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## Drivers of export entrepreneurship



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## ABSTRACT

The existing knowledge concerning the determinants of exporting entrepreneurship – conceived to be the speed, degree and scope with which the exporting activity is developed – is both scant and scattered. In order to cover this research gap, the main aim of this investigation is to get to know the drivers of export entrepreneurship from the resource-based view – RBV – and the contingency approach. A conceptual model that is verified with a multi-sectorial sample of 212 Spanish exporting companies is proposed. The results reveal that export entrepreneurship positively depends on internal factors, such as export commitment and resources associated with experience and structure. It likewise depends on contingency factors linked to the external environment, such as competitive intensity and the distances between the export firm's different markets. The results produce academic and managerial contributions for the field of export activities.

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## 1. Introduction

The study of entrepreneurship in international businesses (IB) has been a topic of great relevance in the last two decades. For example, Jones, Coviello, and Tang (2011) counted in their review 323 articles in the 1989–2009 period. However, their study is fragmented, inconsistent and lacking in unifying paradigms and theory (Keupp & Gassmann, 2009). These weaknesses are due to two main causes: (a) the different types of businesses (venture type) (e.g., export/import start-up, multinational trader, geographically focused start-up and global start-up; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994) or 'entry mode' (Gallego, Ramos, Acedo, Casillas, & Moreno, 2009) that the firm can develop in their internationalization process has not been taken into account, and this conditions the orientation, the commitment, the speed and the pace of the firm's internationalization (Jones et al., 2011); (b) a myopic viewpoint about entrepreneurship in IB has been adopted (Evangalista, 2005), there being few studies which have jointly included variables from inside and outside the firm. To avoid both weaknesses and adopting an entrepreneurial perspective, the current work is centered on exports as the main form of entry into foreign markets. In this context, we aim to know the drivers of export entrepreneurship (EE), considering them to be a strategic behavior

associated with the degree, scope and speed with which the firm develops its exporting activity. In order to do so, we adopt an inclusive approach, incorporating both factors of the firms itself – or of its decision makers – and factors which are external to the organization, associated with the industry and the environment in which the firm operates.

Entrepreneurship and exports are two essential elements in the economic growth process of countries through the creation or development of new businesses (Acs, Audretsch, Braunjerhelm, & Carlsson, 2006; Hessels, 2007). Entrepreneurship contributes to economic growth via the generating and transmitting of knowledge, and the increase of competitiveness and diversity (Audretsch & Keilbach, 2004). Exports have a positive impact on the national quantity of currency reserves and the increase of national prosperity, contributing to the expansion of the domestic industry, and to the improvement of productivity and employment (Hessels & van Stel, 2011). They also generate learning processes, from the point of view of both human and technological capital (Blalock & Gertler, 2004; Yeoh, 2004). Individually, both topics – entrepreneurship and exports – recur in the economic, management and marketing literature. However, the extant knowledge about EE is very limited (Hessels & van Stel, 2011). This can be due to having considered the time that passes between the firm's foundation and the start-up of export activity – speed or timing of entry – as a factor that in itself is decisive of EE. This means, for example, contemplating as equivalent terms – in a confusing manner as Gallego and Casillas (2014) point out – early exporting and

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international new ventures – INVs. However, INVs are “organizations that, from their inception, seek to derive significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and the sale of outputs in multiple countries” (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994, p. 49), accepting their entrepreneurial orientation (EO) regardless of their way of entering foreign markets. This implies that, along with the speed or entrance time, the *scope* (number of countries to which the firm exports) will be a factor to be taken into account in the entrepreneurship level of the export firms. They will be catalogued as INVs when they are early exporters (starting their export activity in their first years) and commercializing their products and/or services in multiple countries simultaneously. In any case, the very orientation of the export firm in its international expansion must not be overlooked – market concentration vs. market diversification (Ruzo, Losada, Navarro, & Díez, 2011). Moreover, the intensity to which the export firm is achieving its sales in foreign markets cannot be disregarded, as this is decisive of its entrepreneurial capability (Zhang, Tansuhaj, & McCullough, 2009). This leads to the consideration of a third aspect, inter-related to the speed and international scope to determine the export firm’s entrepreneurial level: *degree*. This is evaluated by the ratio (%) between the export sales and the total sales. The key is what percentage is taken as a reference, assuming that 25% can be a good cut-off point (Jones et al., 2011). This has led to the consideration that exporters which achieve at least 25% of their sales in foreign markets – normally developing a market diversification strategy – and which have begun their exporting in their first years of existence (early exporters) can be catalogued as *export born globals* (BG). This case is defined as the greatest level of EE.

In this context, in the current research we will use speed, scope and degree together to define the exporting firm’s EO. Its antecedents are also analyzed from the resource-based view (RBV) and the contingency approach, setting out from the premises established in the work of Keupp and Gassmann (2009). They consider that there are four antecedents of entrepreneurship in IB: (a) personal factors – in our study, export commitment; (b) business factors – here, structure and experience; (c) factors associated with the industry – in this case, competitive intensity; and (d) factors connected to the country – in this study, market distances.

The paper has three main contributions. Firstly, the degree, the international scope and the speed can be jointly used to define the exporting firm’s EO. Secondly, taking the RBV as a reference, it is shown that the level of entrepreneurship is conditioned by internal factors, both personal – export commitment – and those of the firm itself – experience and structure. Thirdly, from the contingency approach, it is shown that the factors of the export firm’s external environment also condition EE. In this way, in this study competitive intensity and, surprisingly, the market distances between the countries in which the exporter works, increases the export firm’s level of entrepreneurship.

To achieve the aims proposed, the paper has the following structure. First, the conceptual model is set out and the drivers of EE are modeled using the RBV and the contingency approach. This allows the defining of the research hypotheses. Then, the research method used is explained from a multisectorial sample of 212 Spanish exporters. Finally, the results are discussed and the main conclusions and the study’s contributions are presented, both academic and from the management practice point of view. The work finishes with its limitations and suggestions for future lines of research.

## 2. Literature review

To be an entrepreneur implies creating or developing a new business – in this case exports. Exportation vs. non-exportation

centered the initial debate on entrepreneurship and export activity, trying to get to know the business or personal factors which lead a firm to initiate – entrepreneurially – external trade operations compared to those that do not (e.g., Katsikeas, 1996; Leonidou, 1995; Ursic & Zincota, 1984). In this way, some authors conceived that firms which decide to export develop a business innovation process – entrepreneurship – which influences its business performance (Samiee, Walters, & DuBois, 1993; Simmonds & Smith, 1968). However, the literature on EE has progressively centered itself on export firms. The work of Yeoh and Jeong (1995) helped to concentrate the debate. They pointed out that export firms can be differentiated according to their EO. This can be moderated by the structure of the export channel and by the environment in which the firm works. Thus, while some exporters tend to be proactive, innovative and have less risk aversion in the search for business opportunities in foreign markets, others tend to be reactive or conservative.

In line with Yeoh and Jeong (1995), Ibeh and Young (2001) define EE as “the process by which managers, either by themselves or within organizations, take advantage of market opportunities – foreign – taking into account the resources available and the environmental factors which affect them”. This definition highlights that EE depends on internal (e.g., resources) and external (e.g., environment) factors. However, the definition of Ibeh and Young (2001) considers that an entrepreneurial exporter is any firm which starts its export activity. This raises an important question. Are there different levels of entrepreneurship between firms which already export? Trying to answer this question leads Ibeh (2003) adds to the definition of Ibeh and Young (2001) that export entrepreneurs are those who show themselves to be proactive and aggressive in the search for export opportunities related to products-markets innovations. This description opened the debate, in the EE area, about what should be understood as export proactivity. This is a debate which does not seem to be resolved in the literature on exportation, as it has centered on the attitudes and orientations of the export managers and not on the organization’s own behavior (Navarro, Acedo, Losada, & Ruzo, 2011). In the current work, we consider that this debate can be resolved taking into account three key aspects associated with entrepreneurship in IB (Keupp & Gassmann, 2009; Jones et al., 2011): speed, scope and degree, using the necessary nuances associated with exportation, such as the way of entering foreign markets.

Speed refers to the time that the firm takes to start up its export activity (Acedo & Jones, 2007), as well as the pace at which the export firm grows and develops in the foreign markets (Kuivalainen, Saarenketo, & Puumalainen, 2012). In this context, the most entrepreneurial will be those firms which start exporting early on, as they reflect a clear international orientation (Gallego & Casillas, 2014). The key is what cut-off point is considered in the speed or timing of entry into foreign markets to determine the exporter’s EO, as there is not a consensus about this in the literature. In this respect, Acedo and Jones (2007), based on the contributions of Coviello and Jones (2004), consider that taking 6 years to begin the export activity can be a good starting point.

Scope determines the number of foreign markets – countries – in which the export firm generates international sales. This is referred to in the literature as export extension or diversification (Beleska-Spasova, Glaister, & Stride, 2012; Ruzo et al., 2011). As with speed, scope also raises the problem of what cut-off point to consider when measuring it. In this respect, five is the number of countries which Ruzo et al. (2011) consider must be taken into account to distinguish between when a firm is tending to market concentration (it exports to  $\leq 5$  countries) or to market diversification (it exports to  $> 5$  countries).

The export degree or intensity determines the export firm's level of orientation toward foreign markets, in relation to the domestic markets (Kuivalainen, Sundqvist, & Servais, 2007), normally using the export sales/total sales ratio to measure this. Nor is there an agreement in the literature about what ratio to use to evaluate the exporter's EO. In this sense, some authors have pointed out a ratio around 20% (Pla-Barber & Alegre, 2007).

In this context, assuming the premises of Ibeh (2003), those firms which internationalize themselves earlier will show a greater level of EO, will tend to diversify markets and have a high export intensity. A review of the literature reveals two groups of drivers of EE: (a) internal and (b) external. The internal drivers are associated with the personal or individual factors of those who make export decisions – export managers – as well the characteristics typical of the organization: its resources and capacities.

The personal drivers include cognitive and attitudinal or motivational factors. In this way, as Ibeh and Young (2001) point out, entrepreneurial export are characterized by having innovative managers who have a proactive behavior and a low level of risk aversion concerning foreign markets. Acedo and Jones (2007) add that the level of proactivity and risk aversion of the export entrepreneur will be conditioned by the level of ambiguity tolerance. This, in line with Leonidou, Katsikeas, and Piercy (1998), will also be affected by the export manager's degree of international orientation. The personal factors include the typical demographic characteristics of decision makers. Thus, prior work experience and international experience positively contribute to maintaining a greater degree of EE (Acedo & Casillas, 2007; Ibeh, 2003, 2004). This experience – a generator of learning processes – reduces the perceived barriers and strengthens the EE (Julian & Ahmed, 2012; Zucchella, Palamara, & Denicolai, 2007).

On the other hand, there are different internal factors, typical of the organization, which can influence the degree of EE. In this way, there is the positive influence of structure (e.g., an export department) which formalizes decision making and eases planning (Caruana, Morris, & Vella, 1998; Ibeh, 2003). There is also the availability of certain resources, such as the use of information technologies which expedite international communication (Andersson and Johansson, 2008), of capacities associated with knowledge and organizational learning (Zhou, 2007), and the exporter's adaptation to the foreign markets (Ibeh, 2003) and flexibility related to importers (Rundh, 2011).

Among the external factors which influence EE are all those contingency factors connected to the organization's environment, either linked to the country – domestic or foreign – or the sector – industry – in which the export firm works. Thus, the institutional quality and the implementation of governmental policies in the domestic area which encourage exports stimulate EE. This can be especially relevant in developing countries (Ibeh & Young, 2001; Terjesen & Hessels, 2009). Regarding the country of destination, the economic growth level, the scarcity of entrance barriers and the geographical and cultural nearness – which act as inhibitors of the distances perceived by the export managers – are factors which stimulate EE (Hessels & van Stel, 2011). Regarding the industry, EE tends to be driven by the competitive intensity and the level of globalization, as they accentuate the search for opportunities in foreign markets, given the lesser possibilities of domestic growth (Mittelstaedt, Ward, & Nowlin, 2006).

### 3. Conceptual model and hypotheses

In the current work, taking into account the review of the literature, we are going to distinguish as potential EE drivers between internal and external factors. Among the internal factors, as personal factors we are going to consider the attitude of the export managers toward exporting, reflected in their export

commitment. Among the organizational internal factors, following the RBV, we consider the structure resources – an export department – and learning resources – general and international experience. Among the external factors, following the contingency approach, we will distinguish between those associated with the country of destination – market distances – and those related to the industry – competitive intensity.

#### 3.1. Export commitment and export entrepreneurship

The attitudes of the export managers are a central element in the organization's progress in the foreign markets (Lages, Jap, & Griffith, 2008), and can influence the degree of EO (Acedo & Galán, 2011). Among these attitudes, the reviews of Aaby and Slater (1989) and Zou and Stan (1998) grant a special role to export commitment. Later studies support these proposals, both as a direct antecedent of the export performance (Beamish, Karavis, Goerzen, & Lane, 1999; Navarro, Losada, Ruzo, & Díez, 2010; Styles & Ambler, 2000), and as a mediator factor of the international marketing–export performance relationship (Hultman, Robson, & Katsikeas, 2009; Lages & Montgomery, 2004; Navarro, Acedo, Robson, Ruzo, & Losada, 2010; Sousa, Martínez-López, & Coelho, 2008). However, no previous work that we are aware of has proposed a direct relationship between export commitment and EE.

In this study, export commitment is defined as the attitude – willingness – of the decision makers to allot appropriate financial, human and managerial resources to the export activity (Donthu & Kim, 1993). This willingness attenuates the perceived export risks and barriers (Styles & Ambler, 2000) and increases the predisposition to offering a greater basis and support to foreign distributors (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994). All this strengthens the development of a business culture oriented toward exports and can influence the process – speed, degree and scope – of internationalization (Navarro, Rondán, & Acedo, 2013). These arguments uphold the proposal of the following research hypothesis:

**H<sub>1</sub>.** Export commitment positively influences EE.

#### 3.2. Resources and export entrepreneurship

The RBV conceives resources to be the cornerstone of business performance (Barney, 1991). The epicenter of this approach is to know how firms can achieve competitive advantages and performance which are superior to their competitors' in the same market, via acquiring and exploiting resources that are unique and inimitable (Dhanaraj & Beamish, 2003; Makadok, 2001).

The resources and performance relationship has also centered the attention of researchers in the area of export activity (Cadogan, Kuivalainen, & Sundqvist, 2009; Colton, Roth, & Bearden, 2010; Lages, Silva, & Styles, 2009; Morgan, Kaleka, & Katsikeas, 2004; Morgan, Vorhies, & Schlegelmilch, 2006; Singh, 2009; among others). However, there is a broad lack of awareness about the resources–EE relationship. In the present work we are going to consider two types of resources (Ruzo et al., 2011): (a) resources associated with experience – experiential resources and (b) resources associated with structure – structural resources.

Regarding experience, we distinguish between general and international experience. General experience is connected to knowledge of business activity in the industry in which there is competition (Zou & Stan, 1998), while international experience indicates the level of knowledge about foreign markets (Fischer & Reuber, 2003). General experience provides a fundamental basis to initiate internationalization movements – the fruit of organizational learning and the increase of managerial confidence in decision making (Majocchi, Bacchiocchi, & Mayrhofer, 2005). It

reinforces the planning level and reduces the levels of improvisation, decreasing the likelihood of making erroneous decisions in markets that are different from the domestic market (Nemkova, Souchon, & Hughes, 2012). All this can reinforce the organization's export orientation, driving the degree and scope inherent in EE (Ruzo et al., 2011).

International experience is a generator of specific learning linked to the export activity, and provides available information to facilitate the firm's adaptation to the needs of the foreign markets and makes international positioning easier (Morgan et al., 2004). It reduces the perceived export risks and barriers, increases the firm's orientation toward foreign markets and drives its entrepreneurial spirit (Autio, Sapienza, & Almeida, 2000; Knight & Cavusgil, 2004).

On the other hand, there is a positive correlation between the creation and adaptation of specific systems and infrastructure for the export activity and the advance of the firm in its process of internationalization (Vermeulen & Barkema, 2002). Thus, the creating of an export department helps to organize and plan the export activity (Caruana et al., 1998), and facilitates the gathering of information about the external markets, speeding up the search for and exploitation of new opportunities (Czinkota & Ronkainen, 2002). This increases the firm's international competitiveness. Then this is reflected in a greater export orientation which will influence the levels of market diversification and will accelerate the organization's internal expansion (Ruzo et al., 2011). The arguments presented lead us to propose the following hypothesis:

**H<sub>2</sub>.** The resources associated with experience and there being a specific structure – an export department – for the export activity positively influences the level of EE.

### 3.3. Competitive intensity and export entrepreneurship

The external environment tends to be one of the main decisive elements of the export firm's entrepreneurship level (Yeoh & Jeong, 1995). It is a question of a contingency factor which influences the exporter's proactivity in seeking and exploiting opportunities in external markets (Ibeh, 2003).

Following Keupp and Gassman (2009), the factors of the external environment which determine the level of entrepreneurship in IB are divided into two types: those associated with the industry and those linked to the country. In the industry context, one of the most relevant factors is competitive intensity. This is defined by the level of rivalry which exists between an industry's different competitors and is a reflection of the environment's hostility (Auh & Menguc, 2005). It tends to increase the dynamism of the market and influences the organization's strategic agility to adapt to such changes (Zahra, 1993).

In the export activity context, some studies reflect that the prevailing conditions within the sector – called mimicry – tend to condition the behaviors and results of export firms (Gallego et al., 2009). Specifically, competitive intensity tends to be reflected in a greater degree of adaptation of the marketing-mix program with the aim of satisfying the needs and desires of foreign consumers (Navarro, Arenas, & Rondán, 2014; Powers & Loyka, 2010). It also reflects a greater development of market-oriented behaviors (Cadogan, Cui, & Li, 2003; Kwon & Hu, 2000), and, given the need to seek and exploit business opportunities outside the domestic area, positively influences the scope and degree of the organization's international orientation (Mittelstaedt et al., 2006). These arguments support the proposal of the following research hypothesis:

**H<sub>3</sub>.** The competitive intensity positively influences the level of EE.

### 3.4. Market distances and export entrepreneurship

The differences or distances between markets – countries – are decisive elements of the volatility of the international environment in which the organization works (Ghemawat, 2001). In this study, these distances can be geographical, physically evaluating the nearness or distance of the countries-markets, institutional, measuring the differences in the regulatory framework – cognitive and normative from the point of view of the public administration – between the two countries (Aguilera-Caracuel, Aragón-Correa, Hurtado-Torres, & Rugman, 2012; Gallego & Casillas, 2014), and psychic (Sousa & Lages, 2011). In this way, following Sousa and Bradley (2006) we define the market distances as differences – economic, legal, social and cultural – between the different markets in which the organization works as individually perceived by those in charge of the export activity.

The market distances are one of the main cognitive barriers to the internationalization process of organizations (Whitelock & Jobber, 2004; Zhao, Luo, & Suh, 2004), and decisively influences the time and way of entering into foreign markets (Dow, 2000; Dow & Larimo, 2009). Thus, it makes the export firm be seen as more conservative in marketing-mix programs (Sousa & Bradley, 2009). All this generates a limited EO of the exporter and a gradualness and greater slowness in its internationalization process (Prime, Obadia, & Vida, 2009). Based on these arguments, we formulate the following research hypothesis:

**H<sub>4</sub>.** The market distances between the different countries in which the firm works negatively influences its level of EE.

We see the relationships proposed in Fig. 1.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Sample and data analysis

An empirical study of Spanish export firms is performed. We used a multi-industry sample to enlarge observed variance and emphasize the generalization of the findings (Morgan et al., 2004). Two stages were developed to obtain the sample: (a) we got into contact with the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade (ICEX). They facilitated us with a database made up of Spanish exporters – 1200 firms – dividing them into four main macro-sectors, according to the percentage of exports corresponding to each macro-sector in 2012 (Table 1). The number of firms in each macro-sector is in proportion to the percentage of exports; (b) maintaining macro-sectorial proportionality, questionnaires were sent, mainly via e-mail, to 1200 managers in charge of exports. 212 valid questionnaires were obtained, representing a response rate of 17.7%. This is within the range between 15 and 20% considered as an adequate response rate (Menon, Bharadwaj, & Howell, 1996).

Table 2 offers us general information of the sample and also has details per macro-sector. The majority of the sample's firms were small (66% have less than 50 employees). Most firms had a great amount of experience in their business (70% longer than 20 years in their sector), and much experience in international business (61% longer than 15 years of export activity), though only a minority (33%) had an export department.

The majority of the sample's firms concentrate their export sales in a few markets (71% exported to five or less countries), compared to 19% which tend to develop market diversification strategies (presence in more than 10 countries). 60% of the sample have started their export activity in their first ten years of existence, 31% being firms which have had a clear international vocation since when their inception (they began to export in their

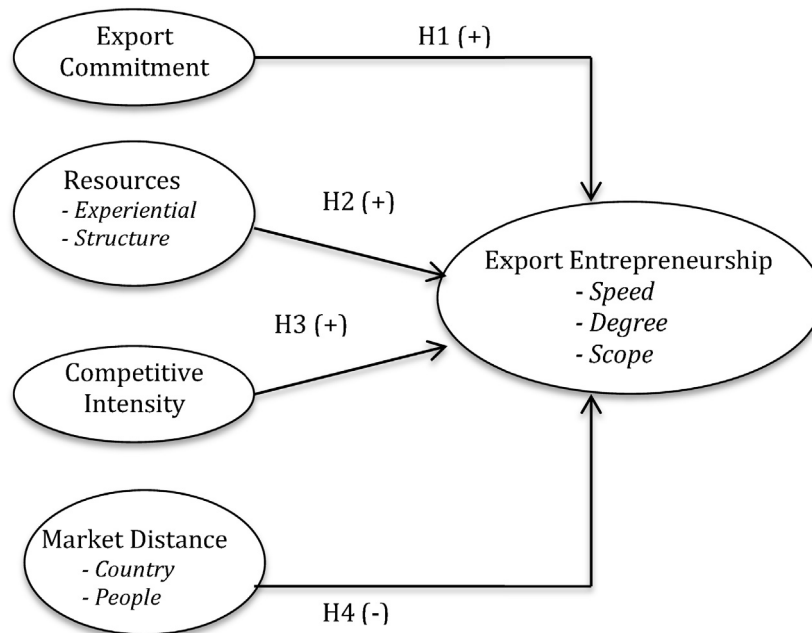


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

first three years of existence). It is in this last group that we find early export firms (Gallego & Casillas, 2014) which can be called INVs, depending on their presence or non-presence in multiple countries simultaneously. Moreover, if some of these INVs (early exporters with a presence in at least 10 countries simultaneously) have an export degree over 20–25% we can consider them to be BG (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004). In the current work, 50% of the firms in the sample have an export degree over 20%.

By sector, the main characteristics of the sample are:

- (a) *Agri-food*, includes exclusively small (<50 employees) and medium-sized Spanish export firms (50–249 employees), although in percentage terms they are the group with the greatest general and international experience. This is in spite of their mainly not having a specific structure – export department – for export activity (87% do not have an export department). They are firms whose exports are concentrated in few countries ( $\leq 5$  countries), despite an important percentage (40%) having started their international activity in their first six years of existence. Along with export firms of consumer goods, they are the firms with a greater export degree (62% surpass export degree of 20%).
- (b) *Industrial goods*. The same as in the sector of consumer goods and services, the sector of industrial goods includes small (68%), medium (23%) and large-sized (9%) export firms. These

are firms with experience (34 years on average) in the sector in which they compete as well as in international markets (23 years on average). It is the sector which has most developed a specific structure for their export activity (47% have an export department), contributing to the developing of market diversification strategies (9 countries on average). 39% are early exporters, although most firms of this sector (65%) have an export degree below 20%.

- (c) *Consumer goods*. This includes the sample's largest export firms (an average of 175 employees) and less international experience (13 years on average), though they have ample experience in the sector (32 years on average). They are mostly late exporters (52% begin exporting after 10 years since their inception), do not have an export department (66%), and tend to develop market concentration strategies (68% center exports in  $\leq 5$  countries), although 63% of this sector's firms have an export degree over 20%.
- (d) *Services*. This group includes the youngest export firms (22 years on average) and the smallest (31 employees on average). These are the firms in the sample with the greatest international vocation (they take 7 years on average to become international), starting their exporting in their first three years of existence – early exporters – in 57% of the cases. 24% of the firms of this sector tend to diversify their markets (presence in  $> 10$  countries), and have an export degree over 20% in 38% of the cases.

Table 1  
Information of the sample.

Sector	Exports of the sector divided by the total exports for Spain (%)	Number of export firms available in the database	Sample of export firms by sector
Agri-food	26%	312	55
Industrial goods	35%	420	74
Consumer goods	29%	348	62
Services	10%	120	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1200</b>	<b>212</b>

Source: ICEX (2012).

A single key informant was selected in each firm to report on export activity. Using only one well-informed respondent may potentially reduce the systematic and random sources of error (Huber & Power, 1985). To ensure the reliability of the data source, the respondents were required to be senior managers in charge of exports. A specific section of the questionnaire asked respondents for their job title and assessed their competency in terms of knowledge, involvement, and responsibilities in export activity. High scores on the skills about export questions indicated that potential bias attributable to the key informant was minimized.

Structural equation modeling via PLS (partial least squares) is the choice of method for data analysis and for assessing the

**Table 2**  
Detailed information of the sample per macro-sector activity.

Sector	Size (number of employees) Average: 31 employees					Age (number of years since inception)					International experience (number of years exporting) Average: 13 years					Structure (export dept.)	
	≤10	11–49	50–249	≥250	≤10	11–20	21–30	≥30	≤5	6–10	11–15	16–20	≥20	Yes	No		
Agri-food	7 (12.8%)	34 (61.8%)	14 (25.4%)	–	–	–	48 (87.3%)	7 (12.7%)	–	–	14 (25.4%)	21 (38.2%)	20 (36.4%)	7 (12.7%)	48 (87.3%)		
Industrial goods	5 (6.8%)	45 (60.8%)	17 (23.0%)	7 (9.4%)	7 (9.5%)	23 (31.1%)	19 (25.7%)	25 (33.7%)	4 (5.4%)	12 (16.2%)	9 (12.2%)	16 (21.6%)	33 (44.6%)	35 (47.3%)	39 (52.7%)		
Consumer goods	11 (17.7%)	21 (33.9%)	21 (33.9%)	9 (14.5%)	–	21 (33.8%)	31 (50.0%)	10 (16.2%)	–	21 (33.9%)	10 (16.1%)	21 (33.9%)	10 (16.1%)	21 (33.9%)	41 (66.1%)		
Services	3 (14.3%)	13 (61.9%)	4 (19.0%)	1 (4.8%)	4 (19.0%)	9 (42.9%)	6 (28.6%)	2 (9.5%)	2 (9.5%)	7 (33.3%)	4 (19.1%)	5 (23.8%)	3 (14.3%)	7 (33.3%)	14 (66.7%)		
Total	26 (12.3%)	113 (53.3%)	56 (26.4%)	17 (8.0%)	11 (5.2%)	53 (25.0%)	104 (49.1%)	44 (20.7%)	6 (2.8%)	40 (18.9%)	37 (17.5%)	63 (29.7%)	66 (31.1%)	70 (33.0%)	142 (67.0%)		
Sector	Speed (number of years the firm exports to)																
	Average: 10 countries																
	≤5	6–10	11–15	16–20	≥20	≤3	4–6	7–10	11–15	≥16	≤20%	21–40%	41–50%	≥50%			
Agri-food	48 (87.3%)	–	–	7 (12.7%)	–	14 (25.5%)	8 (14.5%)	13 (23.6%)	14 (25.5%)	6 (10.9%)	21 (38.2%)	27 (49.1%)	7 (12.7%)	–			
Industrial goods	46 (62.2%)	10 (13.5%)	7 (9.5%)	3 (4.0%)	8 (10.8%)	29 (39.2%)	8 (10.8%)	9 (12.2%)	8 (10.8%)	20 (27.0%)	48 (64.9%)	11 (14.9%)	5 (6.7%)	10 (13.5%)			
Consumer goods	42 (67.7%)	10 (16.1%)	4 (6.5%)	6 (9.7%)	–	10 (16.2%)	9 (14.5%)	11 (17.7%)	9 (14.5%)	23 (37.1%)	23 (37.1%)	21 (33.9%)	11 (17.7%)	7 (11.3%)			
Services	14 (66.7%)	2 (9.5%)	2 (9.5%)	–	3 (14.3%)	12 (57.2%)	2 (9.5%)	3 (14.3%)	2 (9.5%)	2 (9.5%)	13 (62.0%)	4 (19.0%)	2 (9.5%)	2 (9.5%)			
Total	150 (70.8%)	22 (10.4%)	13 (6.1%)	16 (7.5%)	11 (5.2%)	65 (30.7%)	27 (12.7%)	36 (17.0%)	33 (15.6%)	51 (24.0%)	105 (49.6%)	63 (29.7%)	25 (11.8%)	19 (8.9%)			

Source: Own elaboration.

relationships between constructs, taking into account the characteristics of the model (predictive) and the sample (fewer than 250 subjects) (Reinartz, Haenlein, & Henseler, 2009). The empirical analysis uses the statistics package SmartPLS 2.0 M3.

4.2. Measurement scales

Mackenzie, Podsakoff, and Jarvis (2005) recommendations for distinguishing formative and reflective variables have been taken into account in the multi-item measures of the study. EE is considered a formative construct made up of three dimensions: (a) speed, which refers to the time – years – that the firm takes to set up its export activity (Acedo & Jones, 2007); (b) degree, which determines the export intensity, using the export sales/total sales ratio for its measurement (Kuivalainen et al., 2007); (c) scope, which dictates the number of foreign markets – countries – in which the export firm generates international sales (Beleska-Spasova et al., 2012). Export commitment was, following Navarro, Acedo, et al. (2010b) and Donthu and Kim (1993), defined as the attitude to allot appropriate human, financial and managerial resources to the export activity. This is a first order reflective construct. The resources associated with experience and structure were described according to the work of Ruzo et al. (2011). The experiential resources were defined by the number of years in the sector and the number of years exporting. The structural resources available for exporting were measured by there being an export department. The evaluation of the competitive intensity was made according to the work of Cadogan, Sundqvist, Puumalainen and Salminen (2012), being represented as the extent of rivalry among different players in an industry. This is a first order reflective construct. Finally, according to Sousa and Lages (2011), the market distance scale is considered a second-order reflective construct, based on country-characteristics distance and people-characteristics distance. Export commitment, competitive intensity and market distance were measured through a five-point Likert-type scale, allowing picking up managerial perceptions of the variables analyzed (Appendix A).

5. Results

5.1. Evaluation of measurement model

Two different stages were carried out to interpret and analyze the model proposed using PLS (Barclay, Higgins, & Thompson, 1995): (1) the evaluation of the measurement model and (2) the analysis of the structural model. This sequence ensures that the measurement scales proposed are valid and reliable before testing the hypotheses. For the reflective scales, the factor loadings were all above the recommended 0.7 score (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). The composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE) values also exceeded the recommended values of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Thus, the results support the convergent validity of the reflective scales considered in this study (Table 3). Then, to ensure the discriminant validity, the authors confirmed that the squared correlations between each pair of constructs did not exceed the AVE (Barclay et al., 1995). It was also checked that the inter-correlations between constructs were significantly different from 1, which provided additional evidence of the discriminant validity. In addition, none of the correlations between constructs reaches the 0.5 score (Table 4).

5.2. Testing hypotheses: parameters of the structural model

After having ensured the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model, the relationships between the different variables were tested. The different statistical parameters

**Table 3**  
Evaluation of measurement model.

CONSTRUCT/dimension/indicator	Weight	Factor loading	Composite reliability ( $\rho_c$ )	Average variance extracted
<b>EXPORT COMMITMENT (first-order reflective construct)</b>			0.898	0.688
COMMITM1		0.837		
COMMITM2		0.863		
COMMITM3		0.835		
COMMITM4		0.780		
<b>RESOURCES (first order reflective construct)</b>			0.872	0.695
GENERALEXPERIENCE		0.805		
EXPORTEXPRIENCE		0.852		
STRUCTURE		0.856		
<b>COMPETITIVE INTENSITY (first order reflective construct)</b>			0.841	0.641
INTENSCOMPET1		0.784		
INTENSCOMPET2		0.905		
INTENSCOMPET3		0.700		
<b>MARKET DISTANCE (second order reflective construct)</b>			0.940	0.888
Country Distance (first-order reflective construct)		0.946	0.900	0.601
ECODEVEL		0.713		
COMMUNIC		0.771		
MKTINFRA		0.731		
TECREQUI		0.813		
MKTCOMPE		0.801		
LEGALREG		0.818		
People Distance (first-order reflective construct)		0.746	0.874	0.584
PERCAPIT		0.809		
PURCHASI		0.846		
LIFESTYL		0.812		
CONSUMER		0.719		
LITERACY		0.612		
<b>EXPORT ENTREPRENEURSHIP (first order formative construct)</b>			n.a.	n.a.
SPEED	0.462			
DEGREE	0.567			
SCOPE	0.673			

n.a.: not applicable.

**Table 4**  
Correlations between constructs.

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
1. Export commitment	0.829				
2. Resources	0.141	0.833			
3. Competitive intensity	0.264	0.168	0.800		
4. Market distance	0.160	0.196	0.146	0.942	
5. Export entrepreneurship	0.498	0.299	0.297	0.278	n.a.

In the main diagonal are shown the square root of AVE; n.a.: not applicable.

were calculated using the bootstrap method (1000 subsamples) (Table 5). Although many researchers opt for computing 500 subsamples in their studies, and this is enough, in the current work it was decided to use 1000 to reduce the randomness (Davidson and Mackinnon, 2000). The hypothesis tests considered the sign and significance of the  $t$ -values in each relation ( $\beta$  coefficient). Of the four hypotheses considered, three of them ( $H_1$ ,  $H_2$  and  $H_3$ ) are

confirmed in the direction proposed (Table 5). Hypothesis  $H_4$ , which establishes a negative effect of the market distance on EE, is, surprisingly, confirmed in the opposite direction to that proposed. Fig. 2 shows the structural model graphically.

## 6. Discussion and implications

### 6.1. Academic implications

The discussion is organized around the research aims. The conceptual model proposed has been validated. EE is considered to be a process associated with those in charge of the export activity through which they decide when (speed), how (degree) and where (scope) the firm is going to develop its export activity. According to the basis of the RBV and the contingency approach, in this process both internal and external factors of the organization intervene. Among the internal factors, those which are personal – in our case the attitude of the export managers: export commitment – and the resources associated with experience and structure are essential to drive the export entrepreneurship. Among the external factors, the industry's competitive intensity and the market distances also have an important effect on EE. The influence of these internal and

**Table 5**  
Parameters from hypothesis tests.

Hypothesis	$\beta$	$t$ -Value	Supported
$H_1$ : Export commitment – Export entrepreneurship	0.169	2.002**	Yes
$H_2$ : Resources – Export entrepreneurship	0.496	3.934***	Yes
$H_3$ : Competitive intensity – Export entrepreneurship	0.158	2.173**	Yes
$H_4$ : Market distance – Export entrepreneurship	0.132	2.501***	Opposite

Notes: ns: not significant (one-tailed  $t(999)$  test).

\*  $p < 0.01$ .

\*\*  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*\*  $p < 0.1$ .

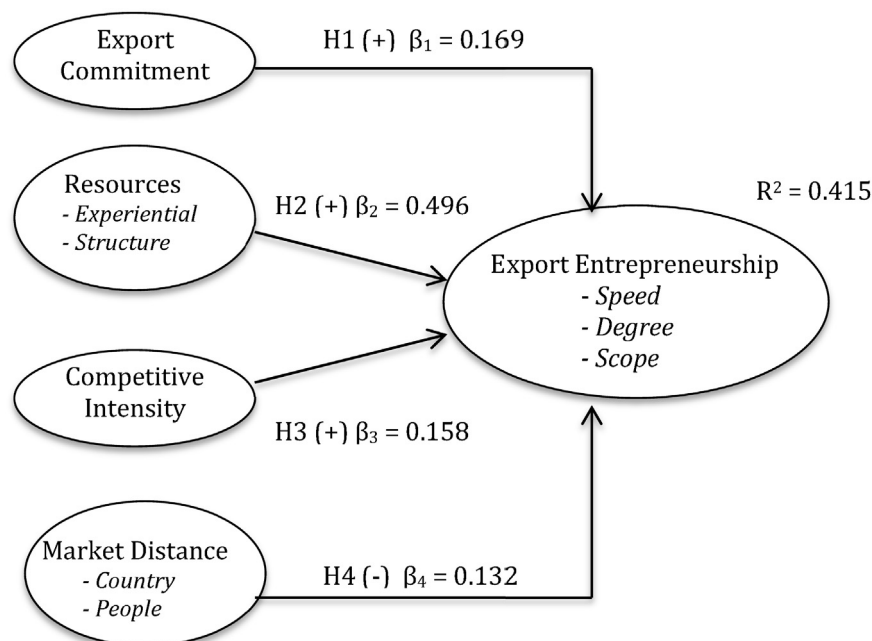


Fig. 2. Graphical structural model.

external factors explain an EE variance of 41.5% ( $R^2 = 0.415$ ). Some implications arise from focusing on the relationships between the variables and taking the global model as a reference.

First, the attitudes toward export of those who are in charge of the export activity are essential decisive elements of the level of EE. This statement is in line with previous contributions which point out that managerial attitudes condition the internationalization process of organizations (Lages et al., 2008), and can influence the firm's export orientation (Acedo & Galán, 2011; Navarro, Losada, et al., 2010a). In our case, these attitudes have been measured through export commitment, understood to be the willingness of the management to allot human, financial and managerial resources to its export activity. This export commitment has a direct and positive influence on the level of EE, confirming H<sub>1</sub> ( $\beta_1 = 0.169$ ;  $t$ -value = 2.002). This can be due to the export commitment attenuating the perceived export risks and barriers (Styles & Ambler, 2000), strengthening the development of a culture oriented toward external markets which can be decisive elements of the organization's speed, degree and international scope (Navarro et al., 2013).

Secondly, in accordance with the RBV, the resources – and capacities – of the export firm are drivers – in our case the main ones – of EE. In this way, it is shown in this study where the resources associated with learning – experience – and the disposition of a specific structure – export department – in the export firm have a very positive effect on the organization's speed, degree and international scope, confirming H<sub>2</sub> ( $\beta_2 = 0.496$ ;  $t$ -value = 3.934). The disposition of these resources offers a greater basis for the decision making, increasing the firm's orientation toward international markets (Ibeh, 2003). Thus, the existence of an export department helps to formalize decision making and increase the planning levels (Caruana et al., 1998). In this way, perceived export barriers are reduced, augmenting the predisposition to diversify markets (Ruzo et al., 2011). On the other hand, experience – both general and international – is a generator of learning processes in the export firm, either associated with the industry – general experience (Zou & Stan, 1998) – or specifically in international markets – international experience (Aguilera-Caracuel, Hurtado-Torres, & Aragón-Correa, 2012). General experience provides a fundamental

basis to initiate internationalization movements – the fruit of organizational learning and the increase of managerial confidence in decision making (Majocchi et al., 2005). This reinforces the planning level and reduces the levels of improvisation, decreasing the likelihood of making erroneous decisions in markets which are different to the domestic one (Nemkova et al., 2012). All this reinforces the export orientation, driving the degree and scope associated with EE (Ruzo et al., 2011). International experience is a generator of a specific learning linked to the export activity, providing valuable information to facilitate international positioning (Morgan et al., 2004). This reduces the perceived export risks and barriers, increases the firm's orientation toward external markets and drives its entrepreneurial spirit (Autio et al., 2000; Knight & Cavusgil, 2004).

Thirdly, according to the contingency approach, the factors associated with the environment in which the organization works influence the organizations' international entrepreneurship (Keupp & Gassman, 2009). In this way, in the current research it is shown that the competitive intensity of the industry in which the export firm works is a direct and positive antecedent of EE, confirming H<sub>3</sub> ( $\beta_3 = 0.158$ ;  $t$ -value = 2.173). This competitive intensity tends to increase the market dynamism, influencing the organization's strategic agility to adapt it to such changes (Zahra, 1993). It generates adaptations in the international marketing-mix program with the aim of satisfying the needs and desires of foreign consumers (Navarro et al., 2014; Powers & Loyka, 2010). It also reflects a greater development of market-oriented behaviors (Cadogan et al., 2003; Kwon & Hu, 2000), influencing the scope and degree of the organization's international orientation, given the greater need to seek and exploit business opportunities outside the domestic area (Mittelstaedt et al., 2006).

Fourth, the market distances perceived by those in charge of export activities, associated with the country and the people, positively influence the level of EE, confirming, in the opposite sense to that proposed, hypothesis H<sub>4</sub> ( $\beta_4 = 0.132$ ;  $t$ -value = 2.501). Two reasons can support this result. One is that the market distances considered in the current work are managerial perceptions, which are not produced in isolation, but rather are



interrelated with the rest of the organization's internal factors. Thus, the greater disposition of resources and capacities available for the export activity reduces the perceived export barriers in the form of market distances (Cadogan et al., 2012). This means that the export firm is more in favor of carrying out a more accelerated internationalization. It diversifies its markets, intensifying its export propensity and carries out the adaptations required in the marketing-mix program to attend to the preferences and needs of foreign consumers. This contributes to value generation in the products and/or services which it commercializes internationally, increasing the probability of achieving good performance (Sousa & Lengler, 2009). Encouraging management values based on proactivity and the continuous seeking of commercial opportunities in international markets will also facilitate the overcoming of mental barriers (market distances) to exportation, driving EE (Sousa, Ruzo, & Losada, 2010). These distances also tend to be reduced as the firm learns in its internalization process, given that it acquires international experience and creates the structure needed to support an appropriate decision making in foreign markets (Katsikeas, Samie, & Theodosiou, 2006; O'Cass & Julian, 2003). Another reason is that in firms which are really export oriented, the market distances tend to drive the development of a market-oriented culture, making the firm develop information and market strategy systems that are adapted to the needs and desires of foreign consumers (Navarro et al., 2013). In brief, perceived market distances can favor EE, whenever the appropriate mechanisms to overcome them are developed (Sousa & Lages, 2011).

To sum up, based on the RBV and the contingency approach this paper significantly contributes to filling the broad gap which exists in the literature about EE. Specifically, this study shows that the level of the firm's export entrepreneurship depends on the management's export commitment, on the resources available, as well as the contingency factors associated with the organization's external environment, such as those linked to the industry's competitive intensity and the market distances.

## 6.2. Managerial implications

Managers can use these findings to systematize decisions and actions related to their firms' export activity and specific implications can be drawn from the study.

Firstly, the export firm's management must show a proactive attitude toward external markets, and allot the necessary human, financial and managerial resources. This export commitment encourages the export firm to speed up its internalization process, to diversify markets seeking business opportunities and to show a greater export tendency.

Secondly, export firms must be given to the creating of specific structures for decision making – for example, an export department – as this facilitates export planning and speeds up decision making. The result of all this is in an increase in the organization's EO. Another facilitating factor will be learning – the fruit of experience – both in the industry and specifically in foreign markets. In this sense, to achieve the necessary international experience as soon as possible, it is advisable for the firm to speed up its internationalization process.

Thirdly, export firms must develop the appropriate mechanisms of monitoring the environment to keep an eye on competitors when competitive intensity is high, as well as noting the differences between the various countries-markets. This monitoring of the environment will help to foster an entrepreneurial culture in the exporters which will influence the speed, degree and scope of the exports. A contribution to this can be the development of dynamic capacities, such as export market orientation. This will allow the gaining and disseminating of the

information necessary for decision making and for responding to the desires and needs of foreign consumers.

## 7. Limitations and future lines of research

This study offers important and novel contributions to the export marketing literature, but it has a number of limitations. These could be the starting point for future lines of research. The first limitation concerns the type of study carried out, since it is based on information obtained at a specific moment in time. It would be advisable for future work to carry out a longitudinal study to analyze the relationships between internal and external factors and export entrepreneurship. The second limitation concerns the fact that the sample is extracted from a single country. In order to generalize the conclusions drawn here, firms from a wider geographic area should be included in the analysis. The third limitation can be associated with the way of measuring the market distance, as it has been evaluated from a subjective point of view (management perceptions) and there are more objective measures to carry out this evaluation (Gallego & Casillas, 2014; Lavie & Miller, 2008). We do not know if using those measures would have produced different results. The final limitation is related to the potential effect of other factors not considered in this study on the variables examined here. Thus, in future works researchers could consider, for example, the characteristics of the exported product, the quality of the relationships with the international distributors, or the organization's dynamic capabilities, such as export market orientation.

## Appendix A

### Questionnaire/measures

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**Export Commitment:** What is the willingness – predisposition – (1. – Very slight ... 5. – Very great) of the management of the firm regarding?

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COMMITM1: Allocating much time to planning and organizing the export activity

COMMITM2: Allocating much effort to planning and organizing the export activity

COMMITM3: Allocating high financial resources to the export activity

COMMITM4: Allocating high human resources to the export activity

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Source: Navarro, Acedo, et al. (2010b) and Donthu and Kim (1993).

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### Resources

GENERAL EXPERIENCE: Age of the firm. Number of years in the sector

EXPORT EXPERIENCE: Number of years exporting

STRUCTURE: The existence (1. – Yes; 2. – No) of an export department in the firm

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Source: Ruzo et al. (2011).

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**Competitive Intensity:** Show your level of agreement (1. – Strongly disagree ... 5. – Strongly agree) regarding the following questions:

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INTENSCOMPET1: Competitive intensity/Industry competition in our export markets is cut-throat.

INTENSCOMPET2: In our export markets, there are many 'promotion and price wars'

INTENSCOMPET3: One hears of a new competitive move in our export markets almost every day

Source: Cadogan et al. (2012).

**Market Distance:** State to what degree (1. – Very similar ... 5. – Very different) the business environment of the foreign markets where your firm is active is similar or different to the Spanish environment for the following factors:

*Associated with the country*

ECODEVEL: Level of economic and industrial development

COMMUNIC: Communication infrastructure

MKTINFRA: Marketing infrastructure

TECREQUI: Level of technological development

MKTCOMPE: Market competitiveness

LEGALREG: Legislation

*Associated with people*

PERCAPIT: Per capita income

PURCHASI: Customers' purchasing power

LIFESTYL: Peoples' life-style

CONSUMER: Consumer preferences

LITERACY: Cultural values, beliefs, attitudes and traditions

Source: Sousa and Bradley (2006) and Sousa and Lages (2011).

**Export entrepreneurship**

SPEED: Time – years – that the firm takes to set up its export activity (source: Acedo & Jones, 2007)

DEGREE: Export intensity – export sales/total sales ratio – (source: Kuivalainen et al., 2007)

SCOPE: Number of foreign markets – countries – in which the export firm generates export sales (source: Beleska-Spasova et al., 2012).

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