

Strategy and business economics

International orientation and export commitment in fast small and medium size firms internationalization: scales validation and implications for the Brazilian case

Orientação internacional e comprometimento exportador na rápida internacionalização de pequenas e médias empresas: validação de escalas e implicações para o caso brasileiro

Orientación internacional y compromiso de exportación en la rápida internacionalización de pequeñas y medianas empresas: validación de escalas e implicaciones para el caso brasileño

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Abstract

A set of changes in the competitive environment has recently provoked the emergence of a new kind of organization that has since its creation a meaningful share of its revenue being originated from international activities developed in more than one continent. Within this new reality, the internationalization of the firm in phases or according to its growth has resulted in it losing its capacity to explain this process with regard to small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME). Thus, in this paper, the international orientation (IO) and export commitment (EC) constructs have been revised under a theoretical context of the fast internationalization of medium-sized companies, so as to identify scales that more accurately measure these dimensions in the Brazilian setting. After a literature review and an exploratory research, the IO and EC scales proposed by Knight and Cavusgil (2004) and Shamsuddoha and Ali (2006) were respectively applied to a sample of 398 small- and medium-sized exporting Brazilian companies. In spite of conjunction and situation differences inherent to the Brazilian companies, the selected scales presented high measuring reliability. Furthermore, the field research outcomes provide evidence for the existence of a phenomenon of fast internationalization in medium-sized companies in Brazil, as well as support some theoretical assumptions of other empirical investigations carried out with samples from developed countries.

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Keywords: Small- and medium-sized firm internationalization; Born Globals; International orientation; Export commitment

Resumo

Recentemente, um conjunto de mudanças no ambiente competitivo mundial trouxe à tona um novo tipo de organização em que, desde sua criação, uma parcela significativa de seu faturamento provém de atividades internacionais desenvolvidas em mais de um continente. Nesse contexto, o processo de internacionalização de empresas por estágios e de caráter incremental perdeu seu poder explicativo no caso dessas novas pequenas e

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médias empresas (PME). Assim, o presente estudo revisou os construtos da orientação internacional (OI) e de comprometimento com a exportação (CE), dentro do campo teórico da rápida internacionalização de PMEs, para identificar escalas que melhor aferissem essas dimensões no contexto brasileiro. Após a revisão de literatura e uma pesquisa exploratória, as escalas de OI e CE propostas por Knight e Cavusgil (2004) e Shamsuddoha e Ali (2006), respectivamente, foram aplicadas em uma amostra de 398 empresas brasileiras exportadoras de pequeno e médio porte. Apesar das diferenças conjunturais e situacionais inerentes às empresas brasileiras, as escalas selecionadas apresentaram elevada confiabilidade de mensuração. Ainda, os resultados da pesquisa de campo trazem evidências da existência do fenômeno da rápida internacionalização de PMEs no Brasil, bem como reforçam alguns pressupostos teóricos de outras investigações empíricas feitas com amostras de PMEs em países desenvolvidos.

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Palavras-chave: Internacionalização de pequenas e médias empresas; *Born globals*; Orientação internacional; Comprometimento exportador

Resumen

Recientemente, un conjunto de cambios en el ambiente competitivo mundial hizo aparecer un nuevo tipo de organización en que, desde su creación, una parte significativa de la facturación proviene de actividades internacionales llevadas a cabo en más de un continente. En este contexto, el proceso de internacionalización de empresas por etapas y de carácter incremental perdió su poder explicativo en el caso de estas nuevas pequeñas y medianas empresas (PYME). Así, en el presente estudio se repasaron los conceptos de orientación internacional (OI) y de compromiso con la exportación (CE), dentro del campo teórico de la rápida internacionalización de PYME, para identificar escalas que mejor cotejasen estas dimensiones en el contexto brasileño. Después del análisis de la literatura y un estudio exploratorio, las escalas de OI y CE propuestas por Knight y Cavusgil (2004) y Shamsuddoha y Ali (2006), respectivamente, fueron aplicadas a una muestra de 398 empresas brasileñas exportadoras pequeñas y medianas. A pesar de las diferencias coyunturales y situacionales inherentes a las empresas brasileñas, las escalas seleccionadas presentaron elevada fiabilidad de medición. Los resultados del estudio de campo aportan evidencias de la existencia del fenómeno de la rápida internacionalización de PYME en Brasil, así como refuerzan algunos presupuestos teóricos de otros estudios empíricos realizados con muestras de PYME en países desarrollados.

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Palabras clave: Internacionalización de pequeñas y medianas empresas; *Born globals*; Orientación internacional; Compromiso con la exportación

Introduction

A set of changes in the global competitive environment, most notably from 1990, brought out a new type of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that, since its inception, have a significant portion of its revenues coming from international activities (Knight & Cavusgil, 1996; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994). This phenomenon has received several names, including the following: Born Globals (BG), International New Ventures, Global Start-ups, and Instant Internationals, among others (Rialp, Rialp, & Knight, 2005).

The phenomenon of rapid internationalization of SMEs has intrigued researchers in the recent decades (Chandra, Styles, & Wilkinson, 2012), mainly due to the peculiar characteristics of this type of organization and also because of their counteracting the corollary of traditional theories that explain the process of internationalization in companies (Knight & Cavusgil, 2005; Moen & Servais, 2002; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994).

According to several empirical studies, the factor that most contributes to the early internationalization behavior of SMEs is the belief by their managers that the target market is any market, whether domestic or international. For the executives of those companies, the market, unlike the gradual international companies, is global (Hagen & Zuchela, 2014; Zhang, Tansuhaj, & McCullough, 2009).

Thus, a key internal factor of accelerated internationalization in SMEs most researched, even considered an antecedent to this phenomenon, is the managers' strong orientation toward

foreign markets. Researchers who investigated this internal history of BG called such managers' behavior as international orientation (IO) or global orientation (Knight & Cavusgil, 1996, 2004; Kyvik, Saris, Bonet, & Felício, 2013; Moen & Servais, 2002; Rialp et al., 2005; Zahra, 2005).

On the other hand, several researchers have noticed the fact that managerial attitudes also influence the exports of a company, especially in the case of SMEs. Those attitudes are usually identified as the commitment of organizational resources, promoted by its managers, toward the export activity (Leonidou, Katsikeas, & Piercy, 1998; Mehran & Moini, 2001; Sousa, Martínez-López, & Coelho, 2008). Zou and Cavusgil (2002) and Cavusgil and Zou (1994) identified that the commitment of resources of a company toward exports has a direct impact on the speed of internationalization and the global performance of that company.

Therefore, it is clear that the BGs managers play a key role in their organization's rapid internationalization (Andersson & Floren, 2011; Kyvik et al., 2013); in addition, a subjective dimension, their international orientation (IO), and an objective dimension, its export commitment (EC), can help explain the accelerated internationalization (Autio, 2005; Freeman & Cavusgil, 2007; Johanson & Vahlne, 2003; Knight & Cavusgil, 1996, 2004; Rialp et al., 2005).

Another convergence in the studies on the BG is that the existence of such companies is more common in developed countries with a strong share of exports in GDP (Autio, 2005; Hagen & Zuchela, 2014; Knight & Cavusgil, 2004; Moen & Servais, 2002; Rennie, 1993). However, recently there has been a

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