

Examining the Moderating Effect of Unions and Intermediaries on the Export Performance of Small and Medium Paint and Resin Producers due to Environmental Uncertainty

Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the effect of environmental uncertainty on the export performance of paint and resin producers on the interaction between exporting unions and intermediaries. The study is a descriptive survey with a pragmatic objective. Five-point Likert scale questions were included in the research questionnaire to collect information. In this study, SPSS statistical software and PLS structural equation software were utilized within the framework of two sections of descriptive and inferential statistics in the form of multiple linear regression to analyze questionnaire data by statistical requirements. The statistical population comprises 108 senior managers and sales managers from paint and resin-producing small and medium enterprises in Tehran province. Based on Morgan's table, 86 participants were selected as a statistical sample by simple random sampling for this study. The research results revealed that the hypothesis of the interaction of unions and intermediaries due to environmental uncertainty moderates the export performance of small and medium paint and resin enterprises. The moderating role of the interaction of unions and intermediaries due to environmental uncertainty on the export performance of small and medium-sized paint companies was confirmed.

Keywords: Interaction of exporting unions and intermediaries, Environmental uncertainty, Export performance

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Introduction

In most countries, small and medium enterprises contribute to different parts of society, such as industrial output and service. These organizations are the key producers of new jobs, the hub of change and innovation, and the forerunners in developing new technology. On the other hand, these enterprises contribute significantly to countries' economic growth. Small and medium enterprises are among the most effective factors in the growth and development of any country's economic and social systems, and they have received the attention of the officials and politicians of the countries. Several internal and external variables appear to impact small and medium enterprises' position and competitive advantage relative to large industries (Rezaei, 2017). Examining empirical data reveals that no theory or model adequately describes the internationalization of small and medium enterprises and that the available models are mostly concerned with large organizations. Therefore, it is imperative to create a model for internationalization for Iranian small and medium enterprises (Amini and Fatahi, 2017).

Several elements contribute to entering the foreign market, including organizational, environmental, and managerial

concerns (Karadeniz and Gocer, 2007). During the latter decade of the 20th century, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have become increasingly significant. They are the motor of national economic expansion (Spicer and Sadler, 2006). Based on the criteria made by the European Committee, SMEs (Small and Medium enterprises) are companies with up to 250 employees. In addition, their annual financial turnover should not exceed 50 million euros, and their annual balance sheet should not exceed 43 million euros (European Commission, 2005)¹. The government's export promotion initiatives often result in large export growth for small and medium enterprises than for major exporting corporations (Felzensztein, 2017).

Because small and medium-sized nations' exports are vital to a country's economy, governments frequently invest significant resources in promoting exports.

Export is one of the fundamental pillars of every nation's economic growth, which must be complemented by producing and transferring knowledge and creating jobs. The export of industrial goods exemplifies this trait, and most industrialized and advanced countries have substantial industrial exports (Navarro-Garcia *et al.*, 2016).

¹ European Commission 2005:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/ramon/nomenclatures/index.cfm?TargetUrl=DSP_GLOSSARY_NOM_DTL_VIEW&StrNom

=CODED2&StrLanguageCode=EN&IntKey=17399050&RdoSearch=&TxtSearch=&CboTheme=&IsTer=&ter_vali d=0&IntCurrentPage=1

The presence of small and medium enterprises on international markets offers several advantages, including access to larger markets, economies of scale, technical level improvement, risk reduction, and access to funding (Yadollahi Farsi and Sakhdari, 2006).

How intermediaries and exporting unions engage with producers of paint and resin is the subject that the current study aims to address.

The Importance and Necessity of Research

According to data from the Statistical Center of Iran, 82% of all active industrial units in Iran are small and medium industries, and these small and medium industrial units produce 17% of all industrial production in Iran. Small industrial units have created jobs for 59.2% of the active population in Iran's industry, which is very important for Iran's economy (Deputy of Economic Research, Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines & Agriculture, 2020).

Smaller companies are less eager to export, even though many companies export. Therefore, assisting small and medium is regarded as one of the fundamental goals for economic growth and development in many countries and plays a vital role in the economic development of most countries (Sousa and Bradley, 2009).

The export performance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) has only been studied about changes in the global environment, such as rising technical developments, fewer trade barriers, a rise in the national interest, and corporate export development plans (Johanson and Vahlne, 2016). Concurrently, this goes against the emerging global attitude to mergers and globalization (Ghemawat, 2017).

Therefore, preparing and collecting strategies for small and medium enterprises in Tehran seems necessary to improve the competitive environment and export development.

Theoretical Foundation

Environmental Uncertainty

Organizations are always confronted with unpredictability or uncertainty while engaging with the environment. These situations are known as environmental uncertainty. Managers attempt to adapt to the influence of various environmental conditions. The definition of flexibility is a company's capacity to adjust to uncertain and rapidly changing environments. If the manager's chosen strategies cannot reduce the effect of uncertainties on the organization, the financial repercussions of these uncertainties will impact financial reporting. Therefore, managers continually endeavor to explore these uncertainties and assess their effect on the organization to minimize their effect on the company and its financial reporting (Sazegari and Yazdani, 2016).

Various definitions of environmental uncertainties have been provided, including the following:

1. Environmental uncertainty originates from events and changing trends that create organizational opportunities and threats (Mohammadian *et al.*, 2018).
2. Environmental uncertainty is a random element that influences performance method selection.
3. Uncertainty refers to the feeling of increased doubt. This doubt is caused by unpredictable changeability (Saghafi and Moradi Jaz, 2013).
4. In corporate management, environmental uncertainties are related to managers' doubts. These doubts arise when they face future competitive conditions, which are difficult to predict (Badavarnahandi *et al.*, 2012).

Union and Intermediary Interaction

Combining top-down and bottom-up management is essential for managing and planning natural environments. Bottom-up management entails steps like scenario analysis, criterion development, planning, strategy presentation, and local resource management and monitoring, with community participation in various processes being the most crucial. To apply and implement the bottom-up technique and take into account the local knowledge and experiences of the local community, it is required to expand the local community's engagement in the management of natural areas. One strategy to promote participation is to form trade guilds and various enterprises within a society so that communication can be made between the highest decision-makers in a country's government system and the members of the society with the lowest degree of legal and political power. A guild is a trade or professional organization consisting of people or members with a similar profession, profession, and activity. Organizations or trade associations are legal entities that aim to defend members' rights, promote the goals, demands, demands, and common trade interests, and engage in political and social participation. In Western literature, the term syndicate is used for the guild (Baker and Chapin, 2018).

Export Performance

Export performance refers to the extent to which a company meets its aims while exporting its products to a foreign market—export performance outcomes from organizational operations for the organization's internal and external accomplishments and objectives. In addition, it provides a reference for assessing the company's local and worldwide performance (Madadkhani *et al.*, 2019).

Yan *et al.* (2021) claimed that export performance depends on companies' capacity to employ procedures to uncover new opportunities in the market, which happens through the identification of new ideas and their incorporation into new export goods. Despite this examination of export performance, it is a difficult process, and the use of this review is contingent on the validity of the measures. Since export performance may

be perceived and measured differently, dealing with it can be challenging (Spanos, 2016).

Export performance has various dimensions that cannot be explained by one index or factor, and there is no agreement on measuring it. Sales are measured by criteria such as total sales volume or export intensity. Profit is measured by total export profit. Profit is measured by total export profit, and relative profit measures are measured by export profit divided by total profit or export profit divided by domestic market profit.

When profit or sales indicators are static, export performance is evaluated using growth measures, which refer to changes in export sales or profits over time. Moreover, several sites recommend utilizing these parameters to evaluate export performance; Success: measures such as managers' perceptions of export's contribution to the company's overall profitability and its acceptability and reputation; Satisfaction: relates to the managers' overall satisfaction with the company's export performance. Goal-achieving: relates to managers' assessment of performance compared to goals (Cavusgil and Zou, 2014).

Table I summarizes the findings of internal and external research on the export performance indicator, environmental uncertainty, and the relationship between the union and intermediaries.

[Insert Table I near here]

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the variables of this study.

The study's hypothesis is listed below.

[Insert Figure 1 near here]

Hypothesis

Due to environmental uncertainty, the interaction between unions and intermediaries moderates the export performance of small and medium paint and resin companies.

Research Methods

This study is representative of descriptive-correlational research. The study examined all factors using a five-point Likert scale drawn from standard survey questions used in prior research. The standard questionnaire of Brache and Felzensztein (2019), consisting of 13 closed-ended questions based on a five-point Likert scale, was used to measure the characteristics of export performance.

The Brache and Felzensztein (2019) questionnaire measured environmental uncertainty. This questionnaire comprises 4 questions. The Brache and Felzensztein (2019) questionnaire measured the union and mediator's interaction. This questionnaire comprises 3 questions.

Due to the restricted statistical population, simple random sampling was performed. This study's research community comprises senior managers and sales managers of small and medium-sized paint and resin companies in Tehran province. According to data compiled by the Ministry of Industry,

Mines, and Commerce, there are 58,917 operational small and medium-sized businesses in Tehran province. There are 108 small and medium-sized businesses in the paint and resin industry.

According to Morgan's table, 86 individuals chosen randomly from a statistical population of 108 senior managers and sales managers make up the sample. A representative aware of the company's affairs can be the managing director and sales manager, filling out the relevant questionnaire.

Validity assessment, even though the questionnaires used in this research are according to Brache and Felzensztein's questionnaire in 2019, they have been used in many types of research. To establish its validity following Iran's social and cultural characteristics, eleven professors and specialists were given questionnaires, and the content validity was validated using CVR and CVI. After receiving their feedback, the final questionnaire was drafted and disseminated. SPSS software was utilized for descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the outcomes of this research. This research tested the hypotheses using the structural equation modeling analysis technique with SMART-PLS software.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

SPSS software was used to analyze demographic data. The findings showed that the gender of 16.3% of the respondents was female (14 people), and 83.7% were male (72 people). The age of 11.6% of the respondents is less than 30 years (10 people), 43% are between 30 and 40 years old (37 people), and 45.4% are 41 years and older (39 people). The level of education of 24.4% of respondents is associate degree and below (21 people), 41.9% bachelor's degree (36 people), 33.7% master's degree and above (29 people). In this regard, 26.7% (23 people) of the respondents had less than 5 years of work experience, 57% (49 people) between 5 and 15 years, and 16.3% (14 people) had more than 15 years of work experience. By the SMART-PLS software version 3, the model estimate in this work was based on structural equation modeling (SEM), which used the partial least squares (PLS) method to evaluate hypotheses. This software may be utilized in experimental research by analyzing acquired data (for instance, survey questionnaires) and evaluating hypothesized relationships. This software provides a very effective multivariate analysis of the multivariate regression family, allowing the researcher to test many regression equations concurrently. PLS-based empirical research conducted in the past assesses the model in two stages: 1) Evaluation of the measurement model to provide valid and reliable measurements of the model's constructs. 2) The structural model test evaluates the statistical significance of the relationships specified in the model and the model's predictive ability based on a two-step approach in structural equations. The measurement model and structural model

confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were conducted to measure the measurement model's fit with the experimental data. The fit criteria of the measurement model in PLS include validity and reliability criteria, as well as 1- Factor loading values that must be more than 0.5. 2. The convergence validity must be at least 0.5. 3- The composite reliability scores and Cronbach's alpha coefficient should be higher than the criterion of 0.7 (Rosouli *et al.*, 2017).

The validity and reliability of the measurement model are displayed in Table II. Because all validity and reliability standards fall within the allowed range, the findings demonstrate that the research variables have an acceptable measurement fit.

[Insert Table II near here]

In PLS, structural model fit criteria include model fit criteria, such as the coefficient of determination and Stone-Geysler, for which values greater than zero are approved. Table III contains the results.

[Insert Table III near here]

The measurement and structural model fit criteria are included in Tables II and III, and it was concluded that the variables of this study had the required validity and reliability. Independent variables can predict the dependent variable effectively. Table IV displays the findings of the hypotheses tested in the research. The structural model is presented in Figure 2, along with the lines connecting each variable's significant values.

[Insert Figure 2 near here]

As calculated in Table IV, the main hypothesis of union and intermediary interaction has a moderating effect on small and medium manufacturing companies' export performance due to environmental uncertainty. The t-test value for the path moderating Effect 1 > Export performance is greater than 1.96. At a confidence level of 95% and an error level of 0.05, the interaction between unions and intermediaries due to environmental uncertainty moderates the export performance of small and medium manufacturing companies.

[Insert Table IV near here]

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study supported the main hypothesis that the interaction between unions and intermediaries moderates the export performance of small and medium manufacturing companies owing to environmental uncertainty. Brache and Felzensztein's (2019) research findings are compatible with this hypothesis. In recent years, there have been changes in the environmental tactics of rivals, interaction needs, and changes with labor unions, and the significance threshold is less than 5% when factor loadings above 0.5 are considered. It indicates that unions and intermediaries engage owing to environmental uncertainty's interaction with the export performance of small and medium paint and resin companies. Therefore, it is recommended that managers of companies that want to

increase their export potential increase their participation in business groups based on their export markets. Because the corporate sector lacks information on the important contacts of international business groups, managers must rely on their own data sets. The company is also advised to boost its export performance by dealing with unions and intermediaries and relying on changing market trends and client requests.

In the end, no research, particularly in the humanities, will inevitably be devoid of constraints; hence, they should be explicitly expressed, and the research should be examined by both the researcher and the audience. The following particular circumstances that control the current research have certain restrictions as well, including the research's subject and its participants:

1- Most of the necessary data for the research was gathered using questionnaires, which have inherent limitations such as the possibility that not all areas were covered and that some individuals did not provide accurate or honest responses. In the end, however, efforts have been made to regulate and neutralize these situations as much as feasible.

2- This research relates to the paint and resin sector; caution should be exercised when extrapolating the results to other industries, as the same results may not exist. Consequently, these findings cannot be applied to other industries.

3- The researcher has not involved demographic variables in the research.

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Figure captions

Figure 1. The concept from the studies of Brache and Felzensztein (2019).

Figure 2. A tested research model for the hypothesis.

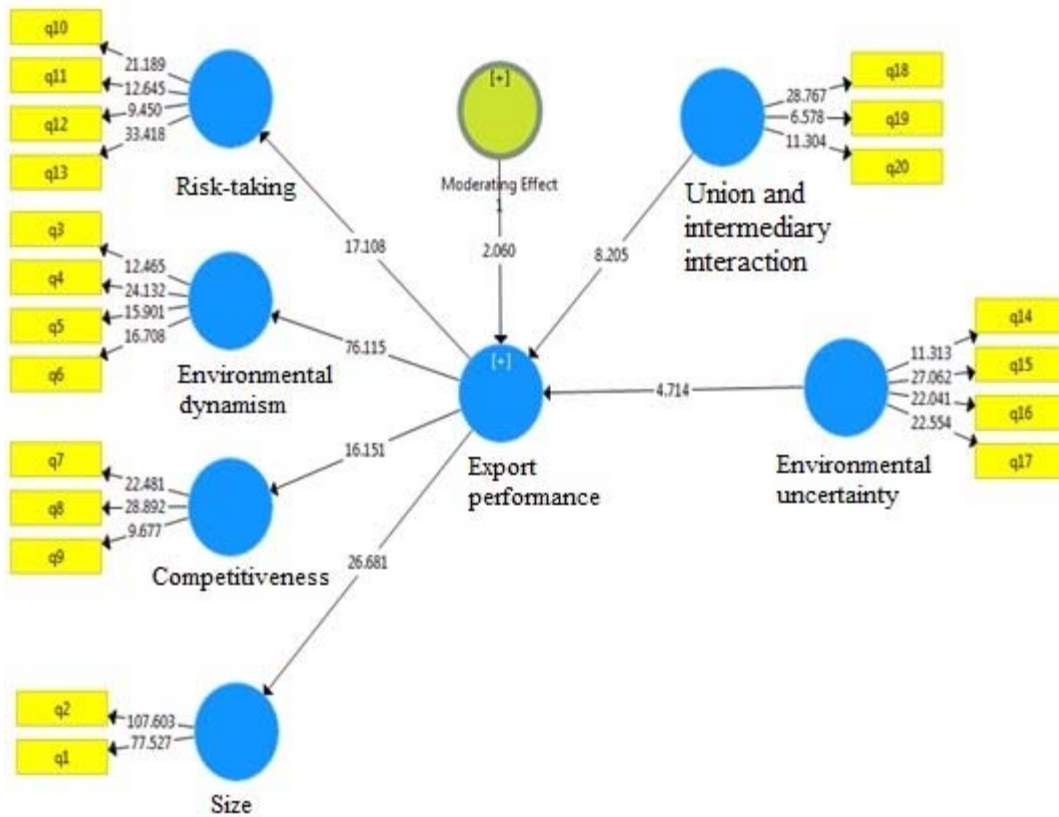
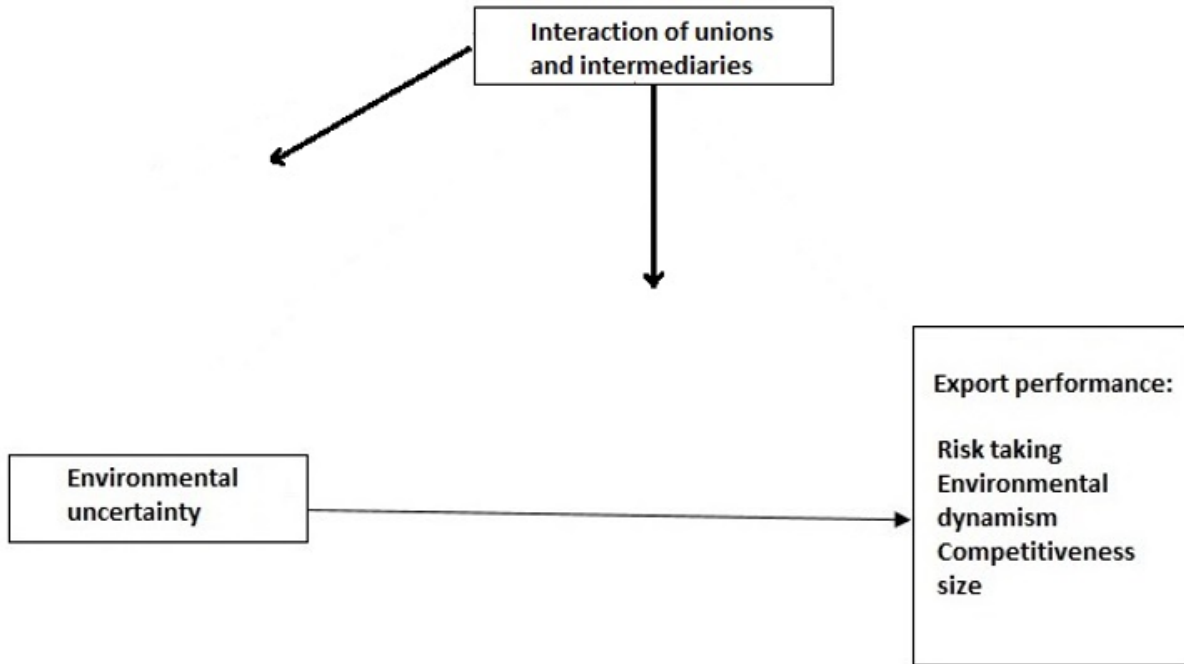


Table I. Summary of research according to study variables.

Researcher	Title	Results
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Brache and Felzensztein (2019)	The partnership of exporting firms with trade associations: A perspective from Chile	The results demonstrated that a stronger connection with trade unions in the company's export market positively impacted export performance. Environmental uncertainty regarding customers wants to be verified as a barrier to export performance, but unexpectedly, when the amount of engagement with business associations created in the firm's export market increases, this barrier is only diminished by an insignificant factor.
Chabowski <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Environmental uncertainty and corporate social responsibility	The research revealed a negative and significant relationship between environmental uncertainty and corporate social responsibility.
Noringa (2018)	Comparison of a cluster of shoe production in India or new competition in Agra	The results indicated that export performance was stronger for companies with a stronger interaction with an intermediary or export association.
Hong <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Environmental uncertainty and tax avoidance	Three factors were used to measure tax avoidance: the effective tax rate, the average over the previous five years, and the difference between accounting profit and taxable profit. Their investigation showed that environmental uncertainty positively and significantly affects tax avoidance.
Chen <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Determining factors of export performance, a literature review in 2006-2014	They re-examined the export performance of 53 researchers and concluded that the knowledge and experience of employees are very important to export performance.
Navarro-Garcia <i>et al.</i> (2016)	The effect of market intelligence on perceived psychological distance, strategic behaviors, and export performance on industrial SMEs	The study involved 196 small and medium manufacturing companies in Spain. They demonstrated the value of marketing expertise and foreign market culture.
Boi (2013)	How do local networks interact successfully with the export behavior of the furniture industry	The interaction between export unions has a significant and favorable effect on international intensity. However, membership in the association and internal unions had no significant effect on international intensity.

Moghri (2021)	The impact of organizational intangible resources on export performance	The values of the general indicators on the measuring model's value in this study are entirely acceptable and reveal a significant relationship between intangible resources and export performance in the garment exporters of Razavi Khorasan province.
Aghazadeh <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Explaining export performance with an export commitment	The results indicate the relationship and correlation between the three market-oriented, customer-oriented, and competitor-oriented elements and export performance but do not confirm the quality of the link between these factors and export performance. In addition, the mediating function of organizational commitment in the link between four intra-organizational characteristics and export performance was validated (except for the relationship between relationship quality and performance).
Raeiszadeh and Ramezani (2017)	Environmental uncertainty, profit management, and stock returns (managerial competence as a moderating factor)	Faced with environmental unpredictability, managers manage earnings to minimize profit variations. In addition, the data demonstrate that the market comprehends and responds to the environmental uncertainties caused by customers (sales change coefficient). It does not, however, respond to the environmental uncertainties brought on by the manager's reservations over the profit per share.
Rostamzadeh <i>et al.</i> (2016)	A case study of Urmia Municipality is being used to examine the link between the organization's performance and the perceived environment's and strategy's uncertainty	The relationship between perceived environmental uncertainty and strategy and organizational performance is positive and significant.
Aram (2013)	Identification and assessment of the elements influencing the export performance of Bushehr companies	Exporting companies can influence the organization's core strategy by using information and communication technologies, entrepreneurship-based, market-based, strategic flexibility, and

		developing their export knowledge. Therefore, enhancing the core strategy will increase the export performance of exporting companies.
Mahmoudi Maimand, Khabaz Babil, Khorshid, and Foroughi Nia (2013)	Management of export development, identification, and grading of export incentives. Case study: Automobile parts manufacturing industry	A special emphasis should be placed on the marketing ability and its research.

Table II. Validity and reliability of the research measurement model.

Main variable	Sub-variable	Question symbol	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Convergent validity
Export performance	Size	Q1	0.961	0.901	0.953	0.528
		Q2	0.946			
	Environmental dynamism	Q3	0.745	0.841	0.890	0.670
		Q4	0.857			
		Q5	0.837			
		Q6	0.830			
	Competitiveness	Q7	0.830	0.835	0.857	0.668
		Q8	0.867			
		Q9	0.748			
	Risk-taking	Q10	0.874	0.748	0.893	0.677
		Q11	0.790			
		Q12	0.769			
		Q13	0.856			
Environmental uncertainty	Q14	0.727	0.847	0.897	0.687	
	Q15	0.883				
	Q16	0.866				
	Q17	0.830				
Union and intermediary interaction		Q18	0.861	0.714	0.837	0.634

	Q19	0.691			
	Q20	0.826			

Table III. Model fit indices.

Variables	R ²	Q ²
Export performance	0.796	0.403
Size	0.653	0.657
Competitiveness	0.692	0.426
Risk-taking	0.731	0.451
Environmental dynamism	0.885	0.587

Table IV. Multivariate regression results of research assumptions in PLS software.

Number	Path analysis	T-statistic	P-value	Result
Main hypothesis				
1	Moderating Effect 1 > Export performance	2.060	0.041	Approved