

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION AND MEASUREMENT OF EXPORT COMMITMENT

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ABSTRACT

Export commitment has long been acknowledged as an important prerequisite for successful export performance (Cunningham and Spigel 1971; Hunt, Froggatt, and Hovell 1967; Singer and Czinkota 1994). However, a review of the export marketing literature reveals at least two major limitations with respect to how export commitment (also referred to as top management commitment, managerial commitment to exporting, or as a firm's commitment to export marketing) has been conceptualized and measured. First, there is no commonly accepted definition for the construct, nor has it been clearly distinguished from concepts like "export performance." Second, past efforts to operationalize export commitment have failed to produce measures that demonstrate acceptable psychometric properties, particularly with respect to reliability and validity.

Against this background, this paper presents an integrative reconceptualization of export commitment and reports the results of an empirical study which assesses the reliability and validity of multi-item scales used to operationalize the construct. Based on an extensive review of extant literature on export commitment as well as conceptualizations of commitment from the organizational behavior, sociology, and relationship marketing literatures we argue that export commitment is a multidimensional construct that encompasses *both* attitudinal and behavioral dimensions. Hence we define the construct as follows.

Export Commitment includes *both* attitudinal and behavioral dimensions. Attitudinal export commitment is an enduring favorable disposition toward engaging in exporting that is demonstrated by a strong belief that exporting is beneficial for the organization (cognitive component), an emotional attachment to exporting (affective component), and an intent to pursue this strategy of international market entry (conative component). Behavioral export commitment refers to the extent that resources and effort are actually devoted to support the organization's exporting strategy and is demonstrated by the intensity of resource expenditures (input component), the extent to which these re-

sources represent long-term investments or non-redeployable assets (durability component) and the stability of the investment level over time (consistency component).

Multi-item scales that reflect this definition were developed based on field interviews and the existing literature. A national mail survey of manufacturers of furniture, plastics, and machine tools resulted in 162 usable questionnaires being returned. Data analysis using the EQS software package (Bentler 1989) supports our contention that export commitment is a multidimensional concept and provides evidence that this construct's various components are conceptually and empirically distinct. Also, we demonstrate that the concept is distinguishable from conceptually related constructs like management characteristics and export performance. These findings have several important implications.

Our findings provide preliminary support for the premise that commitment to exporting requires attitudinal as well as behavioral commitment from top management. Being committed in attitude but not devoting the resources required to take advantage of export market potential will result in lower levels of export performance (Cavusgil and Naor 1987; Stump, Athaide, and Axinn 1998). Therefore, managers must identify any impediments that may prevent their firms from translating committed attitudes into committed behaviors and try to eliminate these roadblocks.

There are also significant implications for the conduct of future research in export marketing and for the development of theories to explain and predict export behavior. For example, do the different dimensions of commitment have a differential impact on export performance? If so, which dimension is more important when and why? Along the same lines, we need greater understanding of the direction of causality in the commitment-performance link. For example, Christensen, da Rocha, and Gertner (1987) argue that the relationship between commitment and performance is an iterative one in which successful performance results in increased commitment which in turn leads to further export success. Thus, future research should seek to clarify the commitment-performance link.

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