to analyse data with bootstrap on 5,000 samples, containing bias-corrected confidence intervals for all parameters in the model.

Results. In the current research, there are 4 latent variables, which is measured by 25 observed variables. All the four variables of this study, marketing capability, export commitment, international experience and export performance were measured reflectively. The model's quality criteria were assessed following purification: average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) estimates all meet the minimum of 0.7 and 0.5 respectively as recommended by Hair et al. (2017). AVE for international experience was less than 0.50 so, index2 was removed for improvement AVE. The results are shown in Table 3. Moreover, all remaining items' loadings were statistically significant by using bootstrap P-values (5000 sub-samples)

(Tortosa et al., 2009). The results show that the convergent validity is sufficiently satisfied.

Table 3. Scales of variables in the model

Scale Items		Mean	SD	Loading	CR	AVE
Marketing Capability		3.610	0.717	-	0.920	0.543
We have the Ability to create relationships with new clients	Mrca1			0.825		
Our company is able to maintain relationships with new existing clients	Mrca2			0.772		
We use different Facilities and equipment's to be able to effectively communicate with clients	Mrca3			0.451		
We are able to jointly solve problems with clients	Mrca4			0.819		
We are able to achieve targets when negotiating	Mrca5			0.814		
We use different information channels to Facilitate the Identification of prospective customers	Mrca6			0.64		
We use different channels to Facilitate the identification of prospective customers in capturing important market information	Mrca7			0.806		
We use different channels to Facilitate the identification of prospective customer's acquisition of export market related Information	Mrca8			0.803		
We use different channels and platforms to Facilitate the identification of prospective customers to make contacts in the export market	Mrca9			0.81		
We use different channels to Facilitate the identification of prospective customers monitoring competitive products in the export market	Mrca10			0.511		
International Experience		3.585	0.722	-	0.774	0.533
The degree of our professional exporting experience is high	Inex1			0.79		
The degree of our overseas experience-worked or lived abroad is good enough	Inex2			0.551		
We are able to follow up on trade leads	Inex3			0.747		
We have enough experience of operating in many foreign markets	Inex4			0.653		
Export Commitment		3.527	0.726	-	0.813	0.525
Our company desires to devote much time to getting to know our overseas customers.	Exco1			0.797		
This firm will devote the resources essential to grow worthy relationships with foreign customers.	Exco2			0.731		
Activities of this company will be disturbed if we end our relationships with our overseas customers	Exco3			0.569		
We have insufficient choices to consider terminating our relationship with overseas clients.	Exco4			0.779		
Export Performance		3.682	0.751	-	0.904	0.576
We are able to offer lower cost channels for transacting with customers.	Expe1			0.786		
We are able to maintain relationships with overseas customers and access new international markets.	Expe2			0.697		
Our export capabilities enable us to exploit new sources of revenue	Expe3			0.79		
We are able to Reduce operating costs.	Expe4			0.818		
We have competency to offer new services to our existing customers.	Expe5			0.779		
We are able to develop stronger relationships with suppliers and customers	Expe6			0.601		
We are able to introduce new products/services to the international market quickly	Expe7			0.815		

Source: develop by author

The next phase after testing for convergence validity is to test for distinctive validity. Distinctive validity is achieved when the square root of the estimated mean-variance for each of the four structures is bigger than the inter-structural correlation between them as shown in Table 4 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Barclay et al., 1995).

In addition to Fornell and Larcker criteria, discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT 0.85) (Henseler et al., 2009).

The presented outcomes show that none of the correlations exceeded 0.85. This shows that each structure is distinct and different from the other measurement structures in the model, and consequently, the four structural models show distinct validity.

Table 4. Discriminant validity by fornell-larcker criterion

	MRCO	INTEX	EXCOM	EXPER
marketing capability	0.737			
international experience	0.602***	0.73		
export commitment	0.650***	0.681***	0.725	
export performance	0.575***	0.580***	0.674***	0.759

Significance of Correlations: *** $p < 0.001$

Confirming the measurement model by CFA. Reliability and validity check for the data was conducted using CFA and the final result is shown in a graphical manner. The model of this research consists of 4 constructs. Each construct is measured with several observed variables. The observed variables which have less than 0.4 factor loading were removed it cannot be counted as the true representation of the constructs. Only these observed variables with their respective constructs were considered for further analysis.

Table 5. Model fit indices for cfa

Indices	Recommended value	Model fit indices
CMIN/Df	< 3	1.486
P-Value	< 0.05	0.000
GFI	> 0.90	0.891
AGFI	> 0.80	0.867
NFI	> 0.90	0.897
CFI	> 0.90	0.963
RMSEA	< 0.080	0.045

Source: develop by author

All the four constructs are shown to be intercorrelated as shown in figure 2. The summary of model fit indices of CFA is also shown in table 4-6 which complies with the recommended value. As Table 4-6 shows, we can find that the overall model fit indices are admissible in the recommended values provided by the researchers, so it can be concluded that the hypothesised model fits the sample data.

Structural model analysis. After compliance with the validity and reliability check by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the overall fit of the model was estimated through structural equation modelling. First, we need to construct the SEM path diagram based on the theoretical framework. The structural equation model path diagram is shown in figure 3.

The results showed that the chi-square test (χ^2) was significant for model fit ($P = 0.000$). In this study, other fit indices should also be considered. The values of the remaining indices indicate the appropriateness of the data ($\chi^2 = 365.48$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.963, TLI = 0.959, RMSEA = 0.045). These factors provide evidence that the hypothesis model fits well with the data.

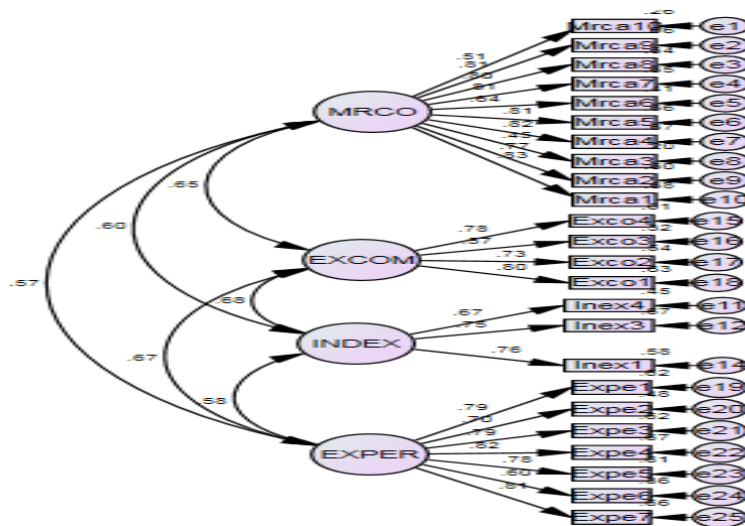


Figure 2. Amos output of the measurement model or CFA – standardised

Source: develop by author

Table 6. Amos CFA output: unstandardised and standardised regression weights

			Estimate*	Estimate**	S.E.	C.R.	P
Mrca9	<---	MRCO	1.462	0.81	0.177	8.249	0.000
Mrca8	<---	MRCO	1.433	0.803	0.174	8.219	0.000
Mrca7	<---	MRCO	1.465	0.805	0.178	8.229	0.000
Mrca6	<---	MRCO	1.187	0.64	0.162	7.316	0.000
Mrca5	<---	MRCO	1.589	0.814	0.192	8.269	0.000
Mrca4	<---	MRCO	1.481	0.819	0.179	8.291	0.000
Mrca3	<---	MRCO	0.881	0.452	0.151	5.838	0.000
Mrca2	<---	MRCO	1.436	0.772	0.178	8.073	0.000
Inex4	<---	INEXP	1.000	0.671			
Inex3	<---	INEXP	1.117	0.755	0.120	9.336	0.000
Inex1	<---	INEXP	1.106	0.762	0.118	9.385	0.000
Exco4	<---	EXCOM	1.000	0.781			
Exco3	<---	EXCOM	0.610	0.567	0.071	8.562	0.000
Exco2	<---	EXCOM	0.907	0.733	0.080	11.303	0.000
Exco1	<---	EXCOM	0.910	0.796	0.074	12.291	0.000
Expe1	<---	EXPER	1.000	0.786			
Expe2	<---	EXPER	0.863	0.696	0.075	11.433	0.000
Expe3	<---	EXPER	0.989	0.791	0.074	13.359	0.000
Expe4	<---	EXPER	1.028	0.819	0.074	13.959	0.000
Expe5	<---	EXPER	0.993	0.779	0.076	13.116	0.000
Expe6	<---	EXPER	0.731	0.601	0.076	9.627	0.000
Expe7	<---	EXPER	1.012	0.815	0.073	13.874	0.000
Mrca1	<---	MRCO	1.542	0.825	0.185	8.319	0.000
Mrca10	<---	MRCO	1.000	0.511			

* Unstandardised

** Standardised

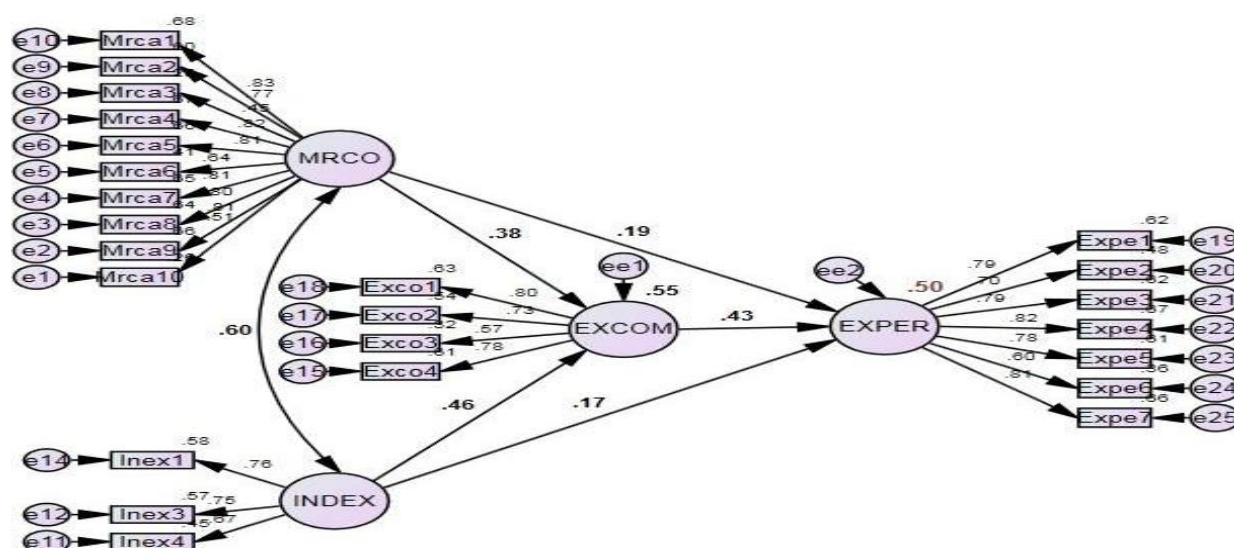


Figure 3. The results of structural equation modelling

Source: develop by author

The outcome of AMOS is given in the tabulated and graphical form as given table 7.

Table 7. Amos sem output: unstandardised and standardised regression weights

			Estimate*	Estimate**	S.E.	C.R.	P
EXCOM	<---	MRCO	.564	0.376	.134	4.212	0.000
EXCOM	<---	INDEX	.550	0.456	.112	4.909	0.000
EXPER	<---	MRCO	.281	0.19	.122	2.307	.021
EXPER	<---	EXCOM	.428	0.434	.102	4.208	0.000
EXPER	<---	INDEX	.203	0.17	.115	1.763	.078

* Unstandardised

** Standardised

Discussion and conclusions. In terms of the path coefficient for testing hypotheses, Hypothesis 1 stated that marketing capabilities are positively and significantly related to export performance. Our results supported this proposition ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.021 < 0.05$). Hypothesis 2 stated that marketing capability is positively and significantly related to export commitment. The data supported this research hypothesis ($\beta = 0.38$, $p = 0.000 < 0.001$). Hypothesis 3 stated that international experience is positively and significantly related to export performance. Our results supported this proposition ($\beta = 0.17$, $p = 0.078 < 0.1$). Hypothesis 4 stated that international experience is positively and significantly related to export commitment. The data supported this research hypothesis ($\beta = 0.46$, $p = 0.000 < 0.001$). Hypothesis 5 states that export commitment has a positive and significant relationship with export performance. The data supported this research hypothesis ($\beta = 0.43$, $p = 0.000 < 0.001$). After examining the direct paths, we will examine the indirect path. We hypothesised that export commitment mediated a positive and significant relationship between marketing capabilities, international experience, and export performance in Hypotheses 6 and 7.

Table 8. Indirect effect

Indirect Path	β	Lower	Upper	P-Value
Marketing Capability \rightarrow Export Commitment \rightarrow Export Performance	0.163***	0.101	0.479	0.001
International Experience \rightarrow Export Commitment \rightarrow Export Performance	0.198***	0.116	0.442	0.001

Significance of Estimate: *** $p < 0.001$

The indirect effect for the indirect path of marketing capability \rightarrow export commitment \rightarrow export performance was $\beta = 0.163$ ($p = 0.001 < 0.001$) therefore, marketing capabilities had a significant effect on export performance indirectly. In other words, marketing capabilities 16.3% indirectly and 19% ($P < 0.05$) directly has a significant effect on export performance. Therefore, it can be seen that between marketing capabilities and export performance, export commitment is a partial mediator. For hypothesis 7, the indirect effect between international experience and export performance through export commitment was $\beta = 0.198$ ($p = 0.001 < 0.001$). Marketing capabilities 19.8% indirectly and 17% ($P < 0.1$) directly have a significant effect on export performance. Therefore, export commitment partially mediates marketing capabilities and export performance relationships.

Table 9. Results of hypotheses

Direct Path	Direct effect	Indirect effect
Marketing Capability \rightarrow Export Performance	0.190*	0.163***
International Experience \rightarrow Export Performance	0.170*	0.198***
Marketing Capability \rightarrow Export Commitment	0.376***	-
International Experience \rightarrow Export Commitment	0.456***	-
Export Commitment \rightarrow Export Performance	0.434***	-

Significance of Estimates: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$

Findings indicate that the export capabilities and international experience as two strategic concepts in boosting the performance of firms in international markets seem to be ubiquitous among SMEs in emerging markets such as Iran too. Though past research suggests SMEs in emerging markets seldom analyse the relationship between them in their marketing activities, these results depict export commitment is used to supplement the marketing activities of these firms. Export as one of the most important (and the first choice) entry modes is always considered by companies; hence, it is necessary for exporting ventures in emerging markets like Iran to empower themselves by the realisation of the profound impact of these factors on their performance while the decision making is in an uncertain situation. Since exporting SMEs in Iran do not have sufficient resources to compete favourably in foreign markets, it is of paramount importance for them to make a decision that ensures their business continuity and resilience in both the local and international environments.

Practical suggestions for managers. According to the research findings that show the impact of marketing capabilities on performance directly and considering the mediating role of commitment, it is recommended to managers of SMEs Iran and other countries, by considering the limited and insufficient capital and financial resources, high level of competition, lack of information flow, import laws in other

countries to establish better communication with customers, looking for communication networks and channels in the destination country could be done in the form of representatives, or agreements with business partners to allow for a physical presence in those markets and direct contact with customers while also being able to respond to market signals. This may be associated with the high costs of maintaining the Representation or entering the market and maintaining the distribution network, but nevertheless higher profitability than other export methods in terms of communication and Acquiring information is more efficient and the risk perception in this method will be lower.

In determining their international market entry strategies, these companies should first examine the appropriateness between their products and services to the needs of the target foreign market and cost-effectiveness, and then the barriers associated with transportation and consider legal requirements, geographical distance between the country of origin and destination, political relations between countries, banking and financial restrictions, cultural compatibility and differences, costs related to the transfer and import of goods to other countries, etc. and choose their entry method by segmenting the target market. Nowadays, due to the growth and development of information and communication technologies and the widespread use of the Internet by people all around the world, it is possible for companies to introduce themselves by creating websites, social networks, and other platforms to pay attention to customers in other countries and at the same time communicate with them and, if necessary, receive their views, comments, and suggestions.

The research results also show that international experience has a significant and positive effect on export performance directly and considering the role of commitment. One of the main challenges for SMEs is the existence of small and often unfamiliar management teams with exports and its rules and requirements, lack of experienced staff so that these companies seek to hire managers with the background of working in the field of the export or living abroad or have export approaches that can be used to gain the most experience. For example, in indirect exports, or direct exports using a foreign broker and representative, despite the low cost and risk, the level of knowledge about foreign markets is low, and international experience is limited; therefore it is better to use the direct export method or uses a representative office or a personal external distribution network or invite specialists and experts at regular intervals to train the employees and sales and marketing managers of these companies in the field of international marketing, to learn about entering the foreign markets, and export affairs.

Suggestions for future research. In this study, a questionnaire was used to collect information and according to the content and concept of the variables in this study, in order to obtain comprehensive and accurate information, it is suggested that researchers use other structured methods such as interviews to know the perspective of the respondents. The suggestion is that a similar study with such a conceptual or structural model with other independent variables at the level of SMEs in other countries be examined or by classifying and clustering industries only on one industry or there is a specific business area of focus. In addition to the variables used

in this study, we suggest that researchers examine the impact of marketing capabilities and export approach to the market on export performance with respect to the role of trust, the impact of experience, and commitment to exports with performance according to the role Internal and external barriers, the direct relationship between social media resources and export performance, or the role of trust and commitment due to the growth and development of social business.

Managing factors (knowledge and skills, self-efficacy, networks, risk-taking, distance, organisational factors (company position and firm commitment to exports) and external factors such as government support for export performance considering the role of strategy, the influence of market approach and learning on export performance with respect to the role of entrepreneurial approach; The impact of company characteristics, knowledge absorption, export organisational structure, communication networks, innovations and entering mode on export performance; And consider the role of factors such as the intensity of competition, government laws, domestic and foreign market conditions as moderators.

Research limitations. The process of distributing the questionnaire was time consuming in itself and due to the crisis of Covid-19, it was impossible to communicate directly with the respondents and the questionnaire was distributed electronically among them. Answering the questions in this research was limited to senior, sales, and marketing managers of SMEs in Iran. Therefore, considering that the perceptions of business owners in companies operating in different regions and countries may be different in terms of marketing capabilities as well as international experience, it is not logical to generalize the research results to all companies.

Participants' responses were limited to the questions assigned to each of the variables. Accordingly, there may be other topics that are more appropriate to explain and interpret each of the variables and are more comprehensive so that people have a better understanding of marketing capabilities, commitment, or international experience, or Some questions may not be related to the work process of some companies and there is a need to ask questions according to the type of industry and their activities. In the conceptual model of this research, variables such as marketing capabilities, international experience, and commitment are considered as factors affecting export performance, though it should be noted that these are not the only factors affecting export performance, and maybe there would be different views on nature and the meanings of each of these variables. The present study was a cross-sectional study and therefore the initial research was conducted on a group of respondents in a specific period. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to conduct a longitudinal study. A longitudinal survey could help to conduct similar surveys with different sets of respondents over a long period of time and make the findings more consistent.

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