

Export Marketing Performance (EMP) of Pakistan SMEs impacted by the Internet

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Abstract— This paper studies the impact of the Internet (when used for communication, networking, market research, sales, image enhancement, cost reduction and competitive advantage purposes) on export marketing performance of developing country exporters. It was found that Internet use for the purposes of communication and cost reducing significantly impacted the export marketing performance of exporters. Evidence has also been provided that when the Internet is used for communication and cost reduction, this will have a positive impact on export marketing performance. Thus, it is important for the management of such exporters to be aware of these factors when using the Internet for exporting at such scale. The unit of analysis was an individual exporter. Data was gathered via a self-administered mail survey of over 400 Pakistani exporters coming from a wide cross-section of industries. It is recommended that future researchers replicate this study with a larger sample and a larger developing country to examine whether the relationships between variables still hold true on an industry-by-industry basis, as some industries have more interactive websites than others.

Index Term — The Internet, Export Marketing Performance, Developing countries, Pakistan, Firm's International Experience

I. INTRODUCTION

The Internet is a cost effective medium for communicating with current and potential customers – local and abroad for conducting daily business. Further it has evolved into a dynamic source of information as well as an extraordinary marketing tool that is able to reach nearly any user. Thus any business, regardless of their size and sectors, ventured into internet trying to obtain the benefits the Internet brings.

The Internet was opened for communication use in the 1990's, and with that the use of the web has become widespread [1]. The expanded use of the Internet has created new opportunities for exporters to improve current ways of doing business and influencing the development of competitive export marketing strategies [2]. So in order to be competitive, exporters need to employ technologies to develop low-cost yet efficient customer prospecting methods, efficient international leading prospects, and closing relationship with customers / partners around the

world [2]. To achieve these goals, a greater understanding of the influence of Internet on export operations is required.

The impact of the Internet on Export Marketing Performance (EMP) has been studied by [3, 2, 4, 5] on developed countries. From all the major points in evaluating EMP, we can see the Internet actually plays a very important role. Nevertheless limited scholarly studies have focused on developing countries. [3] have stressed the need for further research in the developing countries to validate their model as a sampling frame.

Purpose and Significance of the Study:

The impact of the Internet on the EMP has been studied when it is used for communication, networking, market research, improving sales volume, image enhancement, cost reduction and competitive advantage. As such, the primary objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of the Internet on export marketing performance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) of developing countries.

It is expected that the current study will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the success factors in export marketing and the role internet plays in the success of SMEs of developing countries involved in online exports. It is further expected that the findings of this research will assist the management of SMEs of developing countries to use the Internet more efficiently and effectively.

To measure the impact, validated measurement scales developed by [6] for such, was used. The instruments were used to examine the Internet's use in export marketing in relation to communication, networking, market research, sales, image enhancement, cost reduction and competitive advantage.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The capability of the Internet in providing interactive, two-way communication plays an important role in the firm's maintenance of long-term relationships and networking [7]. The Internet also promises to be an efficient medium for conducting worldwide market research [8]. With the rapid pace of change in increasingly competitive international markets, timely and relevant information is essential for firms to grow their export volume and proactively compete for their market standing [9].

Other related studies [9, 4, 10, 5] have attempted to limit access to the Internet on a firm's Export Marketing Performance (EMP), however the empirical findings are inconclusive and those studies are quite dated requiring further investigation. The use of internet for business results in a reduction in transaction costs for all parties involved [11] including the costs of executing a sale, costs of procurement and cost associated with making and delivering a product

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leading to an increase in profitability [12]. Finally, internet has the capability to create a long-lasting competitive advantage which in turn determines a firm's survival and prosperity in the information age [2]. According to [13] internet is one of the very few tools that small businesses can use effectively to compete with their bigger rivals on the same ground.

The adoption of the Internet is usually considered as a vital part of IT adoption. Some of the prevailing theories of IT adoption include theory of reasoned action [14] technology acceptance model (TAM) [15] and theory of planned behavior (TPB) [16]. [16] showed that recent investments in client/server (C/S) networking applications have competing effects on the likelihood of Internet adoption. Furthermore, he indicates that geographic dispersion of employees is complementary with Internet adoption, suggesting that Internet technology lowered internal coordination costs. According to [17], perceived usefulness, but not perceived ease of use, of the internet is a potential predictor of the intention to adopt the internet by firms for their export activities.

Export Marketing Performance is defined as the composite outcome of a firm's international sales consisting of export sales, export profitability, and export growth. A more comprehensive definition was offered by [3] that included the extent to which a firm's objectives, both economic and strategic, with respect to exporting products / services into a foreign market, is achieved. A variety of approaches for the measurement of EMP have been used by [18, 19, 2] has also studied the key predictors of EMP for exporting firms and found firm-characteristics to be non-significant predictor of EMP.

Despite the growth and benefits of internet usage, limited scholarly attention has been paid to the investigation of the role of the Internet in international marketing especially exporting SMEs of developing countries. [3] concluded in their study on Australian export market ventures that the two uses of the Internet in export marketing contributing to the variation of the EMP were communication and competitive advantage. This meant that how an export market venture perceived internet's usefulness in relation to communication and competitive advantage could be used to significantly predict their marketing performance. Thus it is important for management of an exporting SME to be aware of these factors when using the Internet in an export venture of any magnitude.

Lu & Julian (2008) have studied the Internet impact on EMP when used for communication was measured via items that tapped the degree to which the Internet improves internal communications and communications with suppliers and partners overseas. Networking was measured via items that tapped the degree to which the Internet helps make industry contacts and improves network relationships. Image enhancement was measured by [2] via items that tapped the extent to which the Internet helps introduce new products, makes it easier to serve niche markets, and create a good business image.

There are various ways by which Sales could be increased by the Internet, since it is an effective tool for foreign markets. For example Internet can help the firm increase its sales volume without physically expanding the business. Similarly the Internet makes it easier to bypass local intermediaries in foreign markets. It also makes it

easier for foreign customers to order goods online. Further, the firm can sell anywhere in the world using the Internet, no matter how remote the country is [20] Marketing research was measured via items that tapped the extent to which the Internet helps with export marketing research. Sales were measured via items that tapped the extent to which the Internet helps a firm increase in its sales volume and whether the Internet makes it easier for a firm to bypass local intermediaries in foreign markets [6].

In relation to the Internet enhancing the company image, it helps penetrate unfamiliar markets as well as stimulates secondary markets. Internet also makes it easier to serve the niche markets overseas and is capable of creating a good business image. Further, it has the capability to generate international awareness about a business as shown by [3].

Some earlier studies of Effect of Internet on Long-term relationships and networking were done by [7, 1]. Fulfillment of some business functions [21], Reduction in transaction costs [11], Information Competitive Advantage [2], and Sales volume increase [8] have also been done.

Pakistan is a developing country with a need to diversify its exports [22]. The increased usage of the Internet for exports has the potential to boost its international trade. Over 90% of all private sector businesses of Pakistan are SMEs. SMEs provide 80% of the industrial labor force of the country and contribute 40% of the GDP (Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority [SMEDA] [22]). In addition, SMEs contribute around 30% of the total export receipts. A large majority of these enterprises are involved in the export of unfinished products. Thus understanding of impact of the Internet on EMP will be beneficial to the decision makers of exporting SMEs.

A. Hypotheses

The theoretical perspective which is being adopted for the current study is that for EMP scales to be reliable and valid across national settings, they need to include items that are drawn from multiple perspectives of previous studies in various developed countries. The argument is that the current study will provide more conclusive evidence on the relationship between the Internet and EMP using such measures.

Communication is the most popular use of the Internet, with email topping the list of all the technologies used [23]. The internet enables all users a very timely and convenient communication. [20] observes that "clearly, marketers are adding on-line channels to find, reach, communicate, and sell" and that "companies small and large are taking advantages of cyberspace's vanishing national boundaries" (p. 370). [8] believe that the Internet will accelerate the internationalization of small and medium-size enterprises. As such, the following hypothesis is offered for testing:

H1. The Internet when it is used for communication purposes is a propeller for Pakistani export firms that experience high (vs. low) export marketing performance.

The culminant evolution of social networking among Internet users is no longer "just a trend". The social network became more than a tool for connecting people [9]. The use of the Net for market intelligence and to support international networking can lead to a more positive, geocentric orientation towards the strategic importance of

international markets [10]. Hence we have the following Hypothesis 2.

H2. The Internet when it is used for networking purposes is a propeller for Pakistani export firms that experience high (vs. low) export marketing performance.

The Internet serves as a hub of information nowadays. As the most cost-efficient medium for the research process [2] the Internet is now becoming an increasingly important source of first hand and secondary data. There are many methods of researches that can be conducted online to provide decision support for export and import companies, such as customer satisfaction survey. Here is our logic support for Hypothesis 3.

H3. The Internet when it is used to conduct market research is a predictor for Pakistani export firms that experience high (vs. low) export marketing performance.

Business of all sorts could not be separated from the rest of society. A good social image will bring massive benefit to companies. A company should be a responsible member of the society in which it operates. The internet provides a good channel for companies to improve their social image by promoting their corporate social responsibility activities. Hence we have Hypothesis 4.

H4. The Internet when it is used for image enhancement purposes is a predictor for Pakistani export firms that experience high (vs. low) export marketing performance.

Researchers on virtual teams have argued that by reducing these communications costs, Internet investments reduce the costs of having geographically dispersed employees [15]. Followed is our Hypothesis 5.

H5. The Internet when it is used for cost reduction purposes is a predictor for Pakistani export firms that experience high (vs. low) export marketing performance.

Many firms do not realize the significant competitive advantage that could be brought by the use of the Internet. Some companies, for example, underestimate the value of using their websites to convey useful information about their products or services to the customers in their given markets. The websites served just as a means of displaying their company profile or list of products are not enough. Poorly designed Internet publicity strategy, however, will jeopardize the competitive advantage. Thus the following Hypothesis 6 is important to test.

H6. The Internet when it is used to achieve a competitive advantage is a predictor for Pakistani export firms that experience high (vs. low) export marketing performance.

III. RESEARCH METHODS AND ANALYSES

The purpose of this study was to investigate exporting firms of Pakistan (a developing country) that used the Internet, to examine the Impact of the Internet on the Export Marketing Performance (EMP). The survey was carried out by using a structured questionnaire and targeted to all firms who were identified as being involved in direct exporting from Pakistan. The sample came from a wide cross section of industries listed in the Directory of Export Promotion Bureau (EPB). In order to obtain valid and reliable measures of the variables, previously validated scales used to measure EMP were used. Same instruments were used by [2, 3, 6].

Before we expand our research, the following findings from previous research should be highlighted in

advance [3, 2, 6] and a few others): by using the Internet to introduce new products, to serve niche markets, to create a positive business image, to generate international awareness about the firm and to penetrate and stimulate unfamiliar and secondary markets this will have a positive impact on EMP.

A questionnaire was administered and the respondents were asked to evaluate each statements in the questionnaire via five-point bipolar scales with scale poles ranging from “completely agree” (5) to “completely disagree” (1). The questionnaire consisted of three sections described below:

Section A: It was designed to collect the data of the companies. Items included firm size, annual exports, years in international operations, number of markets being served, and types of products being exported.

Section B: This section contained items identified by the literature as to the use of the Internet in export marketing. Seven areas summarized by [4] included communication, networking, market research, sales, image enhancement, cost reduction, and competitive advantage. A total of 31 statements in this regards were used to fine-point bipolar scales ranging from completely agree (5) to completely disagree (1).

Section C: This section contained items intended to measure EMP. A composite measure of EMP that incorporated all three indicators i.e. economic, strategic, and overall satisfaction with the performance, as identified from the literature [20, 25, 3].

Respondents were asked to indicate the relative importance attached to each objective by allocating a constant sum (100 points) to the individual objective proportional to their importance. Respondents were also asked to indicate their satisfaction with the achievement of those objectives. The extent to which the initial strategic objectives were achieved was computed as the weighted-sum of the importance of the initial strategic objectives.

Respondents then indicated their perceived success of the export venture. Finally, the respondents were asked to indicate the overall profitability and the sales growth of the venture. The respondents were confined to the senior management of the companies involved in exporting which in the majority of cases included owners, managing directors, CEO's, and marketing managers.

A total of 400 SMEs were selected from the directories of EPB (Export Promotion Bureau), 2009 version, and from Chambers of Commerce of Pakistan. The questionnaire was developed and pre-tested using a small sample of exporters. The final instrument was mailed to the sample yielding 125 usable questionnaire being returned via mail as well as online, accounting for an effective response rate of 31.2% and considered to be adequate from literature.

A. Data Analysis

Responses from the survey were coded in preparation for statistical analysis using SPSS program. In order to obtain valid and reliable measures of the variables, previously validated scales were used to measure export marketing performance (EMP) and the uses of the Internet. Frequencies and independent t-tests were used to determine whether significant difference existed between the 125 sample exporters and the target population of 400 based on their industry classification. No significant differences were identified between the sample and the target population for

this classification variable. Therefore, as the results suggest that there are no significant differences between respondents and non-respondents, the sample can be considered sufficient to draw conclusions about exporters for the issues understudy.

Data collected in this study were used to export marketing performance (EMP) and the uses of the Internet by small exporting businesses of Pakistan, as follows:

1. Firm Size: The number of employees working in SMEs ranged from a minimum of 4 to a maximum of 580 ($N = 125, M = 124, SD = 167$).
2. Annual exports of surveyed organizations: 39% of the SMEs surveyed were exporting below US \$1 million, 25.6% were exporting in the range of U.S. \$1–10 million and around 16% of the respondents reported exports above US \$ 10 million. Further, Business owners/Executives of around 19% of the SMEs surveyed did not disclose their export sales.
3. Years in International Operations: Number of years in International operations for the surveyed firms from a minimum of 1 to maximum of 75 years ($N=125, M=15.2, SD= 13.2$).
4. Number of Markets Operating in: Chart1 shows the International markets being served by the respondents. It is noted that major markets served include UAE, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, UK, and Germany. This is in line with the information provided by [22].
5. Types of Export Products: Major exports of the exporters include Textile, Leather, and Agricultural goods as shown in Chart 2. As can be noted, Pakistan is the major exporter of textile and textile related products.

Chart 1: Major Markets for Export

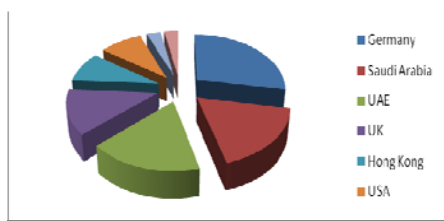
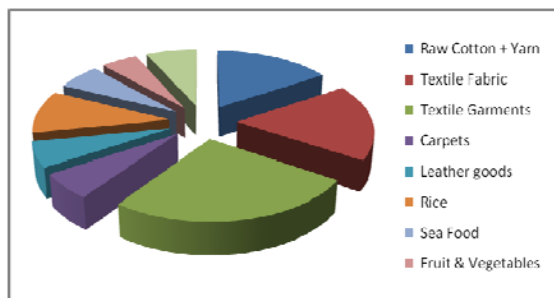


Chart 2: Products Exporting



The data was also analyzed using Principal Component Analysis to assess the psychometric properties of the instrument. The main concern was interpretability of the factors. The procedure was also used by [2] for similar type of study. All items loaded appropriately and no cross loading above 0.2 were identified and only factors loading of above

0.5 being accepted. The final reliabilities (Cronbach’s alpha values) were greater than 0.65 with most greater than 0.75.

Table 1: Multiple Regression Analysis

Variable	Cr. Alpha	Coefficient	T-Statistic	Sig. T	Signif.
(1) Communication	0.65	0.236	2.389	0.019	Yes*
(2) Networking	0.72	0.131	1.302	0.196	No
(3) Market Research	0.76	0.052	0.474	0.636	No
(4) Sales	0.76	-0.005	-0.041	0.967	No
(5) Image	0.77	0.008	0.075	0.94	No
(6) Cost Reduction	0.81	0.129	1.191	0.05	Yes*
(7) Competitive Adv.	0.68	-0.216	-1.927	0.237	No

Preliminary results indicated that the psychometric properties of the scales were acceptable, and as such it was appropriate to examine the research hypotheses. To explore the influence of the different uses of the Internet (Communication, Networking, Market research, Sales, Image enhancement, Cost reduction, and Competitive advantage) on export marketing performance, two-group discriminant analysis was used, as shown in Table 1. The purpose was to determine which variables of Internet usage best distinguish between high vs low marketing performance.

The different uses of the Internet were each measured on composite sales created by summing the items, respectively. In the discriminate analysis, the two groups were identified by splitting the groups at the median score for the composite measure of export marketing performance (EMP) that included satisfaction with the success of the export market venture, strategic output and economic performance.

In the discriminant analysis, the discriminant function was significant as shown in Table 2. The analysis resulted in $R^2 = 0.240$ suggesting that the seven uses of the Internet, Communication, Networking, Market research, Sales, Image enhancement, Cost reduction, and Competitive advantage explained 24% of the variance in EMP of Pakistan’s exporting SMEs. The results also show that two uses of the internet: “Communication” and “Cost Reduction” as having a significant influence on the EMP of these SMEs.

Table 2: Summary of the t-test

	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
Comm.	0.009	-0.857	0.325	-1.501	-0.214
	0.004	-0.857	0.293	-1.438	-0.277
Networking	0.101	0.331	0.2	-0.065	0.726
	0.133	0.331	0.218	-0.103	0.765

As such support was provided for hypotheses H1 and H6 while hypotheses H2, H3, H4, and H5 were rejected.

Unpaired t-tests on H1 and H2 were also conducted to double check our results. First of all we divide all

companies into two groups based on their export marketing performance. A company with the volume of exports more than 80 million will be categorized as high EMP company, while others are considered as low EMP companies. As shown in the Summary of t-test (Table 2), the Internet for communication purpose is not recognized the same way for two types companies. The significance level of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances with regard to communication is 0.044, which can be rejected with 95% confidence level. Similar results can be found for t-test for equality of means of two groups no matter equal variances assumed or not (2-tailed significance level 0.009 and 0.004, respectively). Hence H1 cannot be rejected. The test result with regard to networking is, however, the other way around. The significance level of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances with regard to communication is 0.061, which cannot be rejected with 95% confidence level. 2-tailed significance levels with equal variances assumed or not assumed are 0.101 and 0.133, respectively are high enough to accept the assumption of equality of means. Hence H2 is rejected.

IV. DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was based on the premise that the Internet as a business tool has experiencing amazing growth in recent times and while research had attempted to determine the relationship between internet usage and export marketing performance (EMP) in developed countries, studies in this area for developing countries is limited. As such, a robust empirical inquiry into the effect of the Internet on EMP of developing country exporters, when used for the purposes of communication, networking, market research, sales, image enhancement, cost reduction and competitive advantage, has been conducted.

The study found that two uses of the Internet in export marketing contribute significantly to the variation in the export marketing performance (EMP) of Pakistani exporters. The two significant uses are Communication and Cost reduction. This means that how a Pakistani exporter perceived the Internet's usefulness in relation to communication and cost reduction could be used to significantly predict their marketing performance. Thus it is important for the management of such exporters to be aware of these factors when using the Internet for exporting at such scale.

In relation to use of the Internet for communication contributing significantly to EMP, various areas were explored. In communication the findings demonstrate that the Internet create an ongoing relationship with customers, to improve communication with partners and suppliers overseas, to improve international communications, and as part of the firm's marketing communication mix, this will have a positive impact on EMP. It must be noted that this findings for developing country exporters are opposite to that of similar study [3] conducted on a developed country. It was shown that use of internet for communications have a negative impact on EMP of exporters in developed countries. This could be due to increasing number of websites and extremely high level of use of the Internet for both internal and external communication as well as the advertising clutter. It is possible that the exporters of the developing countries have not yet reached such a stage and

thus the perception regarding the Internet's use as communication tool is still positive. However, further research may be required to confirm this.

The study also demonstrates that how an export market venture perceived the Internet's usefulness in relation to cost reduction could be used to significantly predict its marketing performance. It also demonstrates that by using the internet to avoid obtaining foreign market representation, to avoid having to set-up foreign branches, to lower the cost of international marketing, to avoid having to bother about foreign cultures and practices, by making exporting easier and by reducing the costs of market information will have a positive impact on EMP of a developing country exporter. Thus the managers of export firms need to be aware of this use of the Internet for export marketing success. This is similar to the findings of [2] for Australian firms. Other uses of the Internet that included Networking, Market Research, Sales, Image, and Competitive advantage were deemed to have a non-significant impact on the export marketing performance of the export ventures studied.

The study also shows that since Internet usage among Pakistani exporters is at its early stage, factors such as Networking, Market Research, Image, and Competitive Advantage have yet to be exploited. As far as the Sales is concerned, Pakistani exporters may want to use the Internet for such purpose, however since the current IT infrastructure does not provide them support such online payment acceptance facility [22] this factor is not yet helping them improve the export marketing performance.

The present study has extended the literature on the relationship between the Internet and export marketing performance (EMP) in several areas within the specific Pakistan context. First, valid and reliable scales have been re-validated to examine the internet's use in export marketing in relation to communication, networking, market research, sales, image enhancement, cost reduction and competitive advantage in a developing country context. Second, the study has contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the success factors in export marketing and the role internet plays. Finally, evidence has been provided that the Internet when it is used for communication and cost reduction will have a positive impact on EMP.

Several factors may have influenced the results of this study and should be taken into consideration for any future studies. This study added to the body of knowledge regarding use of the Internet and EMP in developing countries. As a result of this study recommendations for future research are presented.

Future researchers could replicate this study with a larger sample and a larger developing country. This should be replicated to examine whether the relationships between variables still hold true on an industry-by-industry basis, as some industries have more interactive websites than others. Another area for future research is to focus on export of services rather than products, which could substantially enhance the body of knowledge.

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