The effect of market information on export performance: The mediating role of notional export support and encouragement

Mohamed Salih Yousif Ali[a*]

[a]Department of Business Administration, College of Science and Humanity Studies Al-Aflaj, Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia

A B S T R A C T

Global competition and economic globalization are forcing countries' governments to devise encouragement support programs and formulate exporting policies to help SMEs export, compete, and survive in foreign markets. This study examines the mediating role of national export support and encouragement programs (NESEPs) in clarifying the impact of determinants of market environment information on the SMEs' export financial performance (EXFP) and SMEs' export strategic performance (EXSP) based on a resource-based view, which helps understand novel holistic relationships between them. Data from 106 exporting SME firms working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were collected using an online questionnaire survey. Regression path analysis from structural equation modeling was used to test the study's model relationships. The most important positive findings that emerged from this study are: Determinants of market information acquisition (DMIA) will positively influence SMEs' EXFP and NESEP. Determinants of market information dissemination (DMID) will positively influence SMEs' EXSP. Determinants of market information responsiveness (DMIR) will positively influence NESEP. NESEP will positively mediate the effect of DMIA and DMIR on SMEs' EXSP. The study's theoretical and social implications and limitations are discussed in the concluding sections. Furthermore, directions for future research are provided.

1. Introduction

Research in the field of export performance, despite the many studies that have been conducted on it, is still full of challenges and limitations (Acikdillia et al., 2020; Chen et al., 2016; Faria et al., 2020). It is the least understood and most contentious area of research (Faruk & Subudhi, 2019), particularly research on the export performance of SMEs in emerging economies (Edeh et al., 2020; Oura et al., 2016). Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) face some difficulties regarding the lack of market information, proper designs (Altýntaþ et al., 2007), and specialized information for decision-making (Nalcacia & Yagcib, 2014). Paul et al., (2017) and Lu and Beamish (2001) argued that it is of vital importance for SMEs to study the factors that might influence their export performance. The towering competitive conditions that business organizations, particularly SMEs, are currently facing allow them to shift their focus from solely home markets to markets abroad, thereby expanding their opportunities for growth (Ibrahim and Ali 2021). Thus, an SME struggles to discover a roadmap to boost its position in the international markets, add good value, and reduce dependence on the internal market.

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) the SMEs General Authority classifies small-size enterprises as firms with 6 to 49 full-time employees, or with a volume of overall revenues of 3-40 Million Saudi Riyal (SR), and medium-size enterprises as firms with 50 to 249 full-time employees, or with a volume of overall revenues of 40–200 Million SR. SMEs' contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) is increasing due to their significant role in the economy of countries interested in this type of company in export, innovation, and employment.

* Corresponding author
E-mail address my.ali@psau.edu.sa (M. S. Yousif Ali)

Export performance is measured in two dimensions: (1) economic measurement as an objective measure called export financial performance, and (2) non-economic measurement as a subjective measure called export strategic performance. This measurement is adopted in the present study to measure the export performance. According to Akyol and Akehurst (2003), export performance should consider both objective and subjective measures to evaluate strategic performance. Export financial/economic performance is often the focal point of interest by researchers (Oliveira et al., 2012). Strategic performance reflects the extent to which exporters' goals have been met (Cassia & Magno 2022).

Export performance tends to be conditioned by foreign environmental characteristics (Sousa et al., 2008). Foreign Markets' environments can differ considerably from each other in terms of their institutional environment, which has many aspects, including cultural, political, geographical, and knowledge ecosystems (Cadogan & Diamantopoulos, 1995). This environment includes opportunities and threats for SMEs. For marketing engagement with the determinants of market environment information, there are three methods: export market information generation, export market information dissemination, and export market information response (Acosta et al., 2018; Cadogan et al., 2016). In this regard, SMEs must quickly activate and periodically develop market information systems to devise the market orientation strategy that permanently satisfies supply chain members.

Acikdilli (2015) concluded that obtaining and developing unique, valuable, inimitable, and rare capabilities increases the firms' requirement for information in a complicated export environment. Researchers (e.g., Ali & Shamsuddoha 2014; Lages & Montgomery 2005; Martincus & Carballo 2010; Shamsuddoha & Ali 2006; Silverman et al., 2002; Sousa & Bradley 2009; Spence, 2003; Wilkinson & Brouthers 2006; Wilkinson et al., 2005; Quaye et al., 2017) have attempted to prove the existence of relationships between export determinants and their performance and programs to support and encourage national exports and their export performance. Acikdilli et al., (2020) and Leonidou et al., (2011) advocated the use of export support and promotion programs as mediators and moderator variables between the determinants of export and export performance. There is no detailed empirical evidence for the effect of the relationship between the three market information environment variables and the export performance of the current study model. The integration of these three stages (acquisition, dissemination and responsiveness) achieves the desired benefits and purpose of the information usage.

In both developed and developing countries, firms often require help and guidance in identifying potential export markets and opportunities (Quaye et al., 2017). Export assistance/support programs are explained as factors that motivate and assist the export-related activities of domestic industries and export firms (Gencturk, 2010). Export support/promotion programs aim to assist SMEs in overcoming market access, information, and operational barriers in foreign markets and competing in international markets (Freixanet, 2012). Cantwell et al. (2010) urged the governmental export promotion agencies and exporters to engage in co-evolutionary processes of export performance. Governments, in their efforts to reform the export performance of SMEs, have sought to put in place programs to support and encourage export activities in many countries, such as Saudi Arabia. To gauge their effects on export performance, these programs need to investigate their precursors' roles as mediators in previous models of export markets' information determinants.

Using the method, this study aims to provide insights that make a significant contribution by revealing the type and the strong nature of relations between the determinants of the information market environment, national export support and encouragement programs (NESEPs), and the quantitative performance of exports in Saudi SME firms. These firms may reap the benefits of this study's contributions to practice and theory. Further, it aims to answer the following main question: To what extent do the Saudi NESEPs mediate the influence of marketing environment information on export performance?

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. The next section reviews the literature and outlines the conceptual framework. It is followed by a section that describes the research methodology. We then provide an analysis of the results, and the final section concludes the paper.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Resource-Based View Support to Study Model

This study model is supported by the resource-based view (RBV) that is widely used in export performance in many countries. The RBV suggests that the bundle of resources will lead to a sustainable advantage and, subsequently, higher export performance (Ipek 2017). RBV states that to prosper and grow, a firm should consider external environmental factors besides internal ones (Beleska-Spasova, 2014). Trąpczyński (2021) found that the RBV has often been used to address the determinants of the export market. The exploitation of market information as a strategic resource and programs to support national exports as an external resource function as sources of SMEs' super performance. SMEs' success depends on various resources, the most important of which is the information resource. Thus, it can be said that the RBV facilitates understanding and valuing the information required from the market environment and its dissemination. Moreover, when this information is considered valuable and inimitable, RBV helps respond to it to achieve competitive advantages for export performance. Therefore, the company's ability to deal well with market information affords it a strong competitive advantage in penetrating the international market. These resources allow firms to produce efficiently and effectively (Hunt, 1997). Carboni and Medda

(2020) saw the company's specific resources as driving the process of internationalization and export activity performance according to the RBV.

Companies' growth and achievement of competitive advantages are subject to their resources (Penrose 1959). Thus, these resources determine export performance. Market information increases exporters' resources, knowledge, and capabilities, which leads to high export performance competitiveness. Further, it can be said that the acquired market information, if it is disseminated among the company's departments and responded to, constitutes a valuable resource that plays an important role in export performance. Here we suggest that NESEP can modify the relationship between these resources and SMEs' export performance projects or adapt and update those programs to suit the market environment to achieve that end. Export support and promotion programs and market environment information constitute a resource that can bring competitive advantages to exporting companies' performance. This is consistent with the assumption that export promotion programs affect exports related to organizational resources (Leonidou et al., 2011; Shamsuddoha et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2017).

2.2 Determinants of market information and export performance

In export information literature, there is general agreement that the acquisition of the right export information behavior positively affects export performance (Haahti et al., 2005; Hart & Tzokas 1999; Glenn Richey & Myers, 2001; Samiee & Walters, 1999; Yeoh, 2000). The results of market research and the information available on export market conditions should be disseminated among all the departments and strategic business units of the company to make effective export decisions (Manjunatha, 2020). When information is efficiently disseminated throughout the organization, and there is frequent change in market conditions and customer needs and preferences, it is difficult for decision-makers to use past information to make current decisions (Theodosiou & Katsikea 2013). Nazar et al. (2009) found that international market information and marketing research plays a significant role in enhancing the export performance of small-scale enterprises. Chang and Fang (2015) and Chung (2012) found positive links between market orientation that depends on market information determinants and firms' export performance (Chang & Fang, 2015; Chung, 2012). Information is a valuable means of accessing knowledge, and that knowledge plays an important role in firms' strategies and export performance (Navarro-Garcia et al., 2016; Singh & Gautam, 2021). SME companies operate in a dynamic and changing market environment in terms of the conditions of the target markets, which must generate information about them, disseminate and respond to them to know their opportunities, and access the studied selection of their export markets. Given the foregoing discussion, we propose the following hypothesis:

H$_{1a}$: *Determinants of market information acquisition (DMIA) will positively influence (1) SMEs' export financial performance (EXFP) and (2) SMEs' export strategic performance (EXSP).*

H$_{1b}$: *Determinants of market information dissemination (DMID) will positively influence (1) SMEs' EXFP and (2) SMEs' EXSP.*

H$_{1c}$: *Determinants of market information responsiveness (DMIR) will positively influence (1) SMEs' EXFP and (2) SMEs' EXSP.*

2.3 Determinants of market information and national export support and encouragement programs

Marketing literature has widely acknowledged the significant contribution of information-processing activities to export organizations' success (Theodosiou & Katsikea 2013). Export programs' success depends on the ability to appropriate and validate information on international markets, foreign customers, and competitors (Mohsenzadeha &Ahmadian 2016). SME exporters often lack the necessary resources or capabilities to satisfy their export information needs. Additionally, a lack of information on the complex international trade environment may afflict SMEs outside the market, prompting governments to support and assist them, believing in their role in their national economy. Therefore, they should strive to take advantage of the relevant export promotion programs that governments offer in their attempt to expand national export (Theodosiou & Katsikea, 2013). International market information and access to it is extremely important to exporters (Gerschewski et al., 2020; Hollensen 2004). Different managers and policymakers have stated that detailed information on exporting operations is critical for effective performance (Singh and Gautam 2021). Abreo et al., (2021) recommended that associations and the government should support exporters with information about import markets as well as promote international trade. Therefore, it is difficult for companies to acquire, disseminate, and respond to this information without government support. Leonido (2004) argued that limited international market information and analysis hampers the identification of trade opportunities and threats and thus influences export decisions. This argument illustrates the importance of the need for foreign market environment information for export purposes by the government and firms' management. Given this background, we propose the following hypotheses:

H$_{2a}$: *DMIA will positively influence NESEP.*

H$_{2b}$: *DMID will positively influence NESEP.*

H$_{2c}$: *DMIR will positively influence NESEP.*

2.4 NESEPs and export performance

Many authors have noted that governments support national exporting companies through a wide range of assistance programs and models to overcome barriers to entry or expansion of international markets (Paul & Dikova, 2016; Pickernell et al., 2016; Volpe et al., 2010). Export promotion and support programs are the export performance catalysts for SMEs (Malca et al., 2020). The use of export promotion programs enables a firm to reduce operating costs and become more profitable and, therefore, more efficient in its export activities (Quaye et al., 2017). Governments, through public and private initiatives, have developed export promotion programs to assist exporting firms (Freixanet, 2012). Export assistance programs help firms operate with low investment, generate significant profit, and take effective measures toward export-related activities (Acikdilli et al., 2020). From the economic dimension, the use of export promotion programs should help firms improve their financial performance results (Cadogan et al., 2003; Dhanaraj & Beamish, 2003; Lages & Lages 2004). Export promotion programs help firms improve the strategic position of the company (Lages & Montgomery 2004; Masiero et al., 2017). A company benefits more when it focuses on both the resources of its internal environment and those of its external market environment, rather than focusing on a single resource to improve its performance (Ali & Abou 2021). The preparation and development of effective programs to support and encourage national exports by governments and their auxiliary agencies reveal that it is one of the crucial elements in increasing the returns of their exports. From the foregoing, we propose the following hypothesis: H3: NESEP will positively influence (a) SMEs' EXFP and (b) SMEs' EXSP.

2.5 Mediating the role of NESEPs

Export promotion programs are an important resource designed to interact with the SMEs' organizational resources to attain a higher level of export performance success (Abreo et al., 2021; Fischer & Reuber 2003; Hultman et al., 2011; Lages et al., 2008; Shamsuddoha et al., 2009). Export promotion programs foster the process of SMEs' experience and market knowledge acquisition; and increase the level of commitment toward export activities and international expansion (Shamsuddoha et al., 2009; Singer & Czinkota 1994). Both market targeting and marketing program elements potentially affect export performance (Diamantopoulos et al., 2014; Katsikeas et al., 2000). The government commissions trade promotion organizations to assist SMEs in minimizing the risks associated with international activities and increasing their profitability (Kotabe & Czinkota 1992). E-commerce, which SMEs recently turned to as a new means to enter the foreign market, justifies the importance of paying attention to the determinants of market environment information and other relevant information. We suggested that the combination of market information determinants, national export promotion, and encouragement programs will lead to financial and strategic export performance and enhance economic growth. Exporting EMEs are striving to sustain and compete in foreign markets depending on government bodies' support and assistance with effective marketing information strategy. Assdinia et al., (2019) concluded that exporting SMEs need to develop strong marketing program planning practices to ensure that the knowledge acquired in export learning is effectively translated into export performance. The economic perspective of the export assistance program helps firms in their related financial constraints and ensures their satisfaction in the growth of export sales, export market, and other export activities, which reflect overall export performance (Dhanaraj and Beamish 2003; Lages and Montgomery 2005; John et al., 2003). Further, the strategic perspective of the export assistance program helps firms in international marketing strategies, information, and knowledge enhancement, which establish the position of the industry in the global market (Lages & Montgomery 2004; Masiero et al., 2017). Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H$_{4a}$: *NESEP will positively mediate the effect of DMIA on (1) SMEs' EXFP and (2) SMEs' EXSP.*

H$_{4b}$: *NESEP will positively mediate the effect of DMID on (1) SMEs' EXFP and (2) SMEs' EXSP.*

H$_{4c}$: *NESEP will positively mediate the effect of DMIR on (1) SMEs' EXFP and (2) SMEs' EXSP.*

3. Research Methodology

This study relies on the quantitative research method using the electronic survey method as an appropriate way to reach the study population of small- and medium-sized companies spread across KSA, which has an area of 2.15 million km². In the questionnaire, the participating companies were asked about the extent to which their export performance benefited from the national export support and encouragement programs that were launched by the KSA's Vision 2030 and determinants of market information. The study sample was represented by non-oil export SME companies such as food products, building materials, packaging, polymers, chemicals, and plastics. Our conceptual framework made determinants of market environment information as a second-order construct that contains three first-order constructs such as market information acquisition, market information dissemination, and market information responsiveness. The questionnaire was structured into two sections. The first part contained SMEs' profiles, which were later made into control variables to verify the relationships of this study model. Part two contained the model's main constructs that were measured by a 5-point Likert scale. To avoid any shortcomings in the study questionnaire, the questions were reviewed by three professors of international business administration and foreign trade for three Saudi universities, in addition to pre-testing the questions by ten faculty members at the University of Researchers. We follow Churchill (1979) and Gerbing and Anderson (1988) to determine the elements of

the study's scales and to develop its model, which has multiple elements. Some control variables were introduced to reduce possible ambiguities in the results of the studied relationships, which are as follows: SMEs' age, SMEs' international experience, foreign sales rate, and the educational degree of SMEs' top management.

A set of techniques was employed to investigate the model fit measures, reliability, validity, and testing hypotheses using AMOS 20 and SPSS 24 versions.

3.1 Data Collection

Through a list of names and contact data for more than 300 small and medium companies obtained from the Aflaj Chamber of Commerce, an introductory email was sent to indicate the purpose of the study and to obtain voluntary consent to participate in the questionnaire survey. From that procedure, we were able to send 185 messages to update the communication data, and after several attempts, we obtained the approval of 140 companies to participate in the survey. After that, a letter of thanks and gratitude was sent to those companies for their approval to participate with a link to access the survey. The data collection process then took a full month from the beginning of October 2021 to its end. Fifteen days after the start date, another email was sent reminding the non-responding companies, and a week later, another email was added. Of the 115 questionnaires, 106 were valid for analysis.

The response rate was 57%, which is an appropriate percentage in electronic survey research, especially information that obtains the level of each company as a unit of measurement. Baruch and Holtom (2008) stated that the response rate for surveys conducted at the company level is very low compared to research at the individual level. In the study sample consisting of 106 companies, we found that the majority (70.75%) of the studied companies are ten years old or more, whereas the majority (66.04%) of the international experience of those companies is seven years or more, followed by those with 4–6 experience years (27.36%). As for the annual foreign sales rate, the 25-50% category was the majority at 83%. Most company managers (98.10%) also had university and post-graduate education. Table 1 describes the data of the participating companies in the study.

Table 1
Participating companies' profiles (N= 106)

	Group	Frequency	Percentage
SMEs' Age	<5 years	8	7.55
	5–9 years	23	21.70
	≥ 10 years	75	70.75
SMEs' international experience	1–3 years	7	6.6
	4–6 years	29	27.36
	≥ 7 years	70	66.04
Foreign Sales Rate	0–25 years	16	15.10
	26–50 years	88	83.00
	≥ 51 years	2	1.90
Educational degree of SMEs' top management	Secondary	2	1.90
	Undergraduate	43	40.60
	Post-Graduate	61	57.50

3.2 Bias Assessment

We tested Armstrong's and Overton's (1977) non-response bias by comparing the responses of respondents for the first two weeks with the last two weeks of the month of data collection. We did not obtain any statistically significant difference. In addition, comparing valid questionnaires with the inverse questionnaires did not show any statistically significant differences—these findings indicate the risk of non-response bias in our studied model. Both methods of designing study procedures and statistical controls were used to ensure that there was no common bias error (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Harman's test for the individual factor was conducted by analyzing cyclical factor analysis, from which we found that the total variance of the first variable is equal to 17.81 of the total variance of 75.52 and, therefore, does not explain a large amount of the total variance alone; this result is evidence of no effect on the common method bias in our study. We also conducted the introduction of all the latent variables test of the measurement model in our study to test the factor of the latent method under its customary restrictions to be equal across its components and to ensure the determination of the appropriateness of the model at a level of significance p=.01 for standard values. The results indicate that the common method bias does not constitute a serious threat to the study. The design of the questionnaire included the following: accurate identification of the required information, the categories using which the information was investigated, and the method of accessing them, based on previous studies in determining the study questions, their meaning and formulation, in addition to seeking the assistance of academics in the field of study, and conducting a pre-test for the questionnaire to reach the final survey form.

3.3 Measurement

The EXFP was measured with four items, and the EXSP was measured with five items taken from the (Ibrahim and Ali 2021) study. The NESEPs were measured with 14 items taken from the programs offered by the Saudi Export Development

Authority (SEDA) and the Saudi Small and Medium Enterprises General Authority. SEDA is a governmental authority concerned with increasing Saudi non-oil exports, opening up to global markets, and utilizing all its economic potential to improve the efficiency of the export environment. SEDA programs aim to encourage existing Saudi companies to enter and expand export markets by providing nine incentives compatible with the requirements of the World Trade Organization, covering a percentage of the costs incurred by Saudi companies at the different stages of their export activities, in addition to the services provided by the Small Enterprises Authority to help build and improve competitiveness and spread in global markets. The determinants of market environment information were measured from the study of Theodosiou and Katsikea (2013) after some modification and addition, where the items of measurement expressions were DMIA= 9, DMID= 7, and DMIR= 6.

4. Analysis

4.1 Principal component analysis and KMO tests

In preparation for determining the validity and reliability of the measurements when performing the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) test, we performed the principal component analysis (PCA) using the Varimax rotation process. The test data included 45 items for six variables; during the analysis, as shown in Appendix, the number of the six variables remained constant, whereas one item was deleted from the variable NESEPs due to the inequality in average variance extracted (AVE) value, greater than 0.5, whereas the other AVE values ranged between .646–.867. Eigenvalues were found to be greater than one, the total explained variance equals 75.52%, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was greater than 70. The same table also shows the fulfillment of the factors analysis criteria for sampling through the adequacy of the value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure and the value of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, which are .869 and 4954.559, respectively.

4.2 Confirmatory factor analysis

To develop a clear measurement model for the study model, in a later step of the previous principal component analysis, the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed. To reach the best fit of the model through the CFA, 11 measurement items were deleted from the constructs because their loading was less than .70, and there was a low item-to-total correlation. Table 2 shows the most important results obtained after the modification and the reference for accepting the measurements. The items omitted in these operations are NESEP1, NESEP2, NESEP3, NESEP4, NESEP8, NESEP9, DMIA9, DMIR4, DMIR5, DMIR6, EXSP3, and EXSP5.

Table 2
Model Fit Measures

Measure	Estimate	Threshold	Interpretation	Reference
CMIN	666.096	--	--	
DF	449	--	--	
CMIN/DF	1.484	Between 1 and 3	Excellent	Hair et al., (2010)
CFI	0.933	>.90	Excellent	Fan et al., (1999)
GFI	0.946	>.95	Acceptable	Hu and Bentler (1997)
SRMR	0.055	<.08	Excellent	Joreskog and Sorbom
RMSEA	0.068	<.06	Acceptable	Browne and Cudeck (1993)

Note: CMIN=chi-square value, Df= degree of freedom, CFI=Comparative Fit Index, GFI=Goodness-of-Fit Index, SRMR=Standardized Root-Mean-Square Residual, RMSEA=Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

4.3 Convergent and discriminant validity measurement

Reliability measures were used to assess the internal consistency and validity of this study's model. Where Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) have been used.

Table 3
Model Validity Measures

|	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1-EXFP	.950	.826	.333	.975	**.909**					
2-NESEPs	.952	.711	.444	.955	.501	**.843**				
3-DMIA	.946	.717	.444	.955	.577	.666	**.847**			
4-DMID	.938	.685	.025	.940	.019	-.101	-.121	**.828**		
5-DMIR	.928	.811	.425	.941	.415	.652	.624	-.019	**.901**	
6-EXSP	.881	.712	.050	.886	-.101	-.223	-.118	-.158	-.205	**.844**

Note: CA=composite reliability, AVE=average variance extraction, MSV=Maximum Shared Variance, MaxR(H)=Maximal Reliability, EXFP=Export financial performance, NESEPs=National export support and encouragement programs, DMIA=Determinants of market information acquisition, DMID=Determinants of market information dissemination, DMIR=Determinants of market information responsiveness, EXSP= Export strategic performance.

We found in appendix that Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .848–.971, Table 3 also indicates the values of CR and average variance extraction (AVE), where all CR values are greater than .70 and AVE values are greater than .50, which are recommended percentages (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). In addition, we found that the values of Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) were less than the corresponding values of AVE, and Maximal Reliability MaxR(H) was > 0.7. Therefore, those results fulfill the conditions of convergent validity in the study model. Meanwhile, the integrity of

discriminant validity was verified by comparing the square root of the AVE values and the square root correlation between the constructs. This comparison shows that the square root of the AVE values is the highest, which ensures that the discriminant is valid in the studied model (see Table 3).

4.4 Hypotheses Testing

Fig. 1 shows the results of the structural model estimates for the quality of indicators of relevance and acceptability of the model of this study, which are as follows: $\chi2$(CMIN) = (30.925), DF=17, CMIN/DF= 1.819 with RMSEA=0.088, CFI= 0.958, GFI=0.948, NFI= .918, and SRMR=0.068. Accordingly, the direct and indirect paths of the model relationships were tested. Table 4 shows that the hypotheses H1c.1, H1c.2, H2.1, and H2c were positive and significant (β = .133, CR= 3.677>1.96, P=.000), (β = .228, CR= 2.109>1.96, P=.035), (β = .383, CR= 4.976>1.96, P=.000) and (β = .401, CR= 4.817>1.96, P=.000), respectively are supported. Notably, the CR value in SEM output is the t-statistics value. The hypothesis is accepted or supported if the value of the T-statistic is greater than 1.96, with a p-value less than 0.05 (typically $\leq$ 0.05), which is common in the social sciences. Further we used t-value= 1.64 and p-value less than .10, this procedure revealed that H3a and H3b are supported (β = .306, CR= 1.832>1.64, P=.067) and (β = .226, CR= 1.809>1.64, P=.071), respectively, whereas the rest of the hypotheses are not supported. There also is no effect of the control variables entered in the relationship test form on the export performance.
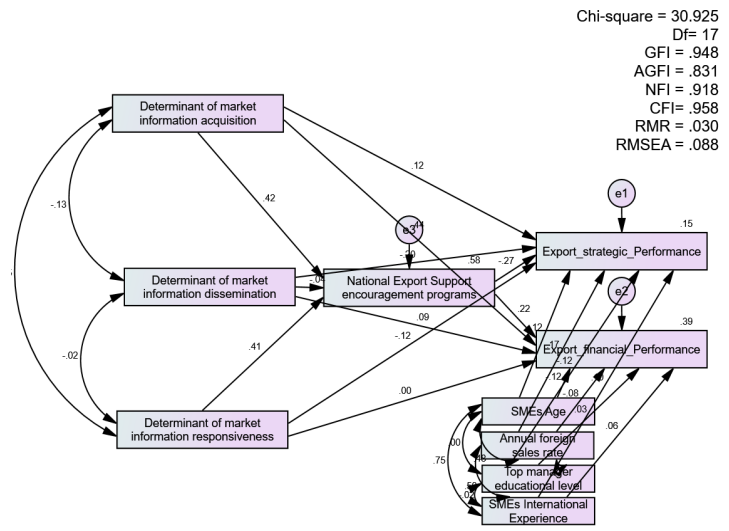
Note: Df= degree of freedom, GFI=Goodness-of-Fit Index, AGFI=adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index, NFI=Normed fit Index, CFI=Comparative Fit Index, SMR=Standardized Root-Mean-Square Residual, RMSEA=Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.
Fig. 1. Model Fit Measures

Table 4
Regression Weights paths' relationship

			Estimate	SE.	CR.	P	Result
NESEPs	←	DMIA	.383	.077	4.976	***	**Supported**
NESEPs	←	DMID	-.044	.064	-.684	.494	**NS**
NESEPs	←	DMIR	.401	.083	4.817	***	**Supported**
EXSP	←	DMIA	.122	.144	.851	.395	**NS**
EXSP	←	DMID	-.228	.108	-2.109	.035	**Supported**
EXSP	←	DMIR	-.133	.152	-.876	.381	**NS**
EXFP	←	DMIA	.395	.108	3.677	***	**Supported**
EXFP	←	DMID	.092	.081	1.142	.253	**NS**
EXFP	←	DMIR	.005	.114	.042	.966	**NS**
EXSP	←	NESEPs	-.306	.167	-1.832	.067	**Supported**
EXFP	←	NESEPs	.226	.125	1.809	.071	**Supported**
EXSP	←	age	-.125	.146	-.857	.392	**NS**
EXFP	←	age	-.109	.109	-.997	.319	**NS**
EXSP	←	Sales	.377	.248	1.524	.127	**NS**
EXFP	←	Sales	-.158	.185	-.854	.393	**NS**
EXSP	←	Education	-.195	.160	-1.214	.225	**NS**
EXFP	←	Education	.037	.120	.310	.757	**NS**
EXSP	←	Experience	.106	.160	.665	.506	**NS**
EXFP	←	Experience	.053	.120	.447	.655	**NS**

Note: EXFP=Export financial performance, NESEPs=National export support and encouragement programs, DMIA=Determinants of market information acquisition, DMID=Determinants of market information dissemination, DMIR=Determinants of market information responsiveness, EXSP= Export strategic performance, NS=Not Significant.

4.5 Assessment of mediating NESEPs' role

The 5,000 bootstrap approach of Bollen and Stine (1990), Preacher and Hayes (2004), and Shrout and Bolger (2002) were used to investigate the effects of NESEPs construct on the paths of relationships between the determinant of market information and export performance. Table 5 shows the results of these tests when the level of significance is equal to .05, which supports hypotheses H4a.2 and H4c.2, where the values of p=.034 and p=.031 are significant, respectively. Thus, the type of mediator can be determined in these two hypotheses, as they are a complete mediator based on the study by Lisboa et al., (2011). However, Table 5 shows the non-statistically significant effects, indicating that the rest of the hypotheses of the model are not supported as p≤10, except for H4.3a, which is significant because p=.092.

Table 5

Mediating role of NESEPs

Lower Bounds	EXFP	EXSP	Upper Bounds	EXFP	EXSP	Two-Tailed Significance	EXFP	EXSP
DMID	-.08	-.019	DMID	.008	.07	DMID	.315	.258
DMIR	-.022	-.378	DMIR	.219	-.006	DMIR	.092	.034
DMIA	-.031	-.34	DMIA	.246	-.011	DMIA	.129	.031

Note: EXFP=Export financial performance, NESEPs=National export support and encouragement programs, DMIA=Determinants of market information acquisition, DMID=Determinants of market information dissemination, DMIR=Determinants of market information responsiveness, EXSP= Export strategic performance.

5. Discussion

The main research question of the study is answered by discussing the following results. This study attempts to test the mediating role of NESEPs' effect on the determinants of market environment information and export performance in exporting SMEs. These hypotheses yield the following result: NESEP will positively mediate the effect of DMIA and DMIR on SMEs' EXSP. These results are in agreement with the findings of both Crespi (2000), who found that overall trade promotion actions indirectly impact total exports and product diversification, and Acikdilli et al., (2020), who found that increase in the level of export assistance leads to an increase in the level of export performance determinants. However, we did not find any influence of the NESEP on the relationship between determinants of market environment information and export performance, and this can be justified by the fact that the NESEP effect is contingent and related to the economic environment of the firm (Malca et al., 2020) and the efficiency of government export promotion programs depend on the individual export models of the exporting firms (Trąpczyński et al., 2021).

One of the most important results of the study is the proof of the validity of the hypotheses, which claims that DMIA will positively influence SMEs' EXFP and NESEP. These results support Morgan et al.'s (2012) findings that possession of quality export information will enhance the capabilities of an exporting firm, including its architectural and specialized marketing capabilities, and Assadinia et al., (2019) who found that exporters utilize their acquired knowledge to increase the likelihood of improving performance. The study shows that DMIR will positively influence NESEP. It can be said that the positive result of this hypothesis is that developing appropriate marketing strategies resulting from meeting the needs and desires of customers in foreign markets and the ability to build good communication relationships with the foreign markets leads to improving export performance. This result aligns with those of Theodosiou and Katsikea (2013), who found that responding to market information has a critical role in the success of SME exporters. Additionally, the study showed that DMID will positively influence SMEs' EXSP. Here, this result can be explained by the fact that the dissemination of market environment information within the company increases the ability of small and medium enterprises to manage their time and ability to meet customer preferences at competitive prices and with distinctive and unique products that end in obtaining strategic performance because the difficulty in obtaining information to deal with export uncertainties and the complexity of the export process prevent small businesses from exporting (Volpe et al., 2010). Superior export performance is also a result of a firm's successful strategic response to external factors (Robertson and Chetty 2000).

6. Theoretical Implications

This study's results contribute to enriching the literature on SMEs' access to global markets, especially for countries such as Saudi Arabia, which are looking to increase international non-oil revenues—contributing to improving the budget allocation of national export promotion and support programs and assisting in evaluating the feasibility and progress of those programs. This research responds to the repeated calls for researchers to study export performance from different angles as well as adds to the impact of the support and stimulus programs provided by governments to revive their national exports, thus confirming the results of previous studies and adding new ones. The findings outlined in this study assist in increasing the understanding of national export support and encouragement programs, determinants of market environment information for SMEs export performance. It increases our understanding of the most important national export encouragement and support programs that can be applied to effect strategic and financial change in the external performance of SMEs in the emerging market by considering the mediating role of national export support and encouragement programs in the relationship between market environment information and financial and strategic export performance.

7. Managerial Implications

This study's findings provide many contributions to SMEs in their pursuit of international success. In a highly competitive market environment, SMEs should develop their capacity to acquire, disseminate, and respond better to information while benefiting from government support programs for business and international operations. Due to the intensity of competition these days, managers/owners of SMEs must build a strong marketing information system that works to obtain market environment information in a timely manner and disseminate it among the various departments of the company and respond to it to guide their business performance in the export market, because this is very important to formulate international marketing strategies and diversify the marketing practices followed.

We noted in this study that the information on the marketing environment does not affect the programs to support and encourage national exports. To achieve the maximum benefit for SMEs, it is necessary to create learning and link between the two sides. Therefore, the managers/owners of these companies should link the acquired or disseminated market environmental information in its various stages of use with government support programs for national exports and then respond to it to activate export operations as export learning orientation. SME managers/owners should respond to the national export encouragement and support programs to overcome some of their export barriers. They should consider these programs a valuable resource that helps seize international market opportunities and then discover the best of these programs and exploit them constantly to achieve the sustainability of competitive advantage and build long-term marketing relationships with the supply chain parties. This study helps improve the financial and strategic performance of SME exports by clarifying how to organize dealing with market environment information and programs to support and encourage national exports.

Additionally, the model of this study contributes to the strategic decision-making process of exporting SMEs by clarifying the direct and indirect causal relationships of the dimensions of its various variables. The study reveals that the current direct benefit for small- and medium-sized companies from national programs to support and encourage national exports is minimal. Thus, policymakers are encouraged to pay attention to feedback to determine the effectiveness of programs and policies designed to influence the export performance of small- and medium-sized enterprises. It enables policymakers in support programs and the promotion of national exports to prepare programs that help meet export requirements and increase awareness about them among the beneficiaries. Policymakers should also help establish specialized export promotion agencies for SMEs to develop programs to support and encourage exports to help them eliminate the obstacles they face in exporting. Considering the special assistance to small- and medium-sized companies from those programs, increase programs to support the capabilities of SMEs in the field of e-commerce systems.

8. Limitations and Possible Future Studies

This study's results were extracted considering many of the limitations that the researchers faced. These may offer more directions for future studies. First, although the sample size in this study was appropriate for the type of exploratory analysis used, it represents additional limitation that may affect the interpretation of the results obtained. This shows a need for a relatively large sample in future studies to effectively draw general conclusions within the SME sector, in addition to diversifying the countries where the study is being conducted to confirm the differences and similarities. Second, this study obtained its data from one person from each company in the studied sample; there is a possibility that the questionnaire questions in this study may be biased. This highlights the shortcoming that one person's orientations and experiences may not fairly reflect the orientations and experiences of other managers in other functional areas in relation to the study's axes. Therefore, future studies should be conducted with more than one person per company. In addition, the failure of many small- and medium-sized companies to update their communication data led to the inability to prove the fairness of the statistically studied sample companies' representation of the study population. Third, the data of this study were collected during a certain time, only a one-month period, so it is advisable to follow a qualitative approach and longitudinal approach to collect data on the dynamic environment of SMEs to increase the strength of the results obtained from the study model related to SMEs firms. Fourth, we supported the model of this study with resource theory, focusing on information resources and government support for exporting companies. Future research can explore other resources that can add value and additional understanding of export performance. Fifth, the lack of control variables in this study can also be considered a study limitation that could be tested in future studies. Another important limitation of this study is that it did not address any moderators' variables (e.g., learning orientation, corporate social responsibility, and physical distance) and more than one mediator variable (e.g., marketing mix, administrative innovation, and technology innovation) to test the relationships between the independent variable and the dependent variable in it. Moreover, it is confined only to linear regression analysis to investigate those relationships.

9. Conclusion

This study constitutes an important extension of previous research that dealt with export in SME companies by clarifying how they can benefit from market environment information and national programs to support and encourage exports to achieve superior financial and strategic performance by using the resource-based view by applying it to the export activities of these companies and building their competitive capabilities. Thus, we reversed the impact of acquiring, disseminating, and

responding to market environment information on export performance operations. This study empirically revealed that the national programs to support and encourage national exports do not directly impact the performance of Saudi SMEs companies, despite their positive impact on directing export performance, developing the marketing-mix strategies, and increasing their competitive capabilities in previous studies. A close relationship was found between acquisition, response to market environment information, and national export promotion and support programs.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix

Principal component analysis and KMO

Factors	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4	Factor5	Factor6
Alpha	**.971**	**.958**	**.938**	**.932**	**.946**	**.848**
NESEP3: Our company has previously benefited from the SEDA incentive to list in e-commerce platforms and support the establishment of e-stores.	.860					
NESEP9: Our company has previously benefited from the SEDA incentive to compensate for the fees of specialized training to develop the export capabilities of Saudi facilities.	.860					
NESEP5: Our company has previously benefited from the SEDA incentive for individual participation in international exhibitions.	.853					
NESEP4: Our company has previously benefited from a SEDA incentive to offset product registration fees.	.837					
NESEP10: Our company has previously benefited from the services of the virtual trade mission to increase Saudi exports.	.836					
NESEP1: Our company has previously benefited from the SEDA incentive to compensate for the fees of specialized consulting in the field of business.	.802					

Item	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
NESEP8: Our company has previously benefited from a SEDA incentive to offset product certification fees.	.792					
NESEP12: Our company has previously benefited from the SEDA service for electronic self-assessment to ensure that the company is ready for export.	.794					
NESEP13: Our company has previously benefited from the use of export evidence information in making sound decisions to enter new export markets.	.785					
NESEP6: Our company has previously benefited from a SEDA incentive to offset legal fees related to export.	.785					
NESEP7: Our company has previously benefited from a SEDA incentive to compensate for marketing and advertising fees.	.765					
NESEP2: Our company has previously used a SEDA incentive to offset fees for facilitating visiting potential buyers.	.763					
NESEP11: Our company has previously benefited from the services of entrepreneurship funds and established business incubators or accelerators.	.750					
NESEP14: Our company has previously benefited from the services of the Saudi Export-Import Bank for Saudi exporters and international buyers of Saudi non-oil goods and services.	.688					
DMIA7: My company always collects information on the structures of the export markets.		.789				
DMIA3: My company always collects information on the Political-legal environment of the export market.		.787				
DMIA2: My company always collects information on the economic environment of the export market.		.774				
DMIA9: My company always collects information regarding marketing-mix elements of the export market.		.771				
DMIA4: My company always collects information on the technological environment of the export market.		.761				
DMIA1: My company always collects information on the sociocultural environment of the export market.		.747				
DMIA6: My company always collects information on the elasticity of demand in the export market.		.741				
DMIA5: My company always collects information on the customer characteristics of the export market.		.717				
DMID6: Little information about our export competitors is never overlooked before it reaches decision-makers.			.865			
DMID1: When a department discovers something important about competitors in foreign markets, alerting other departments is quick.			.862			
DMID3: In my company, the export staff always pass on information about customer preferences to other jobs/units.			.860			
DMID5: Important information regarding export market trends is rarely overlooked in the communication chain.			.853			
DMID7: In this company, customer experience evaluation after every sale is rarely neglected.			.849			
DMID2: Important information about our export competitors is rarely "lost in our systems".			.837			
DMID4: Information about the activities of our export competitors often reaches the relevant personnel in time for their use.			.828			
DMIR2: Our export strategy for competitive advantage is based on our understanding of export customer needs.				.795		
DMIR4: We pay close attention to after-sales service in our export markets.				.786		
DMIR5: We adhere to the corporate social and ethical responsibility charter when choosing export markets.				.766		
DMIR6: Our company constantly responds to local and international rules and legislation on social and ethical responsibility.				.756		
DMIR1: Our export business strategies are based on our beliefs about how to create more value for export customers.				.730		
DMIR3: Our export business objectives are primarily driven by customer satisfaction.				.712		
EXFP3: Over the previous three years, this SME international business was profitable					.867	
EXFP2: Over the previous three years this SME company achieved rapid growth internationally.					.853	
EXFP4: Over the previous three years, this SME's return on investment (ROI) is higher than it is her major competitors.					.839	
EXFP1: Over the previous three years, this SME has generated a high volume of international sales.					.704	
EXSP1: Over the previous three years, our company venture has improved our global competitiveness.						.860
EXSP4: Over the previous three years, our company has been able to build a global leadership position in our industry.						.850
EXSP2: Over the previous three years, our company has significantly increased our market share.						.829
EXSP5: Over the previous three years, our company has strengthened our strategic position in the export market.						.710
EXSP3: In the past three years, the strengths and weaknesses of our competitiveness were evaluated.						.646
Eigen value	17.81	5.40	3.49	3.20	2.14	1.95
Variance explained%	23.95	14.88	11.66	10.02	7.61	7.39
Total variance explained%	75.52					
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin **KMO**	**.869**					
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	**.4954.56**					
Degree of freedom	**.990**					
Level of Significance	**.000**					

Note: SEDA=Saudi Export Development Authority