Global Scientific JOURNALS

GSJ: Volume 10, Issue 2, February 2022, Online: ISSN 2320-9186

www.globalscientificjournal.com

Firm-Level Determinants of Ethiopian Leather and Leather Manufacturing Factories' Export Performance

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Abstract

Ethiopia's government has made significant efforts to promote the growth of the leather industry. However, leather exports were unable to meet yearly export objectives. This study examined the firm-level determinants of export performances on 15 factories of Ethiopian leather and leather product exporters. It found that firm characteristics, management characteristics and firm export marketing strategic capability were statistically significant predictors of export performance. The findings indicated that several management characteristics, such as export commitment, export barriers and international experiences, are important determinants of export performance and have a positive connection.Similarly export marketing strategic capabilities like Product Development Capability, Pricing Adaptation Capability, Distribution Capability, and Technological Capability which made a statistically significant positive influence/prediction in predicting the dependent variable (export performance) have very strong positive relationship and significantly contribute to predict the export performance. As a result, managers (stewards) and policymakers are advised to concentrate their efforts on improving internal firm-level factors that enhance or boost competitiveness, as well as capacity building programs, in order to ensure better performance of the leather export and enable it to meet its intended objectives.

Key words: *Firm level determinants, firm characteristics, management characteristics, export marketing strategy capability, export performance.*

1. Introduction

In the global context, exporting plays a critical role in the economic development of a country in general, as well as in achieving the commercial and non-commercial goals of the exporting organization in particular. However, exporting businesses encounter very difficult conditions that include both interior and outdoor variables and exporting businesses must be prepared to confront the problems front on. Because of the rising globalization of markets, the quick speed of technical development, and the elimination of government-imposed restrictions, domestic marketers are finding it increasingly difficult to isolate themselves from export markets and international competitors.

Many academics and policymakers have been drawn to the export performance of nations in order to offer their part to the growth of export business in order to accomplish the economic improvement of nations under consideration. Various studies and analyses have indicated that in today's global environment, export performance has become a strategic agenda.

Ethiopia is Africa's second most populous country (115 million people, according to 2019 projections) and has the fastest growing economy in the region.

Export business is one of the top prioritized sector which the Ethiopian government has given serious attention to realize foreign currency, promote investment and as a means for job creation for productive labour force.

In line with the GTP II, it was planned to open new employment opportunities for 336 thousand people inside the leather and leather products up to the phase out the Second Five Year Plan and thereby to record the export gains from USD 131.6 million in 2014/15 to USD 706.five million in 2019/20 (GTP II_ 201516-2019/20) which aspires to increase the export earnings by fivefold.

According to the examination of both plan years, the underperformance in relation to the government's desires is being investigated, and unmet objectives have been reset.

2. Literature Review

Export refers to foreign, marketing-related choices and operations of globally operating businesses.

It varies from other worldwide engagements in that export enterprises do not have control over their overseas activities and must instead export directly or through agents (Shoham, 1998).Exporting is defined as a trade-related foreign market entrance option by Steers and Nordon (2006), with the other varieties being the employment of transfer-related modes (such as franchising and licensing) and foreign direct investment.

According to the World Bank (2014), exports of goods and services comprise the total value of all goods and other market services given to the rest of the world, including the value of products, freight, insurance, transportation, travel, royalties, and license fees.

For businesses, particularly those suffering economic challenges in their home markets, exporting is an enticing foreign market entry and expansion option (Hultman et al., 2009)

Exporting may assist organizations in improving use of production capacity, developing superior management capabilities, and enhancing product and manufacturing process innovation, in addition to boosting financial performance (Piercy et al., 1998; Ural, 2009).

Exporting is often a less "resource-intensive" activity than other foreign market entrance and expansion strategies since it entails less business risk, requires little resource commitment, and offers a high degree of flexibility in movement (Neupert et al., 2006).

Exporting, according to Pawan, Chugan, and Singh (2015), has been one of the world's fastest increasing economic activities, particularly in the last two decades.

It is imperative because it quickens the pace of development, makes unused employments and makes strides living guidelines of the individuals on the macro-level, as well as increments the benefit and competitiveness of the firms at the micro-level.

Intrigued in trading is generally credited to changing financial conditions over the world viz

2.1. Export Performance

Firm export performance is seen as one of the primary measures of a firm's export performance, and as such, it has been widely examined (Beleska-spasova, 2014).

Firm export performance is seen as one of the primary measures of a firm's export performance, and as such, it has been widely examined (Beleska-spasova, 2014).Despite the rising number of research on export performance, there is no universally recognized conceptualization and operationalization of the idea of export performance (Cavusgil and Zou 1994; Shoham 1998).However, certain researchers have provided the most frequent and accepted definition of the idea of export performance.

Export performance, for example, is described by Shoham (1998) as a composite result of a firm's overseas sales, which contains three sub - dimensions: export sales, export profitability, and export growth.

According to Beleska-spasova (2014), the performance of a given firm's export performance indicates the extent to which the firm's objectives, both economic and non-economic, are achieved in an international context at a given point in time, and it reflects the suitability of the chosen export strategy in performance responding to the firm and environmental circumstances.This suggests that achieving effective export performance is at the center of both business and public policy decision-makers' strategic decision-making processes.

Several researches have shown that only managers are aware of the projected outcomes from exporting, making it useless to assess exports apart from management satisfaction with the outcome of exporting operations (Kabagambe, 2010).A firm's export performance shows its distinctive behavior in exploiting its resources and competencies in an international setting at a given point in time.

Several studies have employed a large variety of variables to construct and operationalize export performance measures.The researches have yielded conflicting results on the influence of several variables on export performance, which is inconclusive (Beleska-spasova, 2014).

According to Kabagambe (2010), export level (or volume) is a conventional measure of a firm's overall importance of exports, but export sales growth and profitability are dynamic and critical measures of export performance, respectively.

According to Leonidou et al. (2002), the most often used measurements of export performance are export percent of sales or export intensity, export sales growth, export profit level, export sales volume, export, market share, and export profit contribution.

This means that export performance is diverse and cannot be represented by a single performance indicator, emphasizing the need of using a multidimensional approach when developing the measurement for measuring export performance rather than utilizing single-item measurements (Diamantopoulos, 1998).

Jorge et al. (1988) said that export performance is a complicated and diverse phenomenon to support this claim.

Although numerous broad techniques have been offered, there is still no agreement on how to quantify export performance (e.g. Cavusgil and Zou, 1994; Schlegelmilch and Ross, 1987; Walters and Samiee, 1990 as cited in Zou & Stan, 1998).Despite all theoretical and empirical attempts, little agreement has been found on how to conceive, operationalize, and quantify export performance.

2.2. Measures of Export Performance

Katsikeas et al. (2000) and Sousa (2014) distinguished between objective (obtained from official sources) and subjective measurements of export performance indicators (when it is based on personal experience, rather than based on facts).

Objective measurements are indicators that are primarily based on absolute values, such as export intensity, export sales volume, and export market share, among others.

In contrast, variables that evaluate perceptual or attitudinal performance, such as perceived export performance and happiness with export sales, are regarded as subjective measures of performance (Sousa, 2014).

2.3. Determinants of Export Performance

Sousa et al. (2008) grouped export performance factors into two approaches: the resource-based paradigm, which focuses on the firm's internal determinants, and the contingency paradigm, which focuses on the firm's external determinants.

According to Beleska-spasova (2014), the internal/external division corresponds to the two theoretical frameworks that underpin the majority of empirical research on export performance: the resource-based view of the firm (RBV) and the contingency theory.

The resource-based theory justifies internal determinants, while the industrial organization theory justifies external factors (Stan & Zou, 1998). The resource-based paradigm focuses on the production of competitive advantage via the utilization of a collection of resources, i.e., all of a business's assets, capabilities, organizational processes, firm qualities, information and knowledge, and so on.

Similarly, in several studies (Aaby and Slater, 1989; Chetty and Hamilton, 1993; Katsikeas et al, 2000; Madsen, 1987; Zou and Stan, 1998; Sousa et al., 2008 as cited in Beleska-spasova, 2014), the export performance determinants are viewed as internal, firm-specific influences and external, environmental influences.

2.3.1 Internal Determinants

Internal variables are studied under the assumption that the business's export performance is in the control of the business and its management. According to proponents of the resource-based view (RBV), a corporation's better performance is derived from the utilization of idiosyncratic, immovable strategic resources owned or controlled by the business (Beleska-spasova, 2014).

According to this paradigm, a firm has a unique bundle of tangible and intangible “resources” (assets, capabilities, processes, managerial attributes, information, and knowledge) that it controls and that enable it to devise and implement strategies aimed at improving its efficiency and effectiveness (Barney, 1991).

This suggests that the resource bundles have been classified as tangible and intangible assets. The concrete assets comprised the businesses' technological resources, whereas the intangible assets comprised the managers' knowledge and attitudes toward export activities (subsequently management resources), as well as the businesses' inventive and marketing skills (Haddoud, Nowinski, Jones, & Newbery, 2019).

Over the last 40 years, empirical research has identified and evaluated a number of internal determinants, which are sometimes referred to as managerially controlled variables. Firm characteristics, management characteristics, management attitudes and views, and export strategy are the four major categories. Marketing mix variables, managerial traits, firm specific variables, and export strategy elements are the most commonly listed elements as firm-specific determinants in the export performance literature (Beleska-spasova, 2014). Sousa et al. 2008 has provided a similar classification of internal factors of export performance. Size, age, international experience, export commitment, management viewpoint, export marketing mix approaches, and product attributes are among the internal elements influencing export performance, according to them. Internal and controllable variables, according to Stan and Zou (1998), are classified into two groups. The first category is linked to elements of a firm's export marketing strategy which includes: Product adaptation, product strength, promotion adaptation, promotion intensity, price adaptation, and competitive pricing are some of the most often researched strategy elements. In addition, other elements such as channel linkages, channel type, export planning, and organizational variables have been incorporated in this collection of elements (Zou & Stan, 1998).

The second category is concerned with managerial attitudes and perceptions. Management's worldwide orientation, export commitment, anticipated export benefits, and perceived hurdles to exporting are examples of these (Zou & Stan, 1998).

Several studies, however, have explored managerial qualities as determinants of export performance across several dimensions (Aaby & Slater, 1989; Ibeh,2003; Suárez-Ortega et al.,2005, as referenced in Nazar et al., 2009). To incorporate these disparate factors, Nazar et al. (2009) divided management characteristics into three categories: “attitudinal characteristics,” “skill-based characteristics,” and “behavioral qualities.”

2.3.2 External Determinants

External factors of export performance suggest that a business must adjust to external environment challenges in order to survive and thrive.

The contingency theory, which is based on the structure-conduct-performance framework of industrial organization, lends credence to the external determinants of export performance (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994 cited in Beleska-Spasova, 2014).

According to the contingency paradigm, environmental factors impact the firm's strategy and export performance. The contingency theory method is based on the idea that the firm's performance is affected by environmental/external variables.

It is supported by the structure-conduct-performance (SCP) theory of industrial organization (IO), which states that a firm's competitive intensity is determined by the structural characteristics of the market, and that positional advantage can only be achieved and sustained if the competitive strategy plan is carried out efficiently and effectively. (Morgan et al., 2004; Sousa et al., 2008 cited in Sousa, 2014).

The impacts of various firm characteristics on export performance vary according to the business's unique situation. Contingency theory, according to Cavusgil and Zou (1994), is founded on two premises: (1) that organizations are resource reliant on their surroundings

(Pfeffer and Salancik 1978); and (2) that organizations may manage this dependency by creating and implementing suitable strategies (Hofer and Schendel 1978). Thus, under the contingency paradigm, exporting is viewed as a firm's strategic reaction to the interaction of internal and external forces (Robertson and Chetty 2000; Yeoh and Jeong 1995, as quoted in Sousa and Martnez-lópez, 2008).

External effects are characterized as environment-specific and hence uncontrolled from a managerial standpoint. External factors are broadly classified as industry-specific and market-specific. The industry-specific variables refer to the technical intensity and level of instability of the sector. Factors influencing export performance in local markets differ from those influencing export performance in foreign markets. Due to legal, economic, and cultural differences, the liability of foreignness raises the expense of conducting business overseas (Beleska-Spasova, 2014).

According to Sousa et al. (2008), the external determinants of export performance are those that the business cannot control and that influence the macro-environment of both local and foreign markets.

Furthermore, according to Sousa et al. (2008), no firm functions in a vacuum and must engage with the external environment. Foreign markets present both dangers and possibilities for businesses, which are said to have a major impact on export performance (Sousa et al., 2008).

According to Sousa et al. (2008), no manager can afford to ignore the policies and regulations of the country from which their firm conducts international business because they are more likely to be affected by government regulations and the socio-cultural, legal, and political situation in a country (Sousa et al., 2008).

External environmental factors influencing export management, behavior, and performance include macroeconomic, social, physical, cultural, and political factors.

According to Sousa et al. (2008), these determinants may be divided into: (1) Foreign market features, which include legal laws, cultural (dis)similarity, local business conventions, channel accessibility, and market competition (2) Foreign environmental features, such as cultural (dis)similarity, as well as political and legal issues, (3) Characteristics of the domestic market, such as export aid and environmental aspects.

3. Methods

3.1. Study settings and context

The research setting was in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In accordance with the National Leather Roadmap: Summary Report, January 2019, there were 68 leather and leather products manufacturers and exporters in Ethiopia. From the total, 26 companies produce and export finished leather (16 locally owned and 10 FDI companies), 19 companies produce and export footwear (16 locally owned + 3 FDI), 19 companies produce and export goods and garment production (19 locally owned + 0 FDI) and 4 companies (1 local + 3 FDIs) produce and export glove.

3.2. Study design and participants

The objective of this study was to examine the firm-level determinants of export performance for a sample of Ethiopian Leather and Leather Product Exporters. As a result, the quantitative research approach was best suited to this investigation. A descriptive research design was used in this study.

3.3. Data collection types

This study used a quantitative type of data specifically primary data collected using questionnaire (5-point Likert scale) and the secondary data was analyzed. The primary data were collected from 15 selected leather and leather product exporters companies in Ethiopia.

3.4. Data analysis

In order to analyze the data, SPSS application is used to analyze the data. Using this statistical package, descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were employed. In addition, correlation is used to assess the relationship among variables. Furthermore, in order to assess firm-level determinants of export performance or assess the influence of independent variables (firm-level determinants) on the dependent variable (export performance), multiple linear regression analysis was used.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Before collecting the questionnaire from each firm, the consent of the management is sought. Furthermore, the findings were presented solely in aggregate form using statistical methods, with no particular person or corporate outcome revealed.

4. Result

4.1 Firm-Level Determinants and Export Performance

4.1.1 Firm Capabilities and Competences

It has a substantial influence on predicting the dependent variables from factors classified under business characteristics. The independent factors (firm size and firm competency) had no impact on the dependent variable.

4.1.2 Management characteristics

At the 1% significance level, export commitment and export barriers; at the 5% significance level international experience were the only statistical predictors of export performance.

With a Beta value of 0.607, Export Commitment produced a statistically significant positive prediction to the dependent variable.

This means that Export Barriers were the second most powerful predictor of the criterion variable, export performance. Competitiveness, foreign market research experience, and adaptive selling, on the other hand, were not statistically significant.

4.1.3 Export Marketing Strategic Capability (EMS)

Product Development Capability, Pricing Adaptation Capability, Distribution Capability, and Technological Capability were statistically significant positive influences/predictions in predicting the dependent variable from variables grouped under export marketing strategic capabilities.

Whereas, Export competitiveness, Adaptive Selling, International Market Research, Market Segmenting, Targeting, promotion capability and Marketing Strategy Roadmap, on the other hand, had no statistically significant impact on predicting the criterion variable, export performance ($p < 0.05$).

5. Discussion of Results

Management characteristics, firm competencies and capabilities, and export marketing strategies are among the factors considered in the firm-level determinants of export performance. Firm-level export performance determinants were shown to have a strong connection with export performance.

5.1 Firm Competencies and Capabilities and Export Performance

Firm capabilities and characteristics correlated positively and significantly with export performance. This means that the premise that firm competences and capabilities have a strong association with export performance is supported.

This conclusion was validated by studies that examined reported satisfaction with export profitability and organizational competences and capabilities (White, 1998; Stoian, 2011).

Similarly, the conclusion that firm competence has a substantial positive connection with export performance is consistent with the findings of Ejaz Ghani, Musleh Ud Din and Tariq Mahmood (2009), who discovered a positive association between firm competence and export performance.

Furthermore, based on the different correlations between firm characteristics and export performance, it is possible to conclude that firm characteristics are a predictor of export profitability and export performance satisfaction, as stated by previous studies (Thirkell et al., 1998; Zou et al., 1998; White et al., 1998).

One possible explanation for this factor's positive significant effect is that management competency would play a critical role in achieving desired export performance. A professional management team has a long-term perspective, is aware of new markets and problems, and is better equipped to deal with current and future difficulties.

The conclusion has the implication that while contemplating how to enhance their export performance, the chosen firms must implement measures linked to competency and capability development in order to take advantage of macro-level government initiatives.

5.1.2 Management characteristics

According to the SPSS results, management characteristics have a mixed influence on Ethiopian Leather and Leather Products Exporters' export performance (management perception of export profitability and satisfaction with overall export performance).

In general, management qualities produced a statistically significant positive prediction to the dependent variable with a Beta value of 0.701. Managers' awareness of foreign market circumstances, as well as a high level of abroad expertise, aid in improving their export performance

5.1.3. Export marketing strategic capabilities

Market segmentation and targeting, marketing plan roadmap and promotion capability were not statistically significant in predicting the dependent variable in this category. This suggests that the firms in this study did not place a high value on such variables as a source of competitive advantage.

One probable cause is a lack of experience or a failure to complete paper work or create strategy papers. Because most local practitioners are family-owned businesses, they used to do business in the conventional manner.

Product capabilities, pricing capabilities, distribution capabilities, and technological capabilities, on the other hand, are discovered to be important determinants of export performance for Ethiopian Leather and Leather Product manufacturing facilities.

In accordance with the findings, Zou and Stan (1998) discovered that all of these, with the exception of segmentation and targeting, had a substantial beneficial influence.

On the contrary to finding of the study, promotional adaptation is highly associated with export performance (Leonidou et al., 2002; Zou and Stan, 1998). Similarly, Francis and Collins-Dodd (2004) and Shamsuddoha and Ali (2006) discovered that using an export promotion assistance program had a favorable influence on export performance.

However, the use of foreign marketing research has no impact on export performance. In contrast to this conclusion, Shaomi zou and Simona Stan (1998) found a substantial impact in two of the papers they reviewed, but not in the third.

The pricing adaption capacity resulted in a statistically significant beneficial impact to export performance, which is consistent with the study conducted by Leonidou, 2002.

Distribution adaptation is also shown to be substantial, which supports the assertions of other studies such as (Cavusgil and Zou (1994); Zou and Stan (1998); Francis and Collins-Dodd, (2004), Eusebio et al. (2007), and Shamsuddoha and Ali (2005).

These findings were consistent with earlier research that have demonstrated a link between export marketing strategy and export performance (Zou, Fang, & Zhao, 2003; Zou, Taylor, & Osland, 1998,).

According to Maurel (2009), marketing efforts are arguably the most critical to the survival and performance of export firms. In general, management satisfaction with export performance was strongly related to export marketing strategy. The purpose of this research was to determine if the implementation of marketing tactics by ELLPE managers resulted in the attainment of export targets

Management satisfaction with export performance, which is an overall assessment of export performance, is believed to be dependent on marketing strategies.

6. Conclusion

The study investigated the impact of firm-level factors on export performance in selected Ethiopian Leather and Leather Products Exporters, which are subdivided into the categories of management characteristics, firm characteristics and competences, and export marketing strategy capabilities.

The majority of the independent factors in the firm-level variables were acknowledged and implemented by the factories where the survey was performed.

The findings indicated that several management characteristics, such as export commitment, export barriers, and international experiences, are important determinants of export performance and have a positive connection.

Similarly, almost all factors classified under export marketing strategic capabilities like Product Development Capability, Pricing Adaptation Capability, Distribution Capability, and Technological Capability which made a statistically significant positive influence/prediction in predicting the dependent variable (export performance) have very strong positive relationship and significantly contribute to predict the export performance.

Market segmentation and targeting, as well as a marketing plan roadmap, are exceptions to this rule, as they have no statistically significant influence on export performance.

It is possible to conclude that, despite the recognition of firm-level determinants of export performance addressed in the conceptual framework chapter, exporters did not capitalize on the power of management characteristics. It is also possible to conclude that firms' export performance benefited from having educated and internationally experienced managers.

Firm’s characteristics and competencies, as well as and export marketing strategic capabilities, seems to improve the export performance of Ethiopian Leather and Leather Products.

As mentioned in the empirical research, this might be partially justified by the government's assistance for increasing business competitiveness through different incentive and capacity-building methods.

Furthermore, in addition to the firm's own skills, the export marketing strategy competency has been largely supported by the government's export promotion activities. This might be explained by the private players described in this study's lack of attention to firm-level determining variables.

Keeping other things constant, the low export performance of Ethiopian leather and leather goods may be ascribed to particular variables sub-categorized under the three constructs of management characteristics, firm characteristics and competence, and export market strategy capability.

7. Recommendations

From the research findings, Competitiveness, Adaptive Selling, International Market Research, Mkt Segmenting and Targeting, Marketing Strategy Roadmap and Promotion capability did not provide statistically significant predictions of the dependable variable, implying that these aspects are paid little consideration.

As a result, more efforts should be made to raise awareness in the private sector as well as at the government level in order to enhance the export performance of the sector under consideration.

Researchers and academics, on the other hand, can study why these variables have no substantial influence on Ethiopian leather and leather product export performance.

Furthermore, interested researchers can continue to work with mediating and mediator variables to investigate the relationship between export performance and independent variables through in-depth statistical analysis such as partial least square regression analysis and other advanced tools to produce more detailed outputs or theoretical advancement for academic purposes.

By doing a more comprehensive statistical analysis of the various constructs, the constructs utilized in this study can be utilized in other research, too.

According to the findings of the study, management characteristics, export marketing strategic capability, and firm competencies and capabilities variables have a more positive significant relationship with export performance. This study recommends that prior attention to be paid to the focus of research in order to help the theoretical base of the construct.

As a result, managers (stewards) and policymakers are advised to concentrate their efforts on improving internal firm-level factors that enhance or boost competitiveness, as well as capacity building programs, in order to ensure better performance of the leather export and enable it to meet its intended objectives.

In general, companies must focus on inward-looking scenarios to improve the picture of their export performances for the future rather than blaming each other or pointing fingers at government at all levels.

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