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## Examining the impact of managerial involvement with social media on exporting firm performance

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### ABSTRACT

The growth of social media presents international businesses and marketers with unprecedented risks and challenges. Marketers are becoming aware of the threat of losing control over their message and are also beginning to realize the potential of social media as a marketing tool. Based on export managers' beliefs about social media use outcomes, as well as their attitudes, intention to use, and actual use of these applications of Web 2.0, three groups of Spanish exporters are identified according their managerial involvement with social media tools: 'potential in SM', 'initiated in SM', and 'expert in SM'. Considering other firm characteristics and type of sector, these three clusters of exporting firms are fully characterized and their relationship with firm performance is determined. From these results, relevant implications emerge for academic researchers, entrepreneur-managers and policy-makers.

### 1. Introduction

It is now widely accepted that the Internet and allied information and communication technologies (ICT) have facilitated enterprises' internationalization. Moreover, as the World Wide Web has evolved, it has provided new tools that enable such firms to internationalize more rapidly and engage more effectively with customers in a wider range of more complex business activities (Bell & Loane, 2010). In fact, advances in the area of ICT have brought sweeping changes to people and firms' life and to the marketing practice. As a result, online marketing is claiming an ever-increasing portion of the marketers' attention and corporate budget.

The most profound effect of the Internet on marketing practices was the migration of market power from the business to the customer (Constantinides, Lorenzo, & Gómez, 2008; Rha, Widdows, Hooker, & Montalto, 2002; Rogers, Chamberlin, Ellison, & Crean, 1997; Urban, 2005; Varandarajan & Yadav, 2002; Wind & Mahajan, 2001). By accessing the Internet, customers obtain new tools and access to businesses on a global scale, gaining access to almost unlimited information about products and services while virtually walking on a global high street.

A new development in the Internet domain became the source of a second wave of customer empowerment. This development is widely known as social media and implies new forms of one-to-one communication and one-to-many broadcasting of user-generated content.

The social media era increases the available information over

products, services and commercial outlets accessible to consumers, but also affects the nature and dissemination modes of marketing information (Shin, Pang, & Kim, 2015). While marketing information was traditionally generated by corporations and channeled to markets through one-way mass media, or traditional direct media channels (like direct mail and tele-marketing), the social media-based product, brand and company information are used, generated and transmitted through personal social networks, blogs, online communities, customer forums, etc. Therefore, and importantly, beyond the control of marketers a lot of the information exchanged refers to customer experiences from using products or services and user comments in the form of product reviews, recommendations to other customers, remarks about improvements and even advice for use. There is evidence that customer-generated information plays an increasingly important role in the decision-making process (Constantinides et al., 2008) since this information is usually perceived as more reliable and unbiased. Therefore, unlike traditional IT, social media manage the content of the conversation or interaction as an information artifact in the online environment (Yates & Paquette, 2011).

Social media is different from other kinds of technologies in that they employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms by which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content (Gagliardi, 2013; Kietzmann et al., 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

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members (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. Furthermore, social media allow for this exchange of information in a fast, low cost, and efficient manner (Schniederjans, Cao, & Schniederjans, 2013). Therefore, social media can have a more direct and faster impact on performance than other information technologies.

Many firms, especially those exporting, are already trying to cope with the situation by integrating social media strategies into their export marketing programs. While the globalization of business processes offers wide growth opportunities, companies have to overcome the challenges of geographical distance. In a sense, firms selling their products in international markets face more uncertainty and difficulties in performing their activities, due to the fact they are in more unknown environments than purely domestic companies focused only on their domestic markets; thus, the latter behave in a well-known environment that reduces the level of risk and uncertainty.

Social media can be considered as a technical solution that can be used to overcome distance (Diviné, Schumacher, & Stal-Le Cardinal, 2011). For example, according to Okazaki and Taylor (2013), social media create value in the context of international activity, especially international promotion. The three foundations, namely networking capability, image transferability, and personal extensibility, provide marketers with new opportunities to reach consumers across the globe. All three factors facilitate interaction across geographic and psychological boundaries.

Arnone and Deprince (2016) observed that social media facilitate the creation and development of relationships among international partners, such as customers, distributors or importers. Companies use this linking potential to strengthen their business relationships at three different levels: the company level, the professional-individual level and the private-individual level. At each of these levels, it seems that the use of social media helps reduce psychic distance and facilitates players' relationships. Specifically, Arnone and Deprince (2016) affirm that at the company level, social media can facilitate the creation of new business relationships among foreign partners and ease the access of small companies to new business opportunities. At the professional-individual level, the use of social media by companies allows a more individualized management of business relationships.

Several works have investigated the impact of ICT in general on business performance (Bharadwaj, 2000; Zhang & Tansuhaj, 2007; Liang, You, & Liu, 2010; Liu, Ke, Wei, & Hua, 2013; Pezderka, Sinkovics, & Jean, 2012; Zhang, Sarker, & Sarker, 2013; Mathews, Bianchi, Perks, Healy, & Wickramasekera, 2016), and more specially, some authors also highlight the potential influence of the firm's social media usage on international business and export marketing strategies (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012; Maltby, 2012; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013; Alarcón, Rialp, & Rialp, 2015). However, despite social media's great potential, especially for export-oriented companies, to date very limited attention has been paid to the relationship between social media adoption and international performance among exporting firms. Hence, more explanation and understanding is needed in order to determine whether the use of social media has an impact on performance in export companies. Thus, given the lack of knowledge of the influence of use of social media on an export firm's performance, the objective of this research is to understand the use of social media by exporting firms in their business strategy, and to know if there is heterogeneity between companies, it means, if exporting firms differ with regard their higher or lower managerial involvement in relation to social media. As a second objective, this research pretends to analyze how the relationship between the use of social media and the exporting firm's performance is. More specifically, to know if a more proactive behavior regarding managerial social media usage involves a higher company's performance, since these digital social media offer several advantages for those exporting

companies incorporating them into their business strategy but there is not empirical evidence till the date.

To accomplish this, this article presents the findings of a study aimed at mapping the use of social media as marketing tools by export-oriented companies and the effect of their involvement in social media on their performance. The study identifies segments of Spanish exporting companies regarding their export managers' beliefs about social media use outcomes, attitudes, intention to use and their use of social media. Profiles will be also characterized attending firm internal and external characteristics. These different profiles are then related to the exporting firms' performance—an issue that can be relevant for academics, managers and policy-makers.

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides the background for relating social media to firm internationalization and export performance, and mainly identifies the constructs that will be considered for generating the different profiles; Section 3 describes the data collection, measurement of constructs and methodology; Section 4 presents the results of our analysis, followed by the conclusions, limitations and implications of the current research.

## 2. Conceptual framework: social media and export behavior

### 2.1. Web evolution

The role of the Internet user during the developmental phase of the Web was that of a mere information consumer. Pages in Web 1.0 were characterized by being static, with webmasters having absolute control of all the information; pages were designed for being read, with essentially no interaction between users.

Internet users have moved from being simply consumers to being producers and creators as well, with the newest trend in the design and use of web pages: the social web. The user is the centre of the information but also the content generator. Blogs, chats, newsgroups and social networking sites promote a greater degree of participation. This interaction has major commercial implications as the consumers themselves have an increasing influence on products and the strategies used to sell them (Riegner, 2007). The social media domain has become an important tool of interactive marketing, and commercial budgets for social media marketing are growing at the cost of other forms of interactive and traditional marketing. Undoubtedly, a key interest of marketers is how to minimize the negative effects of customer empowerment and utilize social media to their advantage so that they can extract the maximum possible value from social media-based marketing approaches (Regus Report, 2010). In this sense, over the last several years we have observed an explosion in the number of social media applications adopted by businesses.

Academic research into social media has been mainly focused on their impact on corporate processes (Craig, 2007; Shin et al., 2015; Stolley, 2009; Yakel, 2006), on the importance of online communities for corporations (Du & Wagner, 2006; Kolbitsch & Maurer, 2007; Swaine, 2007), or on issues regarding the effects of these new technologies on businesses (Boll, 2007; Deshpande & Jadad, 2006; Karger & Quan, 2005). Likewise, an increasing number of studies suggest that corporate interest in the social media domain keeps growing, and more and more firms are introducing different forms of social media into their daily business routines as well as into their marketing strategies (Constantinides et al., 2008).

However, despite the academic efforts, few studies provide evidence regarding how corporations integrate social media applications into their operations (DeFelice, 2006). According to Bernoff and Li (2008), companies can deploy social applications in different departments to accomplish a variety of objectives (see Table 1).

Different authors agree that the Internet has become one of the most important tools for conducting international business and marketing activities (Sinkovics, Sinkovics, & Jean, 2013; Stevenson & Hamill, 2002). In particular, ICT have been found to be especially crucial for

Table 1

Social Media applications.

Source: Bernoff and Li (2008, p. 41).

Manager's role or department	Typical groundswell objective	Appropriate social applications	Success metrics
Research and development	Listening: gaining insights from customers and using that input in the innovation process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Brand monitoring</li> <li>● Research communities</li> <li>● Innovation communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Insights gained</li> <li>● Usable products ideas</li> <li>● Increased speed of development</li> </ul>
Marketing	Talking: using conversations with customers to promote products or services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Blogs</li> <li>● Communities</li> <li>● Video on user-generated sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Better market awareness</li> <li>● Online “buzz”</li> <li>● Time spent on sites</li> <li>● Increased sales</li> </ul>
Sales	Energizing: identifying enthusiastic customers and using them to influence others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Social networking sites</li> <li>● Brand ambassador programs</li> <li>● Communities</li> <li>● Embeddable “widgets”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Community membership</li> <li>● Online “buzz”</li> <li>● Increased sales</li> </ul>
Customer support	Supporting: enabling customers to help one another solve problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support forums</li> <li>● Wikis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of members participating</li> <li>● Volume of questions answered online</li> <li>● Decreased volume of support calls</li> </ul>
Operations	Managing: providing employees with tools so that they can assist one another in finding more effective ways of doing business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Internal social networks</li> <li>● Wikis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Number of member participating</li> <li>● Increased operational efficiency</li> <li>● Decreased volume of e-mail</li> </ul>

promoting the emergence of new international ventures/born global firms and/or facilitating enterprise's internationalization (Gabrielsson & Gabrielsson, 2011; Loane, McNaughton, & Bell, 2004; Loane, 2005; Mathews & Healy, 2007; Mostafa et al., 2006; Petersen, Welch, & Liesch, 2002; Pezderka et al., 2012; Zhang & Tansuhaj, 2007; Zhang et al., 2013). In addition, many companies currently rely on the Internet for improving the international supply chain co-ordination, relationship learning, customer service management, and firm performance (Jean, Sinkovics, & Kim, 2008; Jean & Sinkovics, 2010; Liang et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2013; Ray et al., 2005; Shih, 2004; Trainor et al., 2014).

Focused on social media usage and its connection to firm internationalization, some authors stand out for their potential influence on international business and export marketing strategies (Berthon et al., 2012; Maltby, 2012; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013), as these applications may help break down the barriers of time and distance between the supply and demand sides (Constantinides et al., 2008).

However, despite the great potential of social media, especially for export-oriented companies, to date, very limited attention has been paid to identify different profiles of exporting companies, taking into account their approach towards social media—precisely the purpose of this research.

## 2.2. Exporting firms' managerial involvement in social media

Several researchers have set out that a company's success in foreign markets depends heavily on its capacity to adapt to new ICT developments (Arenius, Sasi, & Gabrielsson, 2005; Loane et al., 2004; Loane, 2005; Morgan-Thomas & Bridgeater, 2004; Mostafa et al., 2006; Petersen et al., 2002; Sinkovics et al., 2013; Stevenson & Hamill, 2002). ICT has strengthened international business relations by increasing the efficiency of market transactions and promoting access to information easily and faster (Gabrielsson & Gabrielsson, 2011; Jean et al., 2008; Mathews & Healy, 2007, 2008; Petersen et al., 2002; Pezderka et al., 2012; Ruzzier, Hisrich, & Antoncic, 2006; Zhang & Tansuhaj, 2007; Zhang et al., 2013).

In particular, the explosive growth of social media has enabled companies—often, new ventures and small and medium enterprises—to connect with people and locations all over the world (Berthon et al., 2012; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). In addition, social media may help firms reinforce their international business operations by particularly

improving international communication, the efficiency of market transactions, the satisfaction and loyalty of foreign costumers and the development of international network relationships (Alarcón-del-Amo et al., 2015). Therefore, social media are potentially relevant for conducting international activities, as these technologies may improve communication with foreign customers, reducing or even eliminating distances. However, the expected benefits from social media need first to be recognized by managers who will be willing to adopt social media in their managerial activity. Therefore, the managerial beliefs about social media use outcomes are of utmost importance.

Despite this growing interest, the research about uses businesses are making of social media in an international perspective is in an early stage. Bell and Loane (2010) highlighted this international potential and showed that small born global companies are using Web 2.0 technologies to intensify their relationships with international partners. These authors demonstrated that, for international companies, social media are a key driver of business development and rapid internationalization, since these new-wave firms leverage value through close collaboration with other firms and co-creation with customers. Okazaki and Taylor (2013) suggested that the global reach of social networking platforms such Facebook, Google+, Twitter or LinkedIn, combined with their important degree of standardization, make them effective levers for international strategies. Alarcón-del-Amo, Rialp, and Rialp (2016) demonstrated 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. These findings confirm that the relational potential of social networks, acknowledged by many authors in domestic markets (Barnes et al., 2012; Stockdale, Ahmed, & Scheepers, 2012; Durkin, McGowan, & McKeown, 2013), can also be activated on an international scale. But in the context of these recent works, there is a lack of analyzing the effect of use of social media on performance by export companies.

On the other hand, in the last 20 years, several researchers have focused on identifying variables that influence the acceptance behavior regarding ICT, putting forward different theoretical models and proposals. The theory of reasoned action (TRA) is a well-known model for predicting and explaining individual behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980;

Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). TRA asserts that individual behavior is determined by behavioral intentions to perform the behavior, and that behavioral intentions are determined by individual attitudes regarding behavior. The attitude is 'a learned predisposition to respond favorably or unfavorably toward something' (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 216). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) proposed that attitudes are learned, and are therefore dynamic. They can and do change with experience. These predispositions are also assumed to predispose someone to certain actions and behaviors. In fact, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) proposed that the connection between attitude and behavior is through the intention: one's behavior can be predicted from intention. Intentions can be predicted from one's attitude toward the behavior.

According to the expectancy-value theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), individual attitudes toward a specific behavior are defined as a function of salient beliefs and evaluations of behavior outcomes. Thus, the attitude construct links the causal relationships between beliefs and behavior. More specifically, in terms of social media adoption by potential users within firms, the attitude towards adopting (or continuing to use) social media is generated by the individual's salient beliefs about the consequences of adopting (or continuing to use) social media (behavioral beliefs) and evaluation of these consequences. Thus, attitude is derived by the strength of the person's beliefs that adopting (or continuing to use) social media will lead to certain consequences, each weighted by the evaluation of each belief's behavioral consequences (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

Therefore, our expectation is that enterprise' export managers as key decision-makers mostly in exporting enterprises, may have quite different beliefs about social media use outcomes as well as other potential differences in the additional TRA model components (attitude, intention to use, and use) regarding the social media adoption process within their firms. Accordingly, exporters would be heterogeneous – and could then be grouped in different clusters of firms- according their different level of managerial involvement in adopting digital social media tools. Accordingly, we propose the following first hypothesis:

**H1.** Exporting firms differ with regard their higher or lower managerial involvement in relation to social media.

### 2.3. Social media as determinant of exporting firms' performance

Different studies have evaluated firm performance with respect to the use of IT systems (Bharadwaj, 2000; Liang et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2013). Likewise, some of these studies have specifically focused on export-oriented companies and born global exporters (Pezderka et al., 2012; Zhang & Tansuhaj, 2007; Zhang et al., 2013). In such firms, communication processes with relevant players in foreign markets (providers, distributors and customers) occur electronically, and thus, they are influenced by the technological system used.

According to the literature, ICT use can potentially lead to high performance in exporting companies due to (1) the pursuit of high, value-added ICT applications to maintain a competitive edge; (2) the reduction in the costs of communicating with foreign customers/suppliers and of gathering information about foreign competitors; and (3) the support/enhancement of distinctive competencies and skills in other business functions (Zhang et al., 2013).

For companies that are selling their products in foreign markets, social media can be used as an integrated set of strategic resources (human, technological, managerial, and organizational) that can create, through the use of social media applications, competitive advantages and superior firm performance based upon more effective information management (Carmichael, Palacios-Marques, & Gil-Pechuan, 2011; Trainor et al., 2014). This can be explained by the contingency theory, which posits that each firm's export performance is dependent on the context in which the firm operates, and as Robertson and Chetty (2000) demonstrated, there is a relationship between export performance and the level of 'fit' between a firm's strategic orientation and its context.

Also, as Reid (1981) and Robertson and Chetty (2000) affirm, the context of a firm changes continually throughout its exporting activity. Hence, managers will be required to diagnose and make adaptations as these changes occur. They need to behave in a way that allows them to be proactive and flexible in their strategic choices. The failure to do so can lead to poor performance and lost opportunities. In this sense, we believe that if exporting enterprises' key decision-makers take advantage of social media and incorporate them into their business strategy, this might favor their firm performance.

Based upon the key role of the Internet and social media for improving communication and managing customer relationships, distribution channels and intermediaries, sales transactions and fulfillment activities in international markets (Arenius et al., 2005; Gabrielsson & Gabrielsson, 2011; Loane, 2005; Sinkovics & Bell, 2005; Yamin & Sinkovics, 2006; Zhang & Tansuhaj, 2007; Zhang et al., 2013) exporting firms can increase their benefits by significantly reducing communication costs. Furthermore, consumers are using the Internet and social media to communicate with each other and to forge and sustain relationships between themselves and the firms they do business with (Sinkovics & Penz, 2005). Accordingly, online interactions can provide companies with relevant information to enable them to discover, evaluate and exploit international opportunities. In other words, exporting firms can acquire first-hand information of their customers that allows them to develop those export marketing strategies that best fit with the needs and desires of their clients. Therefore, exporting firms can implement business intelligence practices that, through the integration of web applications with back-end databases and systems, in order to customize the online experience for the clients, are recognized as important factors for the successful pursuit of international opportunities. These online technologies can enable a firm to capture international opportunities better and faster than competitors who do not have them if they are able to process in real time the information they have about the wishes of potential buyers (Reuber & Fischer, 2011).

In fact, ICT advances have made internationalization more feasible even for resource-constrained firms (Mathews & Zander, 2007; Oviatt & McDougall, 2005a, 2005b; Zahra, 2005). Broadly referring to ICT, Pezderka et al. (2012, p. 9) assert that 'those companies that develop superior capabilities in terms of communication with customers, relationship-building, reaching potential customers, bypassing costly physical presence in foreign markets, market research, being a front-runner in employing advanced export management technology, and cost reduction through Internet deployment, will experience enhanced export performance'. Therefore, along with the emergence, further development and use of ICT in general and in social media technologies in particular, companies now have a greater ability than ever to take advantage of international market-growth opportunities (Mathews, Healy, & Wickramasekera, 2012). Therefore, the adoption and current use of social media may have unique implications for improving international marketers' strategy and performance (Berthon et al., 2012; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). Accordingly, more proactive social media technology usage by exporting firms will positively affect their performance. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H2.** The more proactive exporters are regarding managerial social media usage, the higher the company's performance.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Sample and procedure

A Web-based survey was distributed by e-mail from March to May 2013 to a multi-industry sample of Spanish exporting firms. A multi-industry sample enlarges the observed variance and emphasizes the generalization of the findings (Morgan, Kaleka, & Katsikeas, 2004; Navarro-García, Arenas-Gaitán, & Rondán-Cataluña, 2014). The sample of exporting firms came from the ICEX (Spanish Institute for Foreign

Trade) database of exporters. Maintaining sectorial proportionality, 1100 managers in charge of exports (i.e. export managers) received and answered the questionnaires, and actually 152 fully valid ones were returned. Consistent with the suggestion by Stanton and Rogelberg (2001), we decided to send just two reminding e-mails. More precisely, after the survey was launched in mid March, two re-calls followed during April. The survey was closed early in May. As different authors point out, 'frequent e-mail participation reminders may be perceived as intrusive' (Michalak & Szabo, 1998, p. 205).

To analyze the possible non-response bias, we compared the number of times the Web page with the survey was requested with the number of completed research responses actually received, so we could make a reasonable estimation of active refusals: the web page was requested 1100 times and the number of completed research responses was 152, which represents a 13.2% rate of non-refusal—close to the acceptable range of 15–20% mentioned by Menon, Bharadwaj, and Howell (1996). Unfortunately, we could not compute differences in key variables among those answering the survey and those that did not because the directory where the contact information was found did not provide us with other types of information. Likewise, to analyze the possible differences between earlier and late respondents (regarding those who answered first to the questionnaire and those who answered after the first and second re-call), we ran bivariate analysis and we did not find any significant differences in their responses.

In the final valid sample, firms have 151.84 employees on average, and the industries to which they belong are diverse (52.41% to manufacturing, 17.93% to services, 12.41% to wholesale business, 9.66% to agriculture, forestry and fishing, 4.83% to construction, 2.07% to retail trade, and 0.69% to public service). About half of the firms in the sample (53.02%) are older than 25 years and, on average, firms' export experience is 20.05 years—a similar percentage to the one obtained by Navarro-García et al. (2014). In addition, 59.60% of the sampling firm applications on average.

The questionnaire was based on a combination of closed-ended, dichotomous and multi-chotomous questions, with single and multiple

responses. The main objective was to acquire information about the level of managerial involvement with social media tools by Spanish exporting firms.

### 3.2. Measures

The constructs used in our study to measure managerial attitude, intention to use and exporters' use of social media were adapted from previous studies related to ICT adoption. Specifically, these indicators were based on the different constructs of the TRA proposed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) on a five-point Likert scale. Attitude toward social media applications is an individual's positive or negative feelings—evaluative affect—about performing the target behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975); intention to use or continue using the Social Media is the manager's intention to use Social Media (Davis, 1989); and actual use is the degree of current usage of Social Media (Davis, 1989).

The construct for beliefs about social media use outcomes (BSMO) identifies the managerial beliefs about the potential of social media in order to perform communication tasks or activities, and to effectively manage information about foreign customers. The BSMO scale is developed on the basis of previous work by Pezderka et al. (2012), who developed a scale to generally measure IT capabilities. To enable its application, we simplified the measuring instrument as much as possible by selecting and adapting to the social media context only those outcomes related to improving international communication, efficiency of market transactions abroad, satisfaction and loyalty of foreign customers and the development of international network relationships. As a result of this process, we obtained a scale of BSMO with seven items (see Table 2).

In order to use these constructs in the cluster segmentation, the content, convergent and discriminant validity and reliability of the constructs were verified first by means of the covariance-based structural equation model (SEM), using the AMOS 20 statistics package.

The first analysis carried out was an analysis of the validity and reliability of the scales employed in our model. The scales' development

**Table 2**  
Definitions of constructs.

Construct	Items	Adapted from
Beliefs about social media use outcomes	BSMO1 Social media allow us to effortlessly communicate a good business image to foreign customers. BSMO2 Using social media, we can interact with foreign customers much quicker. BSMO3 Social media improves our ability to create network relationships with customers in our target foreign markets. BSMO4 Social media improves foreign customer satisfaction. BSMO5 Social media improves our ability to generate foreign sales leads. BSMO6 Social media helps us to reach more potential foreign customers. BSMO7 Using social media to target foreign markets gives our company a competitive edge over rivals.	Pezderka et al. (2012)
Attitude	A1 I think that using social media is a good idea A2 I think that using social media is a wise idea A3 I think that using social media is a positive idea A4 I like the idea of using social media	Davis, Bagozzi, and Warshaw (1989); Fishbein and Ajzen (1975).
Intention to use	IU1 It is probable that I will use or continue using social media IU2 I intend to begin or continue using social media IU3 I will frequently use social media in the future IU4 I will recommend others to use social media	Moon and Kim (2001); Chan and Lu (2004)
Use	USE1 In general, could you say the level of use of social media by your company's export managers? USE2 How often does your company's export managers use social media? USE3 On average, how many hours does your company's export managers use social media per week?	Davis et al. (1989); Moon and Kim (2001)
Firm performance (perceptual) <sup>a</sup>	PER1 Profit margins compared to competitors. PER2 Return on investment (ROI) compared to competitors. PER3 Return on assets (ROA) compared to competitors.	Madsen, Moen, and Hammervold (2012)

<sup>a</sup> We would like to mention here that we made the assumption that the export managers who answered the survey understand and are well-informed of the difference between these three financial ratios.

**Table 3**  
Internal consistency and convergent validity.

Variable	Indicator	Factor Loading	Cronbach's $\alpha$	CR	AVE
Attitude toward social media	A1	0.906	0.943	0.946	0.815
	A2	0.942			
	A3	0.961			
	A4	0.795			
Intention to use	IU1	0.912	0.944	0.939	0.796
	IU2	0.947			
	IU3	0.890			
	IU4	0.816			
Use	USE1	0.969	0.955	0.958	0.885
	USE2	0.963			
	USE3	0.889			
Beliefs of Social Media use outcomes	BSMO1	0.814	0.924	0.924	0.635
	BSMO2	0.834			
	BSMO3	0.716			
	BSMO4	0.789			
	BSMO5	0.826			
	BSMO6	0.865			
	BSMO7	0.726			

Fit measures of the CFA model (Hair et al., 2006): Chi square: 288.68; df: 126; CFI: 0.943; RMSEA: 0.09.

was founded on a review of the most relevant literature, thus assuring the content validity of the measurements instruments.

To analyze the reliability of the constructs, we first conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with SPSS software. The consideration of multiple items for each construct increases construct reliability (Terblanche & Boshoff, 2008). Using EFA, and considering the different items for each construct, we found that only one dimension appeared for each construct. Therefore, EFA confirmed the unidimensionality of the four constructs considered in the model. The item-total correlation, which measures the correlation of each item with the sum of the remaining items that constitute the scale, is above the minimum of 0.3 recommended by Nurosis (1993) for all constructs in the sample used. Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) exceeded the recommendation of 0.70, as suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Then, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) jointly for all of the constructs in the measurement model was conducted using the AMOS 20 statistics package. The first thing to consider is the normality of the available data. The normality test performed on the available items indicates that we cannot accept the assumption of normality either in the total sample or in both subsamples defined according to social media usage. In fact, for various items, the critical values exceeded +2.00 or -2.00, which indicates statistically significant degrees of non-normality. AMOS also reports the joint multivariate kurtosis value and its associated critical ratio. Small multivariate kurtosis values (e.g., less than 1.00) are considered negligible, whereas values ranging from one to ten often indicate moderate non-normality. Values that exceed ten indicate severe non-normality. In our case, the value indicates severe non-normality. One method to correct for non-normality is to use the Bollen-Stine p-value rather than the usual maximum likelihood-based p-value to assess overall model fit. In our sample, the Bollen-Stine bootstrap enabled us to accept the measurement model (p value is 0.286).

The scale refinement process was followed, applying the three criteria proposed by Jöreskog and Sörbom (1993): 1) weak convergence requiring the elimination of indicators that did not have a significant factorial regression coefficient for Student's t distribution > 2.58 ( $p = 0.01$ ); 2) strong convergence forcing the elimination of those indicators that were not substantial, i.e., those whose standardized coefficient ( $\lambda$ ) was less than 0.5; and 3) a selective elimination of indicators that least contributed to the explanation of the construct, given the cut-off point of  $R^2 < 0.3$ .

The results of the final CFA are reported in Table 3. Composite reliability (CR) represents the shared variance among a set of observed variables measuring an underlying construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Generally, a CR of at least 0.60 is considered desirable (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). This requirement is fulfilled for every factor in this model.

The average variance extracted (AVE) was also calculated for each construct; the resulting AVE values were greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Therefore, the four constructs demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability.

Convergent validity was verified by analyzing the factor loadings and their significance. The scores obtained for the coefficients shown in Table 3 indicate that all factor loadings were significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, the size of all of the standardized loadings was higher than 0.50 (Steenkamp & Geyskens, 2006). These findings provide evidence supporting the convergent validity of the indicators (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

Discriminant validity of the measures was also demonstrated (Table 4) because the shared variance between pairs of constructs was always less than the corresponding AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

On the basis of all criteria, it was concluded that the measures in the study provided sufficient evidence of reliability and validity.

Then, the resulting factor scores of the measurement model were used as a measure of these indicators, so these variables are continuous, defined in the real intervals (Allred, Smith, & Swinyard, 2006; Brown, Pope, & Voges, 2003; Mäenpää, 2006).

In order to refine the resulting segments, we analyzed different variables that could have an influence on the degree of use of social media: number of years that firms are exporting (export experience), number of employees in the company (size), sector activity (industry), company age, possession of website, possibility of e-commerce through their website, and the number social media applications that the company use. All these variables were introduced as covariates in order to outline the resulting segments. Based on the positioning of the different firms, with regard to these variables, we have obtained different grouping patterns that fulfil the principles of maximum internal coherence and maximum external differentiation.

On the other hand, in order to use the performance construct in the regression analysis, the content validity, convergent validity, and reliability of the construct were verified first. As we have only one variable, we cannot run an AFC, and we developed an exploratory factor analysis with SPSS v. 19.0. For the EFA, we ran a principal components analysis (PCA). The first step in developing an EFA is to analyze the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO was 0.741 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was highly significant ( $\chi^2 = 228.717$ ; d.f. = 3;  $p = 0.000$ ), indicating good model acceptability, that is, it was a good idea to proceed with a factor analysis for the data.

After factor extraction, one factor resulted from the analysis, accounting for 91.94% of the symptomatic variance. The factor structure was consistent because all the variables had a factor loading > 0.5 on the relevant factor. In addition, Cronbach's alpha and the CR exceeded the recommendation of 0.70, and the AVE is higher than 0.5. Therefore,

**Table 4**  
Discriminant validity of the theoretical construct measures.

	Attitude	Intention to Use	Use	BSMO
Attitude	0.815			
Intention to use	0.465	0.796		
Use	0.209	0.378	0.885	
BSMO	0.310	0.562	0.198	0.635

The diagonal represents the AVE, while below the diagonal the shared variance (squared correlations) is represented.

**Table 5**  
Internal consistency and convergent validity of performance.

Variable	Indicator	Factor Loading	Cronbach's $\alpha$	CR	AVE
Performance	PER1	0.943	0.955	0.972	0.919
	PER2	0.975			
	PER3	0.958			

**Table 6**  
Summary of the results of the models.

Number of conglomerates	LL	BIC(LL)	Npar	Class. Err.	$E_s$	$R^2$
1-Cluster	-345.0691	1021.7143	66	0.0000	1	1
2-Cluster	-259.2289	990.7026	94	0.0524	0.8018	0.8343
<b>3-Cluster</b>	<b>-162.9249</b>	<b>938.7632</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>0.0331</b>	<b>0.9164</b>	<b>0.9220</b>
4-Cluster	-146.7565	1047.0951	150	0.0241	0.9425	0.9441
5-Cluster	-115.0923	1124.4354	178	0.0229	0.9542	0.9531
6-Cluster	-38.0338	1110.9870	206	0.0692	0.8949	0.8831
7-Cluster	-22.8649	1221.3178	234	0.0207	0.9621	0.9578

LL = log-likelihood; BIC = Bayesian information criterion; Npar = number of parameters; Class.Err. = classification error;  $E_s$  = entropy  $R$ -squared;  $R^2$  = Standard  $R$ -squared

the performance construct provided sufficient evidence of reliability and validity (see Table 5).

### 3.3. Data analysis: a latent segmentation approach

One of the objectives of this research is to analyze the existence of heterogeneity among export companies regarding the use of social media and, if found, to group them into different segments that are as homogeneous as possible and more heterogeneous regarding the remaining groups. To achieve this aim, we develop a segmentation analysis. The technique selected for this grouping has been latent segmentation methodology, using Latent Gold 4.5. statistical software. The latent class segmentation, like the cluster analysis, classifies similar objects into groups of which the number and size are a priori unknown. According to Picon Prado, Lévy-Mangin, and Voces-Lopez (2006), a relationship exists between latent segmentation and traditional cluster techniques such as K-means clustering. However, the interest in latent class segmentation models is increasing rapidly because they provide better solutions than the more traditional approaches to cluster, factor, and regression analysis when the population is not homogeneous. In particular, latent class segmentation modelling has now become the gold standard for cluster analysis (Vermunt & Magidson, 2002) by including variables of mixed scale types (nominal, ordinal, (censored/truncated) continuous, and/or (truncated) count variables) in the same analysis. In addition, the models usually can incorporate independent variables that may be used to describe (rather than to define or measure) the latent classes. These exogenous variables are known as covariates or grouping variables (Vermunt & Magidson, 2005).

This kind of procedure allows the assignation of firms to the segments based on their probability of belonging to the clusters, breaking

**Table 7**  
Cluster profiles obtained (indicators).

	Potential (Cluster2)	Initiated (Cluster1)	Expert (Cluster3)	Wald	p-value	$R^2$
Cluster size	29.53%	45.67%	24.79%			
Indicators						
Beliefs of social media use outcomes	3.2129	3.6155	3.8563	12.7005	0.0017	0.2273
Attitude	3.3962	3.7731	4.1946	22.2039	1.5e-5	0.2201
Intention to use	3.2569	3.9361	4.2513	14.6740	0.00065	0.3268
Use	1.0020	2.7265	3.7264	344.9551	1.2e-75	0.8364

with the restrictions of deterministic assignment inherent to the non-hierarchical cluster analysis (Dillon & Kumar, 1994). This methodology assigns the firm units to different segments under the assumption that the data stems from a mixture of distribution probabilities or, in other words, from various groups or homogenous segments that are mixed in unknown proportions (McLachlan & Basford, 1988).

## 4. Empirical findings

Two analyses were undertaken to accomplish the two specific objectives proposed. A similar approach has been followed in other related studies (e.g., Hagen, Zucchella, Cerchiello, & De Giovanni, 2012). The first analysis, a latent class segmentation, has been employed to detect homogeneous strategic groups, it means, to detect heterogeneous but internally homogeneous groups of exporting firms regarding their managers' attitudes and behaviors toward the adoption of social media. The second analysis is developed to accomplish the second objective of the research related to analyze how the relationship between the use of social media and the exporting firm's performance is. More specifically, to know if a more proactive behavior regarding managerial social media usage involves a higher company's performance.

### 4.1. Typology of exporting companies according to social media use

In applying the latent segmentation approach, the first step consists of selecting the optimum number of segments. The model used estimated from one (no heterogeneity existed) up to seven (i.e., seven segments or heterogeneity existed). Table 6 shows the estimation process summary and the fit indexes for each of the seven models.

The model fit was evaluated according to the Bayesian information criterion (BIC) that allows the identification of the model with the least number of classes that best fits the data. The lowest BIC value was considered as the best model indicator (Vermunt and Magidson, 2002, Vermunt & Magidson, 2002, 2005). In this case, the best alternative was represented by three different groups, as the BIC is minimized in this case. The statistical values included in Table 6 indicate that the model has a good fit.

The Wald statistic was analyzed in order to evaluate the statistical significance within a group of estimated parameters (see Table 7). For all the indicators a significant p-value associated with the Wald statistics was obtained, confirming that each indicator discriminates between the clusters in a significant way (Vermunt & Magidson, 2005). Table 7 also contains the profiles of these clusters. In the upper part, the size and name assigned to the three groups of exporters identified according their managerial involvement in social media is shown: the cluster called 'Potential in SM' includes 29.53%, the 'Initiated in SM' 45.67%, and the 'Expert in SM' cluster 24.79% of the total number of exporting companies surveyed.

In addition, Table 7 shows the average score that takes each segment in each of the indicators (note that they can take values between 1 and 5, since items that composed each scale were measured with five-point Likert scales).

We note that the three clusters of exporting firms are ordered from lowest to highest managerial involvement in terms of usage of social media. Accordingly, as compared to their counterparts within the other

two clusters who are currently social media users, export managers within the 'Potential in SM' cluster of exporters do not use social media tools yet. However, their future intention to use them is relatively high. In contrast, export managers belonging to the 'Initiated in SM' cluster of exporting firms do use social media in their current activities although not very frequently, and their intention to use them in the future is even higher than the one shown by those belonging to the 'Potential in SM' cluster of exporters. Finally, export managers performing within the 'Expert in SM' cluster are currently the most (pro)active users of social media, and their intention to continue using these tools in the future is the highest among all the managers of the three examined clusters of exporting firms. It is worth noting that when the export managers' use of social media increases, their beliefs about social media use outcomes are also greater, their attitude is more positive and their intention to use (or continue using) these tools is also higher.

To complete the composition of the segments, we also analyzed the profile of the resulting firm groups according to the information provided by other firm-related variables. Table 8 shows the groups' composition based on a number of descriptive criteria included in the analysis. For the qualitative covariates, the Chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ) also was analyzed, and for the quantitative covariates, the F-test (obtained through an analysis of variance, ANOVA) was used, in order to evaluate the significant differences between the three segments. We can conclude that significant differences exist between the three segments of exporting firms regarding the industry that they belong to, their possession of a website, the use of electronic commerce, and the number of social media tools that each company makes use of.

Related to the industry affiliation of these companies, there are a high percentage of companies in both the 'Initiated in SM' and 'Expert in SM' clusters that belong to the service industry.

With regard to firm age, although the differences between clusters are not significant, the 'Expert in SM' cluster of exporters has an average

age lower than the other groups. The same occurs with the level of firm export experience. Although there is no dependence between export experience and belonging to a given cluster in particular, some differences can be observed. The most active cluster in social media usage, the 'Expert in SM' one, has the least export experience, and the firm cluster with more export experience is the 'Initiated in SM' cluster. The 'Expert in SM' cluster probably shows the least export experience because this group contains the youngest companies. Furthermore, if we look at the percentage of firms that are early exporters, that is, firms that start exporting during the first three years of company life, it is observed that the highest percentage are companies that belong to the 'Expert in SM' cluster (48.65%). Therefore, the export experience of firms within this cluster is lower due to their younger age.

With regard to the possession of a website, all the companies from the 'Expert in SM' cluster of exporters do have a web presence. However, the percentage of those having a website drops among the 'Initiated in SM' group. Regarding the level of e-commerce adoption and the number of social media tools used by the company, they significantly increase the more actively involved in social media these companies are surely because their export managers have more positive attitudes and beliefs with regard to them.

Therefore, we can generally characterize those exporters belonging to the 'Potential in SM' cluster as firms that do not currently use social media but will very likely start using them in the future. These companies' export managers have a less positive attitude toward social media than their counterparts in the other two firm clusters. Moreover, their beliefs about social media use outcomes have also a lower score. These companies have 91 employees on average. They are mainly engaged in the manufacturing sector, but a relatively high percentage is dedicated to primary activities such as agriculture, forestry and fishing. With regard to firm age, they are 33 years old on average, with around 20 years of export experience, and 42.42% are early exporters. Many of

**Table 8**  
Profile of latent segments (covariates).

Qualitative covariates		Total	Potential in SM (Cluster2)	Initiated in SM (Cluster1)	Expert in SM (Cluster3)	$\chi^2$	p-value
Industry	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	9.66%	22.50%	1.47%	10.81%	26.614	0.017
	Construction	4.83%	0%	5.88%	8.11%		
	Manufacturing	52.41%	65.00%	50.00%	43.24%		
	Wholesale business	12.41%	5.00%	16.18%	13.51%		
	Retail trade	2.07%	0.00%	2.94%	2.70%		
	Services	17.93%	7.50%	22.06%	21.62%		
	Public Servant	0.69%	0.00%	1.47%	0.00%		
Age	1-11 years	11.41%	9.09%	13.24%	10.81%	13.443	0.200
	12-18 years	15.44%	15.91%	8.82%	27.03%		
	19-24 years	20.13%	18.18%	17.65%	27.03%		
	25-41 years	26.85%	31.82%	25.00%	24.32%		
	42-63 years	14.09%	15.91%	17.65%	5.41%		
	More than 63 years	12.08%	9.09%	17.65%	5.41%		
Born Global <sup>±</sup>		39.58%	42.42%	23.08%	48.65%	4.345	0.114
Possession of Web <sup>±</sup>		59.60%	73.91%	27.94%	100%	57.301	0.000
Use of eCommerce <sup>*</sup>		12.5%	4.26%	7.35%	32.43%	18.008	0.000
Quantitative covariates						F	p-value
Size	Mean	151.84	91.31	133.68	250.22	0.602	0.549
Export experience	Mean	20.05	20.61	25.42	15.78	3.088	0.050
Number of SM tools	Mean	2.03	0.00	1.65	5.30	28.420	0.000

\* Only positive values (yes) have been reflected in the Table.

± Born Global are early adopters of internationalization—that is, companies that expand into foreign markets and exhibit international business prowess, from or near their founding.



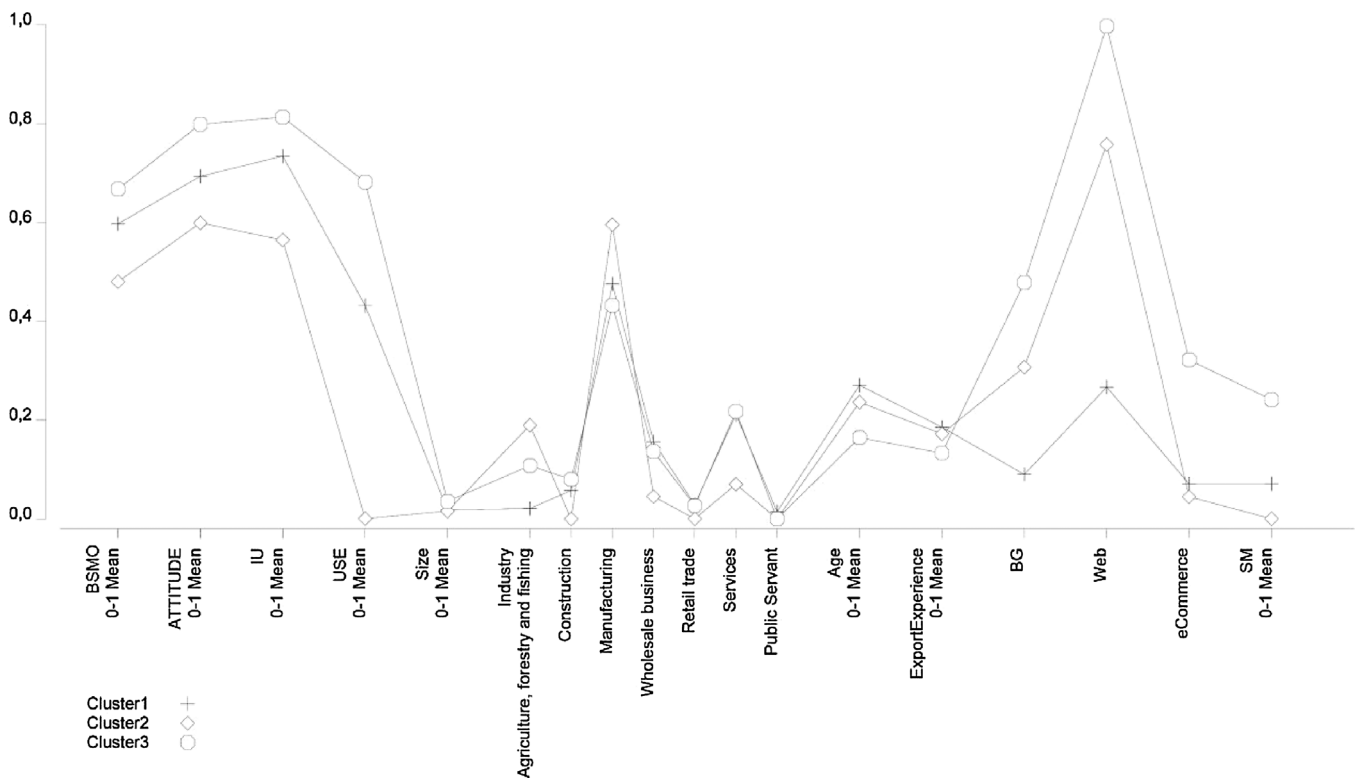


Fig. 1. Graphic profile of companies contained in each cluster (indicators and covariates).

them have a company website (73.91%), but only a very small percentage conducts electronic commerce (4.26%).

The 'Initiated in SM' cluster is the largest group, and can be defined as a firm cluster that is increasingly adopting digital social media. Export managers acting within this segment of exporters do already use social media tools (1.65 applications in average), but with a low frequency. However, their intention to continue using them is very high. In addition, they show a positive attitude towards these electronic tools, and their beliefs about social media use outcomes show a higher score as compared to their counterparts in the 'Potential in SM' cluster. On average, these exporting firms have 133 employees. Moreover, although half of them belong to the manufacturing sector, a relatively high percentage is formed by service providers (22.06%). These companies are around 40 years old, and with considerable export experience (25.42 years on average), but have the lowest percentage of early exporters (23.08%). Surprisingly, only a minority has indicated to have a company website (27.94%), and a small percentage, but slightly higher than the 'Potential in SM' cluster, conducts e-commerce (7.35%).

Finally, the 'Expert in SM' firm cluster is the most proactive one in terms of managerial social media adoption with 5.30 Web 2.0 applications being used on average. The frequency of use and intention to continue using social media tools on behalf of their export managers is high, as well as their attitudes and beliefs about social media use outcomes, which largely exceed those of their counterparts in the other two clusters. This firm cluster has also the highest number of employees on average (250.22) thus it is largely formed by medium-sized companies. Also, the highest percentage of firms corresponds to the manufacturing sector (43.24%) although a relatively high percentage of them belong to the services sector (21.62%). This cluster of exporting firms is on average younger (24.24 years) and shows the lowest export experience (15.78 years) in our sample. However, there are a higher percentage of early exporters (48.65%) than in the other two groups. Besides, all companies in this group do have a company website, and a significant percentage of them conduct e-commerce (32.43%).

Fig. 1 clearly allows appreciation of the profile of those exporters

belonging to each one of the clusters, according to the indicators and covariates.

#### 4.2. Regression analysis

What is the relationship between the use of social media and the exporting firm's performance? Following our second hypothesis, one would expect higher firm performance mainly in the groups that are managerially more involved in social media. A multiple linear regression was employed in order to determine the influence of belonging to a given cluster on firm performance. The quantitative<sup>1</sup> variable 'performance' was the dependent variable. Then we developed three models in which different control variables were included among the explanatory variables: firm size (number of employees in 2013); firm age (years from foundation until 2013); a factor created through an EFA, since both were related and converged in one factor. In addition, two cluster dummies were included, corresponding to membership of firm cluster 1 and 2. Cluster 3 (the most proactively involved in social media) was taken as the base category. We could not include more covariates considered in the clustering as control variables (industry, web, e-commerce, export experience and number of social media employed by the firm), as they were related with the groups. Likewise, as the variable measuring earliness in exporting is related to firm age, it was not considered for avoiding collinearity problems.

The regression results are report in Table 9. Three versions of the model were estimated: model 1 with size as the control variable, model 2 with age as the control variable, and the model 3 with the factor size-age as the control variable. In the three models, only the intercept and the clusters are significant. In addition, although in the three models the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) and the adjusted  $R^2$  value are lower than 20%, the regression models are statistically significant. This indicates that, overall, the models applied can statistically predict the

<sup>1</sup> The resulting factor of an EFA was used as a measure of this indicator, so this variable is continuous.

**Table 9**  
Results from the multiple regression.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercept	0.345***	0.388***	0.303**
Cluster 1	−0.761***	−0.689***	−0.699***
Cluster 2	−0.435***	−0.381**	−0.400*
Size	−8,8E-005		
Age		−0.003	
Size-Age (Factor)			−0.073
R <sup>2</sup>	17.8%	18.5%	12.6%
R <sup>2</sup> adjusted	16%	16.8%	9.6%
F	9.825***	10.964***	4.259***

\*\*\*Significant at the 1% level; \*\* Significant at the 5% level; \* Significant at the 10% level.

dependent variable, firm performance.

The *t*-ratios for the cluster 2 and cluster 1 dummy variables are all significant, different from zero and the coefficients of these two clusters (namely 'Potential in SM' and 'Initiated in SM') are negative, suggesting that belonging to cluster 1 or 2 (with none or lower use of social media, respectively, and a less positive managerial attitude toward them) is worse in terms of firm performance than belonging to cluster 3 (the one whose export managers are the most active on social media usage). Therefore, these results support that having a more positive attitude and beliefs toward social media and using them more significantly in the business strategy can have a positive impact on business performance.

## 5. Discussion

Social media are profoundly contributing to a radical transformation of marketing practice, customer behavior and e-business. In fact, the social media era increases the available information about products, services and commercial outlets accessible to consumers; social media also affects the nature and dissemination of marketing information (Shin, Pang, & Kim, 2015).

Likewise, social media applications have been gradually transformed from completely customer-specific to customer-centric tools that allow organizations to take part in the interaction between network members (Trainor et al., 2014). Therefore, social media enable a substantial increase in customer power (Riegner, 2007), so engaging them within a firm's marketing strategy seems a logical and desirable business choice. There are indications that the impact of the social web is indeed very significant in several business areas and, particularly, in marketing communication and product innovation (Kim & Bae, 2008).

In particular, for export-oriented companies, social media developments can have a substantial impact in their online strategies and foreign markets, as these applications provide better communication with foreign customers, thus reducing or even eliminating the physical distance. In fact, some authors point out their potential influence on international business and export marketing strategies (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012; Maltby, 2012; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013) as these applications may break down barriers of time and distance between the supply and demand sides (Constantinides et al., 2008).

Subsequently, with the emergence of social media, exporting companies nowadays have a greater ability than ever to take advantage of international market-growth opportunities (Mathews et al., 2012). Thus, the adoption and exploitation of social media tools have specific and unique implications for international marketers (Berthon et al., 2012; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013).

This research classified Spanish export-oriented companies with regard to their export managers' use of social media, as well as their underlying beliefs and attitudes toward these online applications. A latent segmentation statistical technique was used with this purpose due to its technical advantages. Latent class models can incorporate variables with different scales, both metric and non-metric, and the

differentiation between indicators to generate clusters allows a better framework to define, profile, and explain the differences between segments. After the application of this methodology, three statistically different clusters or segments of Spanish exporters were obtained, classified, and fully described as 'Potential in SM', 'Initiated in SM' and 'Expert in SM', respectively, therefore confirming our expectation that exporting firms would differ in terms of managerial involvement with social media.

Moreover, our study confirms a positive relationship between cluster of exporting firms and performance. Belonging to the specific cluster of exporting firms showing the highest level of managerial involvement with social media actually predicts a higher level of firm performance. This is, if a company belongs to the 'Expert in SM' cluster, its performance is significantly higher than the performance of another exporting company located in the other groups. This clustering-performance relationship is statistically supported by the multiple regression analysis and reinforces previous academic results (Berthon et al., 2012; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). Our findings therefore complement extant research on the use of ICT and international strategy that has shown positive results regarding the use of new technologies on firms' performance by export companies.

## 6. Implications and limitations

The outcomes of the empirical analyses are relevant for managers and entrepreneurs in that they allow export managers to assess the consequences of being positioned in one of the three groups and thus to compare the firm's performance with the other clusters. In particular, our research supports the idea that positive attitudes and beliefs and a higher use of social media can address with higher firm performance, thanks to the opportunities that these digital applications bring into the international business strategies. Accordingly, export marketers should be aware of the fact that a more proactive managerial involvement with social media actually pays off in terms of company performance, since these digital social media offer strong communicational advantages for those exporters willing to incorporate them into their business strategy. Actually, it would be particularly interesting, as a future line of research, to accurately define specific export marketing strategies to be implemented with the use of social media, and identify which of them would result in better firm performance. In addition, the outcomes are also relevant for policy-makers because they reveal that firms are not isomorphic from the viewpoint of social media usage and managerial beliefs. Thus, policy-makers should facilitate this adoption and exploitation task by means of policies promoting digital infrastructure, social media attitudes, intentions to use, and current usage of social media tools on behalf of both firms and customers.

Likewise, the factors we have analyzed in this study (managers' beliefs, attitudes, and behavior regarding using social media) could be also relevant for non-exporting firms. So, it would be also interesting to analyze whether managers of purely domestic firms show similar beliefs, attitudes and behavior related to the use of social media as compared to export managers; or, contrarily, they significantly differ in these terms. Therefore, replicating this study with non-exporting firms and comparing between exporters and non-exporters is suggested as another possible extension of the present study.

Obviously, this research is not free of some limitations. Although a great effort was made for obtaining a larger sample size of Spanish exporting companies, the final one used in this study is somewhat limited. We also cannot omit the risk of obtaining results that are overly specific to one particular context (in this case, Spain). In this vein, comparative studies drawing on larger multiple-country samples are crucial in internationalization research. In addition, a larger sample of exporting firms would help to perform multi-group analysis and also the use of structural equation modelling to analyze causal relationships. This would also allow researchers to examine more deeply the specific role of the type of business sector in the adoption of social media, since

it is likely that an IT outsourcing supplier or an online intermediary, for example, might have greater IT capability in general, as compared with an export-oriented manufacturer (Zhang et al., 2013).

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