

Relationship Marketing and the Resource Approach as Research Programs Specific to Export Performance

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the relationship marketing and resource-based approach as research programs specific to export performance, focusing on the SCP (Structure-Conduct-Performance) paradigm and its limitations. It explores the postulates of the resource-based view (RBV) and its application in export performance research. Additionally, it examines the transition from a transactional view to a relational view in marketing strategy, highlighting the importance of customer relationships in international business success. The paper reviews the literature on the relational determinants of export performance, emphasizing the significance of managing relationships with business partners. It also provides a literature review of studies on international customer-supplier relationships, highlighting the constructs and conceptual frameworks used by researchers. Overall, the paper showcases the evolving research landscape in the domains of export performance, relationship marketing, and the resource-based approach.

KEY WORD: relationship marketing, resource-based approach, export performance, SCP paradigm, RBV,

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I. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Relationship marketing and the resource approach as research programs specific to export performance

Even if the theoretical frameworks are not always clearly mentioned by the researchers, two major theoretical approaches can be mentioned, namely the SCP approach and the resource-based approach (RBV). These two approaches provide the foundation, often implicitly, for the work of researchers on the export performance of SMEs. In another register, one could oppose the transactional vision of export which puts the emphasis on the variables of the marketing mix compared to a relational vision which insists rather on the development of customer relations.

The notion of research program was proposed by Lakatos in 1978¹. According to this author, a research program consists of two components: a hard core surrounded by a protective glacis which consists of a set of refutable auxiliary hypotheses. For Lakatos, a change in the research program is operated when its hard core is questioned, and this is precisely the enterprise to which the proponents of the resource-based approach and relational marketing have engaged. In the sense that these approaches represent research programs in their own right, the hard core of which consists respectively of the notion of resource and the notion of relationship.

1.1. The RBV as a response to the issues deserted by the SCP paradigm

1.1.1. Postulates of the SCP paradigm: the structure- conduct -performance sequence

Studies on export performance have been largely dominated by the SCP (Structure- Conduct - Performance) paradigm. This paradigm, derived from industrial economics and developed by Mason (1939)², links business performance to context, i.e. to the structure of the market. He considers that the management of the firm cannot influence either the conditions of the industry or its own performance. For the supporters of this paradigm, the constraints of industrial structural forces do not allow the company to conceive its strategy as an independent managerial action. In other words, the proactive role of management is not at the origin of its performance. We therefore find ourselves faced with a deterministic vision that is interested in explaining and

¹Tixier J. (2000) : « La méthodologie des programmes de recherche, évaluation et pertinence pour les sciences de gestion », Cahier de Recherche N° 65, CREPA, Paris dauphine [en ligne] : <http://vdrp.chez-alice.fr/Lakatos.pdf>

² Edward S. Mason, (1939), " Price and Production Policies of Large-Scale Enterprise ", American Economic Review, Vol.29, No.1

evaluating the performance of the industry and not of the firm. Indeed, the term "structure" corresponds to the number and distribution of firms in a given industry. It also corresponds to the differentiation of products, the existence or not of barriers to entry, the degree of integration of companies, etc. The term "conduct" refers to what companies do in terms of R&D policy choices, quality of goods produced, promotion, pricing, etc. Finally, the term "performance" corresponds to the results of the industry or of individual firms. Based on this reasoning, the company's strategic thinking revolves around the choice of potential attractive sectors, as well as the deployment of a competitive strategy capable of responding adequately to the structure of the industry and to market characteristics.

1.1.2. The limits of the SCP approach

Behind the SCP approach looms a deterministic vision nourished by the theories of industrial economics of which Porter (1980) is the emblematic figure. This view attributes a company's performance to external variables over which it has little or no influence. Admittedly, the value of the SCP approach lies in the fact that it offers the company an analytical framework in which it can carry out its strategic thinking in terms of choosing an activity sector and the appropriate strategy. However, it is at the level of some of its fundamental postulates that this approach seems to lend itself to criticism. Indeed, supporters of the SCP approach consider that firms, in a given sector, are similar in terms of the level of resources they control and the strategies they pursue. They also assume the mobility of resources; that is, they can be imitated or acquired by other firms in the market (Hirshleifer, 1976, 1980³). This implies the disappearance of inequalities of resources between firms in the long term. In other words, looking at business performance through a radical SCP view ignores the internal characteristics of organizations while ignoring the active role of management.

1.1.3. The postulates of the RBV

The criticisms addressed by Penrose (1959)⁴ to the postulates of classical industrial economics marked the epistemological break with the SCP paradigm. In the sense that the firm "is a complex institution, affecting economic and social life in various directions, comprising various activities, proceeding to wide varieties of significant decisions, influenced by various and unpredictable human whims, nevertheless generally dictated by reason of his men."⁵ Thus, according to the approach of the RBV, the firm is no longer this "black box" reactive to the environment; it becomes "a set of resources that need to be developed faster and more efficiently than competitors." (Magakian, 2003). This new conception of managerial discipline differs from the SCP in that it considers that the competitiveness of the company is not solely based on its ability to adapt to market constraints. This shift in thinking mode is considered by Grant (1991, p. 116)⁶ as "the passage from a logic of what must be done to a logic of what can be done". The internal and specific factors of the company are now possible to understand its performance.

1.1.4. The RBV in the field of export performance research

The positioning of the RBV in research on export performance reflects its image in strategic management. Some authors see it as a theoretical innovation in its own right (Peng, 2001)⁷, or even a competing paradigm of the SCP approach (Dhanaraj & Beamish, 2003)⁸. Others, on the other hand, only see it as a complementary approach. (Morgan, et al, 2004)⁹. However, RBV is increasingly adopted as a theoretical framework in the internationalization literature (Matanda & Freeman, 2010)¹⁰. For many authors, the RBV would be a very useful "normative guide" for understanding and predicting export activity (Knudsen & Madsen, 2002

³ Hirshleifer, J., (1976): "*Price Theory and Applications*. Prentice Hall," Englewood Cliffs. 2nd ed., 1980, 3rd ed., 1984, 4th ed.

⁴ Penrose, Edith T. (1959): "The Theory of Growth of the Firm", John Wiley, New York,

⁵ "firm is a complex institution, impinging on economic and social life in many directions, comprising numerous decisions influenced by miscellaneous and unpredictable human whims, yet generally directed in the light of human reason (Penrose, 1995, p.9)

⁶ Grant, RM, (1991), "The Resource-Based Theory of Competitive Advantage: Implications for Strategy Formulation". *California Management Review*; 33, (3), p. 114–135.

⁷ Peng, Mike W. (2001). "The resource-based view and international business. *Journal of Management*, 27(6): 803-829.

⁸ Dhanaraj, C. & Beamish, PW (2003). "A Resource Based Approach to the Study of Export Performance" *Journal of Small Business Management*, 41 (3), 242-261.

⁹ Morgan, Neil A., Anna Kaleka, and Constantine S. Katsikeas. (2004). "Antecedents of Export Venture Performance: A Theoretical Model and Empirical Assessment". *Journal of Marketing* 68 (1): 90-108.

¹⁰ Matanda, MJ, Freeman, (2010), "Effect of perceived environmental uncertainty on export-import relationships", *International Business Review*, *International Business Review* 18 (2009) 89–107

¹¹). Dhanaraj & Beamish (2003) were among the first to have proposed the RBV as a potential theoretical framework for understanding export performance, insofar as " *it provides a rich theoretical framework in which several models can be conceptualized and empirically tested* ". This explains the growing interest on the part of researchers in this approach as a framework for analysis (Dhanaraj & Beamish 2003; Morgan, Kaleka , & Katsikeas 2004; Morgan, Vorhies , & Schlegelmilch 2006) RBV has also been used implicitly by other recent research such as that of ' Ibeh & Wheeler (2005), Matanda & Freeman (2009) and Wheeler, Ibeh , & Dimitratos (2008).

1.2. Relationship marketing as a reaction to the issues deserted by transactional marketing

Like the recognition of the company's internal capacities and resources as key antecedents of its export performance, the field of marketing strategy seems to have undergone a no less profound transition; it is about becoming aware of the importance of the role of the customer relationship in the success of international business. This heralded the advent of relationship marketing as an increasingly recognized frame of reference in recent export marketing studies.

1.2.1. The limits of the transactional view of exporting

We have seen that the central idea of industrial economics is that it is the environment that imposes pressures to which exporters must respond. Those who respond effectively by adopting and implementing the best strategy will have the best performance (Zou & Stan 1998). The strategic factors that have been frequently studied are the product mix, product adaptation, pricing policy, to name a few. In an introductory article of a special issue of the *International Marketing Review* and whose title is evocative ¹², Leonidou et al. (2003) argue that: " *The neoclassical microeconomic paradigm focuses on explaining the firm's use of the marketing mix as a means of achieving response in a mass market, made up of passive consumers. It tries to understand export behavior by dissecting managerial decisions in order to identify the variables that make them up* ". (Page 131, free translation). Furthermore, they argue that: " *the relational paradigm came as a reaction to this classic microeconomic paradigm, and seeks to fill the void left by the latter's unrealistic assumptions. This new paradigm emphasizes the behavioral aspects in the economic exchange between customers and suppliers, on the active search of both parties for a suitable partner, on the recognition of transfer costs and the phenomena of dependence between customers and suppliers.* ". These remarks testify to the awareness, among the research community, of the importance of the relational dimension of exporting.

1.2.2. The relevance of the relational vision of export

As we argued in the previous section, the contribution of Rosson and Ford (1982) and then that of Style and Ambler (1994) testified to the awareness of the importance of the relational dimension in the success of export. However, studies on international relationship marketing remained limited during the 1990s. Indeed, Craig and Douglass ¹³(2000, p.297) deplored this parsimony of research, noting: " *that the management of the customer-supplier relationship is become a subject of increasing importance, [however], the complexity of the customer/supplier relationship in the international context has unfortunately been neglected* " ¹⁴. The same criticism was formulated otherwise by Sousa et al . (2008)¹⁵ who themselves formulated it as follows: " *surprisingly, the impact of international customer relationship management, and the beneficial effect it could have on export performance, has only received marginal empirical attention. However, there has been widespread recognition in recent years that these relationships and the networks that accompany them are critical to export success* " .

The perceived importance of relationships in international success could explain the recurring calls for the adoption of the relational paradigm to understand export performance (Balabanis , Theodosiou , Katsikea , 2004). For example, Leonidou (2003, page 138) emphasized the need to apply the relational paradigm to exports, arguing that " *exporting should be seen as a process of creation, development and maintaining customer*

¹¹Knudsen, T., and Madsen, TK (2002), " *Export strategy: A dynamic capabilities perspective* ", *Scandinavian Journal Management* , Vol. 18, p. 475-502.

¹² Leonidou LC (2003): " *Overcoming the limits of exporting research using the relational paradigm* " *International Marketing Review* Vol. 20, No. 2, p. 129-141

¹³ Craig, CS and Douglas, SP (2000) : " *International Marketing Research* ", 2nd Edition. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons

¹⁴"While the management of buyer-seller relationships has become an increasingly important issue ..., the complexity of buyer-seller relationships in an international context has been sadly neglected".

¹⁵ Sousa Carlos MP, Francisco J. Martinez-Lopez and Filipe Coelho (2008): " *The determinants of Export Performance: A review of the Research in the Literature between 1998 and 2005* " *International Journal of Management Reviews* , Vol 10, issue 4, pp 343-374

relationships in international markets, at strategic and tactical levels ". On the other hand, Leonidou , Katsikeas and Hadjimarcou (2002, page 108) went so far as to suggest that companies "*treat exporting as a nexus of business relations* ".

1.3. The relational determinants of export performance: a recent literature review

The literature dealing with inter-organizational relations considers that, on the international scene, the company's ability to manage relations with its business partners could be more important than its functional capacities. For example, Zhang et al (2003, p. 550) claim that "*in an increasingly competitive market, traditional marketing tools such as price, product quality are likely to be imitated by competitors, which reinforces the idea that a lasting source of competitive advantage should come from mutually beneficial, trust-based relationships with customers.* ".

According to the RBV, firms are idiosyncratic with respect to the resources they accumulate over time, both tangible and intangible (Barney 1991). However, according to the proponents of the relational current, customer relations can, when they are successful, be a source of competitive advantage in the sense that they could constitute valuable capital. Indeed, a study carried out by de Kaleka and Piercy (1998) on exporting SMEs in the United Kingdom, noted that "*the difference between the most and least efficient firms in terms of customer relationship management is dramatic. This area of expertise (customer relations) in exporting consists of developing and maintaining good relations with foreign customers* ¹⁶". The authors were able to highlight the positive link between export performance and customer relationship management skills by concluding that "*skills in developing and maintaining customer relationships are indeed associated with export performance. superior* ¹⁷. (page 388).

The theoretical basis advocated by relational marketing is based on the differentiation between discreet exchange and relational exchange. This last form of the exchange occurs when it takes place in a context that takes into account the present, the past and the future of the relationship. We are therefore far from the strictly transactional vision governed by the market. Indeed, Samiee and Walters (2003) argue that "*in real life, there are very few conditions for simple events without any relational dimension* " ¹⁸. These authors consider that the reality of exporting is best captured when considered as a sequence of related transactions. The need to examine the role of relational determinants in export performance is all the more justified when it comes to examining the relationship between customer and supplier belonging to countries with unequal levels of development. This is recalled in the appeal of Samiee and Walters (2003) ¹⁹expressed in the following terms:

" *It is obvious that there is an urgent need for more empirical research on international relationship marketing, particularly in the context of import export relationships. A particularly challenging task will be to examine the relationship when partners form developing and developed countries are involved* ".

In what follows, we will try to establish a description of the way in which cross-border customer-supplier relationships have been treated in the literature. Our purpose is to identify the constructs and conceptual frameworks used by researchers to understand the subject of the international customer-supplier relationship. Capitalizing on the results of a literature review carried out by Samiee and Walters in 2003, we present the details of our own attempt at a literature review.

1.3.1. Samiee and Walters' review (2003)

In 2003, Samiee and Walters published a literature review that remains, to the best of our knowledge, the only contribution of its kind that focuses exclusively on international customer-supplier relationships. Proceeding with a review of research published before the year 2001, they identified twenty-four empirical studies dealing with relationship marketing in an international context. The authors also note the profusion of theoretical constructs addressed by researchers, including relationship longevity (Haugland , 1999) , ²⁰supplier ²¹perception

¹⁶" *The difference between high and low export performers in customer relationship skills is also dramatic. This area of skills in exporting includes the development and maintenance of good relationships with overseas customers* " (page 387)

¹⁷" *Skills in developing and maintaining export customer relationships are indeed associated with superior export performance* "

¹⁸ "*in real-life situations, there are seldom conditions for straightforward events with no relational dimensions* "

¹⁹ Samiee , S. and Walters, P. (2003): "*Relationship marketing in an international context: a literature review* ", International Business Review, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 193-214

²⁰Haugland, Sven A. (1999), "*Factors Influencing the Duration of International Buyer-Seller Relationships* ," Journal of Business Research, 46 (3), 273-80

²¹Ford, David (1980), "(1984), "*Buyer/Seller Relationships in International Industrial Markets* ," Industrial Marketing Management, 13(2), 61-74.

(Ford 1984) , relationship conflict (Sachdev , Bello, and Verhage , 1995)²², relationship commitment (O'Malley , Patterson, and Evans, 1997)²³, trust (Hallén , Johanson , & Seyed-Mohamed, 1991)²⁴. Furthermore, the authors note the lack of consideration of the cultural dimensions of the exchanges. This is in addition to certain methodological weaknesses such as non-probability sampling and the dominance of monadic approaches. In order to identify the scope of the relational paradigm in international customer-supplier relations, we conducted a literature review, attempting to include studies published between the year 2000 and the year 2010. Our ambition is to update the review by Samiee and Walters (2003).

1.3.2. Ten years of research on the relational determinants of export performance

During the first decade of this century, calls for research to integrate the relational paradigm into export studies seemed to bear fruit, and a veritable profusion of research emerging from Relationship Marketing. Indeed, research on international relationship marketing has proliferated over the past decade with an increasing number of studies exploring cross-border customer/supplier relationships. Theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches have also diversified.

From a methodological point of view, a literature review is generally conducted according to two approaches: meta-analysis and descriptive or narrative review. For our case, the narrative review is a considered choice justified by a certain number of objective factors. Recall that a meta-analysis integrates the results of studies in order to indicate in the simplest way the configurations of the relationships that link the different studies, thus providing a basis for the development of a theory. According to Glass (1976)²⁵, quoted by Durif (2008)²⁶, a meta-analysis refers to “the analysis of analyses”; it is the statistical analysis of a large number of analyzes resulting from individual studies with the aim of integrating all the results. Meta-analysis positions itself as a rigorous alternative to the informal, narrative discussions of research that characterize our attempts to make sense of the rapidly growing literature.

However, the application of a classic meta-analysis requires compliance with certain conditions such as the uniformity of measurement of the dependent and independent variables across the studies examined (Hedges and Olkin , 1980)²⁷. This condition is difficult to verify in our case given the disparities in the definitions and operationalization of the constructs used in the various studies listed. In addition, most of these studies do not report statistical details of their results (eg correlation matrices). It is for this reason that recourse to the narrative review naturally imposed itself. This predominantly qualitative and subjective method consists of establishing a thematic classification of research (Cooper, 1998)²⁸.

A thematic search on the EBSCO database²⁹, the SAGE digital library and via the Google search engine provided access to the main recent scientific publications in international marketing (*International Business Review* , *Journal of International Business Studies* , *Management International* , *Management International Review* , *Journal of Marketing*) . The review obviously focused only on the studies accessible at the time of the search, it enabled us to examine 32 studies, the details of which are summarized respectively in tables 1, 2 and 3 below. We conducted our narrative review according to a comparative perspective which, according to Durif (2008, page 37), consists of “ *comparing studies in the field according to various relevant factors* ” . Also, the factors that we retained during our review are:

- **the authors:** where we present the names of the authors of the research;
- **the conceptual framework :** we wanted to check, in the studies reviewed, which conceptual frameworks were used by the researchers;
- **dependent variables :** in the case where models are presented by the researchers, we proceeded to identify the independent variables selected. In this section, we also classify any moderating and mediating variables mentioned in these models;

²²Sachdev, Harash J., Daniel C. Bello, and Bronislaw J. Verhage (1995), " *Export Involvement and Channel Conflict in a Manufacturer-Intermediary Relationship*," *Journal of Marketing Channels*, 4 (4), 37-63.

²³O'Malley, Lisa, Maurice Patterson, and Martin Evans (1997): " *Intimacy or Intrusion? The Privacy Dilemma for Relationship Marketing in Consumer Markets* ," *Journal of Marketing Management*, 13 (6), 541-59

²⁴ Hallén , Lars, Jan Johanson , and Nazeem Seyed -Mohamed (1991): " *Interfirm Adaptation in Business Relationships* " , *Journal of Marketing*, 55 (2), 29-37.

²⁵ Glass, G. (1977): “ *Integrating findings: The meta-analysis of research* ”. *Review of Research in Education* , 5, 351-379.

²⁶ Durif, Fabien, (2008) : « *Quatre essais sur l'importance de la théorie du contrat social de Macneil dans le champ du marketing relationnel*», Université du Québec à Montréal.

²⁷Hedges, LV and Olkin, I. (1980): ' *Vote-counting methods in research synthesis*' , *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 88, No. 2, pp.359–369.

²⁸Cooper, H. (1998): “ *Synthesizing Research: A Guide for Literature Reviews* ” , 3rd ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks.

²⁹ <http://www.ebscohost.com/>

- **independent variables** : given that the studies reviewed used different dependent variables;
- **the study methodology** : this involves specifying the approach and mode of data collection, as well as the size of the samples concerned by the study.

Table 1 : Studies dealing with export performance from a relational perspective

Authors/ year	Conceptual framework	Context of the study	Independent / mediating / moderating variables	Dependent variable	Methodology
Mr. Daud Ismail (2011)	Social Exchange Theory (Trust/Commitment) RBV	Malaysia	trust market orientation learning orientation	Export performance	Investigation n = 228 - CT
Claude Obadiah , Irena Vida (2011)	Social exchange theory	Britain	Quality of the relationship (first-rate build including: trust / cooperation / expectation of continuity	Export performance	CT, Survey , n=224
Mina Behyan , Osman Mohamad & Azizah Omar (2011)	Social exchange theory	Malaysia	Friendship Reciprocity Trust	Export performance	TC, n= 120
Vinh Lu, Pascale Quester , Chris Medlin (2011)	RBV TCT YOUR	Australia	Contract governance Relationship governance Characteristics of the firm Characteristics of the host market	Export performance	untested model proposal
Claude Obadia, Irena Vida, James Reardon (2008)	Social exchange theory (trust/commitment)	France Slovenia	Quality of the relationship	Export performance	survey , n=507, CT
Lages , L.F., Silva, G., Styles, C. (2009)	RBV Relationship Marketing	Portugal	relationship skills innovation capabilities production capacities	Export performance	survey , n=177
Brencic et al (2008)	Internalization theory (Adapted from Style Model and Ambler, 2004.)	Slovenia	Commitment to the relationship Market engagement Market knowledge Trust Intensity of the relationship Collection of objective data Experiential data collection	Export performance	CT, Survey, n= 225
Beaujanot , Lockshin , and Quester (2006)	Transaction cost theory Social exchange theory	Australia	Cross-functional coordination	Export performance	Survey , n=77, CT
Gripsrud , Solberg , and Ulvnes (2006)	Relationship Marketing Internationalization literature	Norway	Trust Information collected from the representative Information collected from other sources Duration of the relationship	Export performance	Investigation, n =117, CT
Zhang, Cavusgil , and Roath (2003)	Social exchange theory	US	Cultural distance environmental hostility Dependence on the importer Trust Standards relational	Exporter competitiveness	Survey , n=142,
Li, Ling Yee and Ogunmokin , Gabriel O (2001),	RBV	Australia	relational skills	exporter performance	investigation CT, n= 134

Table 2 : Studies dealing with the performance of the international customer/supplier relationship

Authors	Conceptual framework	Context of the study	Independent / mediating / moderating variables	Dependent variables	Methodology
Barnes et al (2010)	Transaction cost theory power and dependency theory	China	Opportunism Conflict Trust Commitment Communication Importer dependency Exporter marketing adaptation	Long-term orientation of the importer	Survey , n=200, CT
Farid Ahmed (2009)	Transaction cost theory Power and dependency theories Social exchange theory	Australia , Thailand	Importer's perception of exporter's investment Importer's perception of Exporter's dependency Exporter's perception of importer's investment Exporter's Perception of Importer Dependence Commitment of the importer Commitment of the exporter	Relationship Performance	Survey , n=125 dyads , CT
Dionysis Skarmneas & Matthew J. Robson (2008)	relationship marketing Paradigm cultural	US	Specificity of assets Cultural sensitivity	Quality of the relationship	CT survey , n=292
Leonidou , Talias , & Leonidou (2008)	Marketing channel breakdown Power and dependency theory	US	power exercised power exercised Conflict Satisfaction trust	commitment in the relationship	Survey , n=151, CT
Aulakh and Gençtürk (2008)	Transaction cost theories Social exchange theory RBV	US	formalization of the contract Exporter dependency Duration of the relationship Market volatility Exporter experience Export intensity	Relationship Performance	Survey, n=129, CT
Solberg (2008)	Relationship Marketing Contingency theory	Norway	Cultural distance Product complexity Mode of governance of the relationship Quality of the relationship	Distributor Performance	Survey, n=127, CT
Styles, Patterson, & Ahmad (2008)	RBV Relational exchange theory	US	interpersonal factors factors business related perception of investment in the relationship Perception of dependency Trust Commitment	relationship performance	survey , n=165, CT
Gencturk & Aulakh (2006)	Transaction cost theory Contract theory Social exchange theory	US	Relationship structure Relational norms Control Host Market Uncertainty	effectiveness of the relationship	Survey, n=129, CT
Leonidou , Barnes, & Talias (2006)	Relationship Marketing	US	uncertainty Distance Conflict	relationship quality	Survey , n=151 CT
Leonidou , Paliwadana , & Theodosiou (2006)	Transaction cost theory Resource and Dependency Theory	Greece	mutual understanding Distance trust Addiction Adaptation Communication commitment Conflict Cooperation	Satisfaction	Survey , n=122, CT
Ronald J. Ferguson, Michèle Paulin & Jasmin Bergeron (2005)	Transaction cost theory Social exchange theory	Canada, USA Mexico	Contract governance Relationship governance	Exchange Performance	Survey, n= 160 CT
Pressey & Tzokas (2004)	Marketing Channel Literature	United Kingdom	social ties trust commitment	relationship performance	Survey , n=212, CT
Styles and Amblers (2000)	Internationalization theories	UK and Australia	Commitment relationship intensity	economic performance	survey , n=434, CT

Social exchange theory	Marketing channel theory	trust	commitment to relationship	market knowledge
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Table 3: Studies that have addressed specific dimensions of relationship quality

Legend :

CT	NS	not
cross section	not specified	sample size

Authors	Conceptual framework	Context of the study	Independent / mediating / moderating variables	Dependent variables	Methodology
Min Ju, Janet Y. Murray, Masaaki Kotabe , and Gerald Yong Gao (2011)	Relationship Marketing	China	Market orientation Relationship governance Control mechanism	Importer opportunism	CT; investigation ; n= 160
Farid Ahmed (2010)	Social exchange theory (trust/commitment)	Australia	Cultural sensitivity Communication similarity Reputation Marketing skill Exporter's confidence Exporter dependency	Commitment of the exporter (affective and calculated)	Survey, n=125 dyads
Homburg, Cannon, Krohmer and Kiedaisch (2009)	Transaction cost Culture (hofstede1994)	EU, Germany	Transnationality of the customer/supplier relationship Customer's national culture	Relationship governance • by contract • by trust	Survey (n= 113+ 88+171+139)
Deligonul & Cavusgil (2006)	Transaction cost theory Marketing channel approach	US	Uncertainty Trust Mutual adaptation Control	Relational governance / contractual governance	Survey, n=141, CT
Deligonul et al. (2005)	Resource- based view (RBV)	US	Relational commitment Relational responsiveness Opportunism The longevity of the relationship Satisfaction with the distributor	Importer loyalty	survey , n=142, CT
Cavusgil , Deligonul , & Zhang (2004)	Transaction cost theory	US	Trust Formal contract environmental legal hostility	importer opportunism	investigation , n =142, CT
Freeman et al. (2002)	Commitment-trust paradigm	UK, Australia, Sweden	defection cost relationship benefit shared values Communication Opportunistic behavior Trust Commitment to the relationship	orientation in the relationship	Case study , n=5,
Dyer and Chu (2000)	Social theory _ embedness	EU, Japan, Korea	duration of the relationship Continuity of the relationship Face-to-face communication Supplier Support	Trust	survey , n=453

1.3.3. General discussion about the literature review

Although they are not exhaustive, the tables above provide a fairly representative picture of the different research paths taken by the authors on the subject of international customer-supplier relations. An analysis of the studies examined in this literature review has enabled us to report the observations reported below.

a. The diversity of conceptual frameworks

It is clear that the literature of the Marketing channel ³⁰of the American school forms the main basis of the studies selected. In addition, several studies used an integrated theory approach, involving more than one theory. If the use of a large number of theories has enriched the development of knowledge in MRI, it has also confirmed the

³⁰The expression “marketing channel” translates the American expression “ *marketing channel* ”. A marketing channel corresponds to a distribution and communication circuit followed by a product. It brings together all the independent intermediaries who contribute to placing a product on the market.

complexity of the phenomenon studied and testified to the relevance of transdisciplinary research to address it. However, as noted by Styles et al. (2008), “ *the theoretical perspective of the researcher determines the nature of the variables examined*”³¹(page 892). Generally, we identify five theoretical perspectives adopted by researchers in the studies reviewed, namely, the trust/commitment perspective, the dependency perspective, the transaction costs perspective, the relational norms perspective as well as the resources and capacities perspective. The table below provides a summary description of each of these theoretical perspectives:

Table 4: Prospects for reviewing the customer-supplier relationship involved in export performance studies

Theoretical perspectives	The key dimensions mobilized
<p>The trust-commitment perspective The classic article by Morgan and Hunt (1994), based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964, Cook and Emerson 1978) proposes that commitment, trust and not power and dependence as constructs focal points for understanding relationship performance. From this relational view, they concluded that engagement is the critical precursor to improved financial performance and that trust and commitment are both important for building strong relationships.</p>	Trust and commitment
<p>The dependency perspective: Based on social exchange theory, some authors such as Hibbard , Kumar, & Stern (2001) argue that the structure of dependence is crucial to understanding the performance of the relationship since it determines the capacity of each of the parties to influence the other. Several approaches have been taken to capture dependency structures in exchanges. There is broad acceptance that partner interdependence promotes relationship performance rather than asymmetric dependence and coercive use of power.</p>	Power,asymmetrical dependence, interdependence
<p>The transaction cost perspective Transaction cost theory offers a predictive analysis of trade governance structures and their performance (Noordewier , John, & Nevin 1990; Parkhe 1993). Exchange occurs in free markets without constraints or relational costs (Rindfleisch & Heide , 1997), except where certain governance problems exist (protection of specific investments, opportunism, uncertainty). In these cases, the performance of the exchange is conditioned by the efficiency of the governance mechanisms and their capacity to ensure optimal protection against opportunism.</p>	Transaction cost, specific investments, opportunistic behaviors
<p>The Relational Norms Perspective Based on the work of Macneil (1980), relational exchange theory (Kaufmann & Dant , 1992) emphasizes contractual norms and shared expectations within the framework of the exchange. Depending on the intensity of the norms, exchanges can be positioned on a continuum ranging from discrete transactions to pure relational exchange.</p>	Relational norms (e .g. solidarity, flexibility, mutuality)
<p>The perspective of RBV and relational capacities Based on a literature review, Conner (1991) considered RBV as a potential unifying paradigm. The RBV, applied to inter-organizational relations, integrates the focal constructs of the other perspectives. It suggests that superior performance is expected when partners invest time, assets, knowledge and skills and when they manage to establish effective mechanisms for governance of the relationship (Dyer and Singh 1998).</p>	Idiosyncratic assets, resources and capacities Relationship governance mechanisms (trust/commitment)

b. The predominance of cross-sectional studies

The majority of the studies examined used quantitative surveys using cross-sections. The main method of collecting empirical data remains the survey, sometimes preceded by in-depth preliminary exploratory interviews. We then note the limited recourse to the methods of case studies and longitudinal approaches. This remark is valid for the entire field of MRI despite the recurring calls by researchers to improve research design by integrating longitudinal studies (Sousa, Martínez , & Coelho, 2008; Wheeler, Ibeh , & Dimitratos , 2008 Ruppenthal & Beausch , 2009).

c. The scarcity of jobs in developing countries

The research was carried out mainly in the United States and Europe, focusing on a single country; thus confirming the observation already noted by Samiee and Walters (2003). One should also note the scarcity, if not the absence, of works operating in the context of developing countries or examining relations between customers and exporters from African countries³².

d. The diversity of the constructs studied

Our literature review confirms the observation already noted by Samiee and Walters (2003) regarding the lack of consensus on the constructs and variables used by the authors. In fact, out of the thirty-two studies examined, we

³¹" *The theoretical lens a researcher looks through determines the variables examined*" (p. 892)

³²The study by Matanda and Freeman (2009), carried out in Zimbabwe, is one of the few exceptions

identify nearly fourteen distinct constructs. In this paragraph, we present the focal constructs that have been used by researchers during their examination of the relational determinants of export performance. For the purposes of structuring the thesis, this first presentation of the constructs is deliberately brief.

e. Relationship performance and its sub-dimensions

The performance of the relationship appears as a central construct in the relational determinants of export performance. Many studies have used this construct as an explanatory variable of export performance. This construct is addressed either directly (Ronald J. Ferguson, Michèle Paulin and Jasmin Bergeron, 2005; Leonidou , Barnes, and Talias , 2006; Leonidou and Katsikeas , 2003; Pressey and Tzokas 2004; Styles, Patterson, & Ahmed 2008; Aulakh and Gençtürk , 2008; Lage, Silva & Styles, 2009; Skarmeas D. & Robson, 2008), or indirectly, by looking at one of its dimensions like satisfaction (Leonidou , Palihawadana , & Theodosiou (2006) , customer loyalty (Deligonul et al., 2005) or long-term commitment (Leonidou , Talias , & Leonidou , 2008; Barnes et al, 2010).

f. Modes of relationship governance

Alongside the performance of the relationship, another construct appears recurrently in the study of the relational determinants of export performance. This is the mode of governance of the relationship. Two governance mechanisms are raised by the research, namely relational governance and contractual governance. (Cavusgil , Deligonul and Zhang, 2004; Gençtürk and Aulakh , 2006; Roath , Miller and Cavusgil 2002; Wu et al. 2007; Yu, Liao and Lin, 2006). The researchers argue that these two governance mechanisms create a win-win situation for a firm and its trading partners (Yu, Liao and Lin 2006), and are considered the key foundations in modern trade management (Nevin, 1995)³³. The recognition of contractual and relational governance in MRI research is consistent with findings from research conducted in national contexts, such as those of Cannon, Achrol and Gundlach (2000), Heide (1999) and Poppo and Zenger (2002).

– **Contractual governance of exchanges**

Contractual governance corresponds to the case where a formalized and legally binding contract is implemented in commercial exchanges (Ferguson, Paulin and Bergeron, 2005). By signing contracts, parties explicitly specify roles and responsibilities to be performed, identify agreed-upon outcomes, and how to handle unforeseen circumstances (Dwyer, Schurr , and OH 1987; Lusch and Brown, 1996; Moorman , Deshpandé , and Zaltman , 1993; Poppo and Zenger , 2002). Our review reveals that researchers have examined the role of contractual arrangements in the governance of export relations. This research led to the following conclusions:

- Formal governance mechanisms help protect any specific assets committed by local suppliers (Yu, Liao, and Lin 2006).
- Formalization and explicit contracts help the company to develop better competence in the foreign market (Wu et al. 2007).
- The formalization of the relationship is detrimental to governance by norms and it is positively correlated with the vertical control exercised by the producer in the foreign market (Gençtürk & Aulakh , 2006³⁴).
- The contracts do not have a significant impact on the opportunism of the importer (Cavusgil , Deligonul , and Zhang, 2004; Wu et al. 2007).

Contractual governance has therefore been an influential framework in MRI research (Ahmed, Patterson and Styles 1999; Cavusgil , Deligonul and Zhang, 2004; Deligonul and Cavusgil 2006. Gençtürk and Aulakh 2006. Leonidou , Palihawadana and Theodosiou 2006. Roath , Miller and Cavusgil 2002; Skarmeas , Katsikeas and Schlegelmilch 2002; Skarmeas et al 2008. Skarmeas and Robson 2008. Solberg 2006; Solberg and Nes 2002; Styles and Ambler 2000; Yu, Liao and Lin 2006). From the point of view of exporting companies, contractual arrangements play an important role in facilitating the management of cross-border trade relations. Contractual arrangements help structure relationships between exporters and foreign counterparts, reducing the risks and uncertainties in those relationships (Bello and Williamson, 1985; Cavusgil , Deligonul and Zhang, 2004; Zhang, Cavusgil and Roath 2003). Moreover, cultural differences condition the perception of rights, obligations and the interpretation of the fine line between a breach of contract and a potential law (Cavusgil , Deligonul and Zhang 2004). Accordingly, it has been found that contractual compliance largely depends on the external environment in which contracts are made (Cavusgil , Deligonul and Zhang, 2004; Erramilli , Agarwal and Dev, 2002; Luo 2005; Novicevic and Harvey 2004), the company's ability to have access to a large amount of local knowledge

³³Nevin, John R. (1995), "Relationship Marketing and Distribution Channels: Exploring Fundamental Issues," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 23 (4), 327-34.

³⁴ Gençtürk , Esra F. and Preet S. Aulakh (2006): "*Norms- and Control-Based Governance of International Manufacturer - Distributor Relational Exchanges*," *Journal of International Marketing*, 15 (1), 92-126.

(Casson, 1991) and the commitment and effectiveness of the company's management (Novicevic and Harvey, 2004).

– **The relational governance of exchanges**

Relational governance refers to the interweaving of relational norms in commercial exchanges (Ferguson, Paulin and Bergeron 2005; Noordewier , John and Nevin , 1990; Paulin, Perrien and Ferguson, 1997). The central idea of relational governance is that social or personal relations play an important role in all economic operations (Granovetter, 1985). A very similar argument was also advanced by Heide (1994), finding that even transactional exchanges in fact encompass behavioral or relational characteristics. According to the literature review, we find that researchers have studied the role of relational governance in international trade using two approaches. The first approach is that of Bello, Chelariu and Zhang (2003), Gençtürk and Aulakh (2006) and Zhang, Cavusgil and Roath (2003), who considered relational governance as a first-order construct grouping together different relational norms. In the second approach, each relational norm was studied separately as a distinct construct. The authors who have adopted this approach have examined norms such as: trust, communication, exchange of information, flexibility , cooperation, reciprocity and solidarity.

g. Relational capacities as antecedents of export performance

According to our literature review, another theoretical perspective is also mobilized by researchers on export performance, especially for recent studies, which is the current of relational capacities, anchored in the school of resources. Several studies are to be classified in this category, notably Gabriel O, (2001), Lages , LF, Silva, G., Styles, C., (2009), Deligonul et al. (2005), La, Patterson and Styles, (2009), Styles, Patterson and Ahmed, (2008) and Matanda and Freeman, (2009). Proponents of this approach argue that successful management of relationships with overseas customers is a potential source of competitive advantage in international markets (Sharma, Young and Wilkinson, 2006; Wilkinson and Young, 2005). More specifically, a competitive advantage is maintained if the parties involved are able to develop unique and hard-to-imitate capabilities in a cross-border B2B relationship (Dyer and Singh, 1998; Roath, Miller and Cavusgil 2002) . This *ultimately* leads the firm to superior performance (Noordewier , John and Nevin , 1990; Rosson and Ford, 1982). In other words, sound and adequate management of cross-border relations would allow international companies to improve their export performance (Aulakh , Kotabe and Sahay , 1996; Leonidou and Kaleka 1998; Leonidou , Katsikeas and Hadjimarcou 2002; Leonidou , Talias and Leonidou 2008. Piercy , Katsikeas and Cravens 1997; Styles and Ambler 2000; Zhang, Cavusgil and Roath 2003).

II. GENERAL CONCLUSION

An extensive review of the literature allowed us to inquire about the scope of the concept of export performance and the evolution of managerial thought on this subject. In this respect, three conclusions are to be drawn.

First, we believe that quantitative criteria are not enough to identify the specificity of the SME. Rather, this is highlighted with regard to certain organizational particularities of this type of business. Faced with their inability to control their environment, SMEs are distinguished by the central role of the manager, favoring a local management mode where relationships and networks clearly contribute to performance.

Second, we realize that export performance is a multidimensional construct whose theory is in the process of maturing. Predominantly empirical, the literature is not yet able to provide definitive answers on what determines export performance, particularly in developing countries.

Finally, two heavy tendencies are to be observed at the level of the literature. On the one hand, the rise in power of the approach by the resources. On the other hand, the recognition of the relational dimension of the marketing of export. One of the limitations of classical economic theory is that it focuses primarily on the environment and appropriate strategies, ignoring the roles of internal resources and capacities. This limit, according to many authors, could be exceeded if the problem is approached from the point of view of RBV and relationship marketing. The proliferation of research on international customer/supplier relations and their involvement in performance over the last decade bears witness to the fruitfulness of this field of research and its relevance for understanding the export performance of companies, particularly SMEs.

In conclusion, and judging by the size of the available literature ³⁵, it would seem that the field of research on inter- organizational relations is still underinvested by researchers, despite the increased recognition of the importance of inter-organizational relations in the performance of exchanges (Samiee and Walters 2003, Lane 2002; Yu, Liao, & Lin, 2006). The impact of relational dimensions on export performance deserves more attention

³⁵Remember that our review is not exhaustive, it is in fact only a homothetic representation of research on the relational determinants of export performance on a global scale.

from researchers, especially in terms of empirical validation (Leonidou 2003; Leonidou , Katsikeas , & Hadjimarcou , 2002; Styles & Ambler, 2000).

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