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## ARTICLE

# Social media adoption by exporters: The export-dependence moderating role



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### KEYWORDS

Social media capabilities;  
Managerial adoption process;  
Exporting companies;  
Structural equation modeling

**Abstract** The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between managerial beliefs regarding social media and the subsequent adoption of these tools by exporting companies, and the moderating effect of export dependence measured by export intensity in those relationships. To accomplish this objective we use data from a Web-based survey distributed (by e-mail) to export managers or CEOs of Spanish exporting firms from the ICEX (Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade) database. Our results show that Managers' beliefs about social media capabilities for dealing with foreign customers directly influence managerial attitudes toward and intention to use social media, and also indirectly on the intention to use them through the attitude. Then, the intention to use these applications increases their final usage by exporting firms. Export dependence of the company moderates all these relationships, being stronger with a higher export intensity.

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### PALABRAS CLAVE

Capacidades de los medios sociales;  
Proceso de adopción gerencial;  
Empresas exportadoras;  
Modelo de ecuaciones estructurales

**Adopción de los medios sociales por parte de los exportadores: papel moderador de la dependencia de la exportación**

**Resumen** El objetivo de este estudio es investigar la relación entre las creencias gerenciales en relación a los medios sociales y la subsiguiente adopción de dichas herramientas por parte de las empresas exportadoras, así como el efecto moderador de la dependencia de la exportación, calibrado mediante la intensidad exportadora en dichas relaciones. Para lograr este objetivo, utilizamos los datos de una encuesta basada en web y distribuida por correo electrónico a los gerentes o a los directores ejecutivos de las empresas exportadoras españolas de la base de datos del ICEX (Instituto Español de Comercio Exterior). Nuestros resultados reflejan que las

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creencias de los gestores acerca de las capacidades de los medios sociales, en cuanto al trato con los clientes extranjeros, tienen una influencia directa sobre las actitudes gerenciales frente al uso y a la intención de utilizar los medios sociales, y una influencia indirecta sobre la intención de hacer uso de dichos medios a través de la actitud. Por tanto, la intención de utilizar estas aplicaciones incrementa su uso final por parte de las empresas exportadoras. La dependencia de la exportación por parte de la empresa modera todas estas relaciones, acrecentándose cuando la intensidad exportadora es más elevada.

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## Introduction

While social media have become a primary customer information source about products and/or services for many of their users, they are outside the traditional marketing communication domain and, therefore, beyond the full control of marketers. Thus, there is evidence that customer-generated content plays an increasingly important role in the consumer's decision-making process (Constantinides, Lorenzo, & Gómez, 2008). Likewise, some recent studies have already investigated the way social-media technology usage is currently contributing to improve customer-relationship management (Trainor, Andzulis, Rapp, & Agnihotri, 2014) and organizational performance (Carmichael, Palacios-Marques, & Gil-Pechuan, 2011). As a result, online marketing management is claiming an increasing portion of marketers' attention and corporate budgets.

Many authors agree that information technology (IT), and mostly the Internet, have become one of the most important tools for conducting international business and marketing activities (Sinkovics, Sinkovics, & Jean, 2013). In particular, IT-based capabilities have been found to be especially crucial in promoting the emergence of international new ventures and/or facilitating small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) internationalization (Loane, 2006; Mathews & Healy, 2007; Pezderka, Sinkovics, & Jean, 2012; Zhang, Sarker, & Sarker, 2013). In addition, many companies currently rely on ITs and the Internet for improving international supply-chain co-ordination, relationship learning, customer-service management, and firm performance (Trainor et al., 2014).

Social media (tools that enable online exchange of information through conversation and interaction) is emerging as an important technology for business strategy. Unlike traditional IT, social media manage the content of the conversation or interaction as an information artifact in the online environment (Yates & Paquette, 2011). Some authors also highlight their potential influence on international business and export marketing strategies (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013), as these applications may help break down barriers of time and distance between the supply and demand sides (Constantinides et al., 2008). Therefore, attending the benefits of social media to break down barriers of time and distance, we assume that social media could assist exporting

firms by reducing market lag through real-time and synchronous exchange of knowledge.

Social media mainly differ from other kind of technologies in the fact that these medias employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content (Gagliardi, 2013; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). In addition, social media have introduced new customer-centric tools that enable customers to interact with others in their social networks and with businesses that become network member (Kietzmann et al., 2011). These technologies have the potential to provide greater access to customer information either directly through firm-customer interactions or indirectly through customer-customer interactions.

However, in spite of the great potential of social media, especially for export-oriented companies, to-date very limited academic attention has been paid to examining the relationship between managers' beliefs about social media and its adoption among exporting firms. This study aims at filling part of this research gap by answering two research questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between managerial beliefs regarding social media and the subsequent adoption of these tools by exporting companies? and

RQ2: Does the export dependence, measured by export intensity, moderate this relationship?

To answer these questions, the current research examines the effect of social media expected capabilities and managerial usage behavior through incorporating the Resource-Based View (RBV) framework and two main constructs of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (attitude and behavior). The RBV can be applied to investigate how a firm's powerful resource base enables companies obtain advantages. Specifically, related with our topic, many researchers have studied how technological resources and information technology (IT) capability can serve as a source of sustainable competitive advantage for export companies (Filipescu, Prashantham, Rialp, & Rialp, 2013; Pla-Barber & Alegre, 2007). In this sense, several researchers set out that a company's success in foreign markets depends heavily on its capacity to adapt to new developments such as ITs and Internet-related capabilities (Loane, 2006; Sinkovics et al.,

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