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Relational governance mechanisms in export activities: Their determinants and consequences☆

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ABSTRACT

Taking the relational paradigm, the channel theory and the contingency approach as an orientation, this study's aim is to analyze the determinants and the consequences of the relational governance mechanisms between exporters and their foreign distributors. Specifically, this work explicitly validates the interrelationships between the exporter's dependence on its foreign distributor, the exporter's international capabilities, the foreign market environment, relational norms and export performance. The results show that relational norms have a positive impact on an exporter's result and that the greater an exporter's dependence on its distributors, on its international competences and on the volatility of the foreign markets, the more the exporter needs to maintain a relation with its foreign distributors based on information exchange, flexibility and cooperation.

The data scrutiny uses structural equation modeling (SEM) through PLS as the statistical instrument. The sample comprises 212 Spanish exporting firms.

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1. Introduction

Due to the majority of exporters not developing vertically integrated systems of international distribution (e.g., foreign subsidiaries and overseas sales offices), their entry into international markets takes place through foreign distributors. In this sense, the international marketing literature recognizes the fundamental role which foreign distributors play in the success of exporters, as well as the need to define the mechanisms which govern the relation between them (Zhang, Cavusgil, & Roath, 2003). However, most works in the export area center on the principles of two predominant approaches – structure–conduct–performance (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994) and the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm (Morgan, Kaleka, & Katsikeas, 2004) – to explain the exporter's result, ignoring the premises of the relational paradigm (Styles, Patterson, & Ahmed, 2008). Although prior research has provided evidence of the importance of exporter–distributor relationships (Leonidou, Katsikeas, & Hadjimarcou, 2002; Styles & Ambler, 2000),

until now no export performance model has empirically tested the critical tenets of relational exchange theory which is the basis of this perspective. Assuming and aiming to contribute to overcoming this research gap, this study has two main objectives. First, to know the determinants of the mechanisms of relational governance–cooperation, information exchange and flexibility – between exporters and their foreign distributors from both an internal perspective – foreign distributor dependence and the exporter's international capabilities – and an external viewpoint – the foreign market environment. Second, to analyze the influence of relational governance mechanisms on the exporter's results, considering that qualitative indicators – the achievement of aims – and quantitative indicators – the growth of export sales – make up this factor.

The relationship literature extensively notes that the mutuality of the motivations is of paramount importance for superior relationship performance. For instance, one party (e.g., exporter) in this dyadic relationship may have a very strong motivation toward a long-term relationship. Nevertheless, unless the other party in the dyad (e.g., importer–distributor) reciprocates with the very same motivation, that inter-organizational relationship inevitably comes to an end. The resource-based view and the relational paradigm may explain this argument and these sustainable relationships. The resource-based view means the coordinated action between different functions in the distribution chain in order to reduce uncertainty, and manage both dependence and interdependence in intra- and interfirm relationships (Dhanaraj & Beamish, 2003). The relational marketing literature notes that relational norms prescribe or guide behaviors and expectations (Nummela, Saarenketo, & Puumalainen, 2004). A possible description of relational norms is learning behavior from expectations and shared values. In accordance with resource dependency theory and the relational marketing perspective, participation allows

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members of firms to manage the uncertainty of interdependence and provides behavioral guidance for individuals to work together for the benefit of the entire distribution chain (Porter, 2008).

This study offers four major findings. Firstly, associated with the principles of the relational paradigm, the creating and maintaining of exporter–foreign distributor relations whose basis is information exchange, flexibility and cooperation directly and positively influence the exporter's result. Secondly, in line with channel theory, the greater the exporter's dependence on its foreign distributors, the more its need to set up relational norms. Thirdly, the exporter's international capabilities help to create an appropriate relational atmosphere with its foreign distributors. Finally, according to the contingency approach, the volatility of foreign markets positively influences the need of the exporter and its international distributors to exchange information, to be flexible and to cooperate.

This paper has six sections. Following this introduction, the second section lays out the conceptual model and hypotheses. The third section expounds the research methodology, gives details of the sample and the data analysis tools for the empirical analysis. The fourth section presents the results and the fifth deals with the study's main conclusions and contributions. Finally, the sixth and final part discusses the study's main limitations and future lines of research.

2. Conceptual model and hypotheses

This work is part of the confluence of several theories and research lines. First, the relational paradigm considers that the mechanisms which govern the relation – relational norms – between exporters and their foreign distributors are direct antecedents of export performance (EP) (Griffith & Zhao, 2015). Second, in line with channel theory, this study establishes that the conditioning of relational norms is by the level of the exporter's dependence on its foreign distributors and by the exporter's international capabilities (Bello, Chelariu, & Zhang, 2003). Thirdly, stemming from the contingent approach a presumption exists that the external environment plays a key role in the export activities (Navarro-García, Arenas-Gaitán, & Rondán-Cataluña, 2014), influencing the exporter–foreign distributor relation.

2.1. Export performance

Export performance (EP) is essential for decision making in the international arena (Madsen, 1998). Cavusgil and Zou (1994) define EP as the degree to which the firm completes its purposes by exporting its product-brands to external markets. EP comprises economic or operational facets (profit, sales, etc.) and strategic aspects (its international positioning, an increased market share from exporting, the achievement of objectives, etc.) through the planning and implementation of the firm's export marketing strategy. Three basic aspects of EP emerge from the literature review (Rose & Shoham, 2002; Sousa, 2004): (1) EP is a multidimensional concept that includes quantitative measures (sales, profitability, growth, etc.) and qualitative measures (perceived success, satisfaction, the achievement of objectives, etc.); (2) the evaluation of EP should not be at a point in time (short term) but over a given time horizon (Lages & Montgomery, 2004); (3) assessment measures must reflect the management's perceptions of performance (e.g., management satisfaction with EP) (Lages, Jap, & Griffith, 2008). This study takes into account the above three aspects (1) the work conceives two dimensions of EP: a quantitative dimension, (growth of export sales) and one that is qualitative (management satisfaction); (2) the evaluation of EP is over a period of time (the last three years); (3) the work takes into account the management's perceptions (management satisfaction) with various measures linked to the firm's success in foreign markets (its reputation and image, international expansion, market share, etc.).

2.2. Relational norms in export activities

Differences in the language, in the political and legal environment, in business practices, in consumers' tastes and preferences, etc., characterize international markets. One of the ways of avoiding the psychic distance which negatively affects EP is to achieve a set of norms that is the basis of the relations between exporters and their foreign distributors and governs the relation between them (Dong-Jin & Jang, 1998). This work considers three kinds of relational norms: a) information exchange, b) flexibility and c) cooperation.

Information exchange refers to the expectations of behavior of the members in the relation in order to continuously share essential information for the development of their respective activities (Heide & John, 1992). This bilateral communication facilitates decision making and increases the trust between the parties in the relation, enabling the setting up of priorities, aspirations and aims. The efficient exchanging of information makes interorganizational understanding easier. This situation allows the creation of an appropriate framework for the development of exchange relations (Kim, 2007).

A definition of flexibility is the willingness and capacity that both parties show to adapt to changes in the existing circumstances (Heide & John, 1992). These adjustments are important for two reasons. Firstly, for an exporter and its foreign distributors to foresee all the contingencies which may arise in the agreements that they make is materially impossible (Collins & Hitt, 2006). Flexibility is necessary to adapt the relation in accordance with the circumstances. Secondly, because volatility and high uncertainty are characteristics linked per se to international markets, and past responses are probably not valid in the face of new circumstances. This fact requires the parties to adapt to new scenarios (Aulakh, Kotabe, & Sahay, 1996).

Cooperation refers to the importance attributed to the exchange relation by each member of the dyad (Dant & Schul, 1992). The greater the importance of this dimension, the greater is the interest of each party in maintaining long-lasting relations and in attaining mutual benefits, hence avoiding the development of opportunistic behaviors in the channel (Heide & John, 1992). Cooperation guarantees the maintaining of each member in the relation as well as this relation's continuity over time (Dong-Jin & Jang, 1998). This governance mechanism involves continuous exchanges between the parties in the relation (Kaufmann & Stern, 1988). The more the exporters and the foreign distributors recognize that the current and future exchanges can provide mutual benefits, the greater their trust and wish to cooperate in the distribution channel (Liu, Li, Tao, & Wang, 2008).

Relational norms – information exchange, flexibility and cooperation – can improve the EP for diverse reasons (Dong-Jin & Jang, 1998). Firstly, they reduce uncertainty in decision making, moderating the environment's influence in the relation between exporters and foreign distributors. Secondly, they avoid possible opportunistic behaviors of the foreign distributors, thus reducing the transaction costs. Finally, they enable the exporter to take advantage of new business opportunities, in this way improving the organization and planning of its export activity (Styles & Ambler, 2000).

The following hypothesis is in line with these ideas.

H1. Relational norms have a positive effect on export performance.

2.3. Exporter's dependence on foreign distributors

The definition of dependence is, generally speaking, a firm's need to maintain a relation with another company in order to attain its specific aims (Frazier, 1983). In the international arena, the nexus of interdependence characterize the relations between exporters and foreign intermediaries (Anderson & Narus, 1990). The exporter depends on the intermediary to position its products in foreign

markets and successfully develop its international marketing strategy. In addition, foreign distributors depend on exporters to continue offering these products or services to their market. These generate for them a commercial margin, turnover and, in short, profitability, prestige, etc. In any case, an acknowledgment exists that exporters are generally in an asymmetric position with respect to their international distributors. Without them, unless the firms undertake direct investments, they cannot sell their products or services abroad (Yilmaz, Sezen, & Ozdemir, 2005). This asymmetric position – the exporter's greater dependence with respect to its foreign distributors – can give rise to these distributors behaving opportunistically. This scenario is not the one which is most favorable for the development of a relational atmosphere (Kumar, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 1995). Nevertheless, setting up a series of mechanisms based on information exchange, flexibility and cooperation can avoid this situation and enable a good governance of the exporter's relation with its foreign distributors, hence avoiding dysfunctional results.

The preceding arguments support the following hypothesis.

H2. The exporter's dependence on its foreign distributors has a positive effect on relational norms.

2.4. Exporter's international capabilities

The definition of international capabilities can be those skills which provide the organization with the competence needed to develop its activities in markets which are different from those of the country of origin (Andersson & Svensson, 1994). This study considers, on the one hand, the organization's international experience and, on the other hand, its knowledge of foreign markets. International experience is a feedback mechanism of the decision-making process, in a decision–experience–decision form (Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975). From this perspective, international experience allows the exporter to reduce the uncertainty associated with the environment in foreign markets, as well as to appropriately know how the mechanisms of these markets work (Navarro, Acedo, Losada, & Ruzo, 2011), hence helping to adapt, when needed, the different elements of the marketing-mix (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994). Furthermore, this experience contributes to the creating of a new framework of relations which are appropriate for the development of the export activity (Bodur, 1994). Particularly, based on its international experience, the export firm knows better than anybody which values to foster in the relation with the intermediaries–foreign distributors (Ruzo, Losada, Navarro, & Díez, 2011). Taking into account the exporter's “asymmetrical” position, and the fact that the relational norms are its moderator factors, the greater the organization's international experience, the greater must be the presence of relational norms in the channel (Bodur, 1994).

On the other hand, international orientation and accumulated knowledge concerning foreign markets permits the reduction of uncertainty in the decision-making processes, hence encouraging the management's positive attitudes toward the development of the export activity, as well as making organizational tasks and export planning easier (Gray, 1997). Moreover, these facets allow the firm to know what the tastes, preferences and habits of foreign consumers are with respect to the product exported, and also those of its competitors. This matter facilitates the design of strategies which provide the firm with a sustainable competitive advantage (Lim, Sharkey, & Kim, 1996). Lastly, knowledge of the foreign markets enables the exporting firm to create the most appropriate atmosphere for the relation with its foreign distributors (Styles & Ambler, 1994) and boosts cooperation, information exchange and flexibility in the exporter–foreign distributor relation.

The following research hypothesis captures this idea.

H3. The exporter's international capabilities have a positive effect on relational norms.

2.5. Foreign market environment

The environment of foreign markets conditions how a firm can enter them and act in them (Rasheed, 2005). Due to measurement difficulties, most works on exporting have ignored the influence of the environment, although some recent works show the significant effect that this influence has on the organization, on its strategic decisions and on the EP (Kaleka & Berthon, 2006; Navarro-García et al., 2014). For an export firm, volatility is the greatest concern which stems from the environment; that is to say, the difficulty of anticipating changes in foreign markets (Gaur, Vasudevan, & Gaur, 2011). Nonetheless, when the exporter maintains a relation with its foreign distributors based on cooperation, information exchange and flexibility, this relation minimizes the effect of this volatility on exporting in foreign markets (Bello et al., 2003).

In this context, an exporting activity normally involves a greater uncertainty than that of the domestic market. Therefore, with a view to guaranteeing export success, the need to increase the cooperation and coordination of functions between the exporter and its foreign distributor is greater. Cooperation avoids opportunistic behaviors in the parties, prolongs the relation of exporters–foreign distributors over time and guarantees the efficacy and efficiency of exchanges (Heide & John, 1992). Furthermore, the greater the volatility of the foreign market's environment, the greater is the need for information in order to support international decision making. Guaranteeing fluidity in information exchange when the environment is volatile increases the trust between the exporter and its foreign distributors. On the other hand, interorganizational flexibility must be a characteristic inherent to an exporting activity when the environment is volatile. Inflexibility in business behaviors when facing changing conditions implies an underestimation of resources and capacities, as well as generating tensions in the channel between the members of the relation (Zhang et al., 2003). This situation could restrict the initiatives of the parties in the face of new circumstances.

These arguments lead to the fourth research hypothesis.

H4. The volatility of foreign markets has a positive effect on relational norms.

Fig. 1 shows the conceptual model.

3. Method

3.1. Sample and data analysis

The basis of this research is an empirical study of Spanish export firms. A multi-industry sample enlarges the observed variance and emphasizes the generalization of the findings (Morgan et al., 2004). The sample of firms comes from the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade (ICEX) database of exporters. Maintaining sectorial proportionality, 1200 managers in charge of exports received questionnaires, mainly via e-mail, and returned 212 valid questionnaires – a response rate of 17.7%. This result is within the acceptable range of 15 to 20% (Menon, Bharadwaj, & Howell, 1996).

The majority of the firms in the sample are small (66% have fewer than 50 employees) and most (81%) have specialist export managers, though only a minority (33%) have export departments. The majority of the firms have a great deal of experience in international business (61% have more than 15 years of export activity experience) and concentrate their export sales in a small number of markets (71% export to five countries or fewer).

Structural equation modeling via PLS (partial least squares) is the choice of method for data analysis and for assessing the 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 SmartPLS 2.0 M3 statistics package.

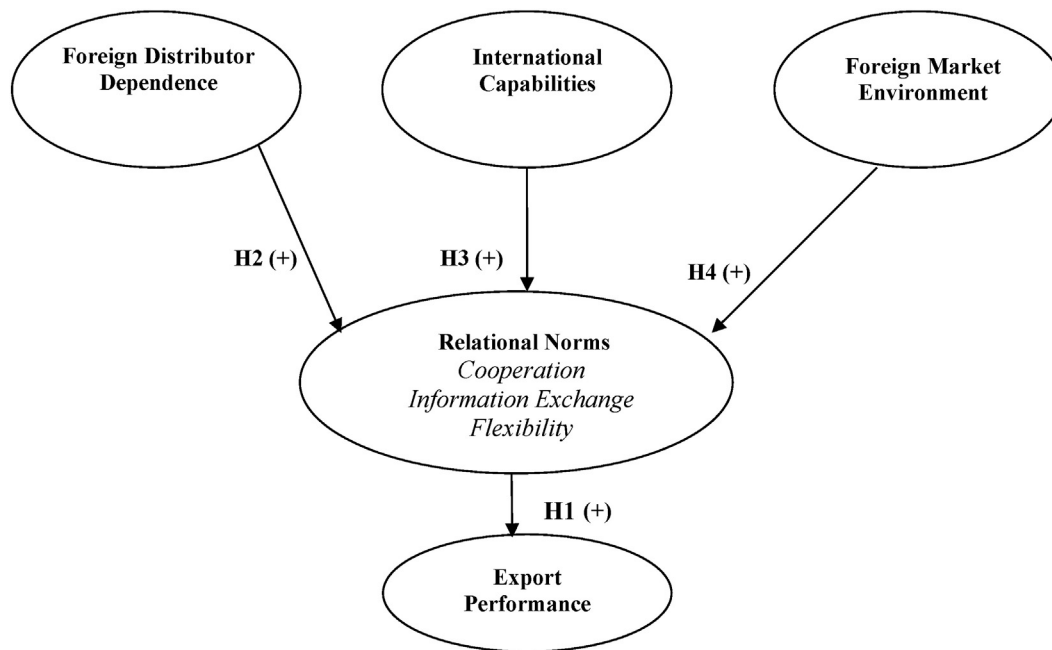


Fig. 1. Graphical description of the model.

3.2. Measurement scales

The items used to operationalize each construct come from adapting prior research in export settings to the foreign distributor context (see Appendix A for questionnaire items). Following Heide and John (1992), the operationalization of relational governance mechanisms – a second order reflective construct – is through the three relational norms of cooperation ($\alpha = 0.83$), information exchange ($\alpha = .79$), and flexibility ($\alpha = .86$). The measurement of each norm is via three items developed by Heide and John (1992). The consideration of EP is as a second-order formative construct which two very different dimensions compose: growth in sales and satisfaction. Following Cadogan, Diamantopoulos, and Siguaw (2002), the evaluation of the EP's qualitative dimension was through export managers' perceived satisfaction with the achievement of five objectives in the last three years ($\alpha = .81$): the growth of international sales, image and awareness of the firm in foreign markets, the profitability of the export business, market share and international expansion. The measurement of the quantitative dimension was by means of growth in export sales in the last three years ($\alpha = .84$) (Navarro, Losada, Ruzo, & Díez, 2010). The operationalization of the exporter's dependence ($\alpha = .85$) on its distributor is through four items, given that the lack of alternatives makes switching to a new distributor difficult, and its basis is Weiss and Anderson (1992). The measurement of the exporter's international capabilities ($\alpha = .77$) is through four items, reflecting its knowledge of foreign markets and its international experience (Ruzo et al., 2011). Finally, the operationalization of the volatility of the foreign market environment ($\alpha = .82$) is via four items, using a seven-point semantic differential response scale. The work of Bello et al. (2003) provides the basis for the adaption of the items and they assess the extent to which the foreign market's environment changes rapidly.

4. Results

The results (Table 1) support the convergent validity of the reflective scales: loadings ≥ 0.7 ; composite reliability ≥ 0.7 ; average variance extracted (AVE) ≥ 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). To ensure their discriminant validity, the results confirm that the squared correlations

between each pair of constructs do not exceed the AVE (Barclay, Higgins, & Thompson, 1995) (Table 2). In addition, verification guarantees that the intercorrelations between constructs are significantly different from 1, thus providing additional evidence of discriminant validity in the case of the reflective scales. The validation of the formative scale “export performance” takes into account the recommendations of Diamantopoulos (2008). In this regard, bearing in mind the fact that omitting or eliminating any of the scale indicators is not possible, as they possess relevant information, the variance inflation factor (VIF) ensures the absence of multicollinearity. The VIF is below the recommended value of 5 (Diamantopoulos & Winklhofer, 2001).

After ensuring the convergent and discriminant validity of the measurement model, the next step is to perform a test of the relationships between the different variables. The calculation of the statistical parameters employs the bootstrap method (1000 subsamples) (Table 3). The hypothesis tests consider the sign and significance of the t-statistic in each relation (β coefficient). The results verify all the hypotheses from the second section.

5. Discussion and implications

The empirical findings generally support the model proposed of the contextual antecedents and performance consequences of relational norms in export channels. Concentrating on the relationships between the variables and taking the global model as a reference, the authors expose their contributions. First, in line with the foundations of the relational paradigm, export relational norms have a direct and positive influence on the EP. This result confirms H1 and is due to information exchange, cooperation and flexibility generating trust in the exporter–foreign distributor relation (Bello et al., 2003), in this way diminishing the psychic distance (Stöttinger & Schlegelmilch, 2000), consolidating relations over time (Griffith & Zhao, 2015) and avoiding the development of opportunistic behaviors in the channel (Heide & John, 1992). These aspects mean that the governance mechanisms of the exporter–foreign distributor relation are key elements for the exporter's success in its international operations.

Second, the results confirm, in accordance with the foundations of channel theory, that the exporter's greater dependence on its foreign

Table 1
Evaluation of measurement model.

Construct/dimension/indicator	Variance inflation factor (VIF)	Weight	Factor load	Composed reliability (ρ_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Relational norms (second order reflective construct)				0.855	0.596
Information exchange (First order reflective construct)			0.765	0.900	0.601
IE1			0.813		
IE2			0.801		
IE3			0.818		
Flexibility (first order reflective construct)			0.746	0.874	0.584
FLB1			0.809		
FLB2			0.846		
FLB3			0.812		
Cooperation (first order reflective construct)			0.772	0.931	0.772
COOP1			0.883		
COOP2			0.917		
COOP3			0.849		
Exporter dependence (first order reflective construct)				0.872	0.695
EDP1			0.691		
EDP2			0.858		
EDP3			0.830		
EDP4			0.786		
International capabilities (first order reflective construct)				0.842	0.731
ICP1			0.752		
ICP2			0.721		
ICP3			0.843		
ICP4			0.734		
Foreign market environment (first order reflective construct)				0.819	0.871
FME1			0.691		
FME2			0.858		
FME3			0.830		
FME4			0.786		
Export performance (second order formative construct)				n.a.	n.a.
Quantitative export performance (reflective construct)	2.040	0.299		0.873	0.697
Crev_2009			0.777		
Crev_2010			0.898		
Crev_2011			0.824		
Qualitative export performance (reflective construct)	1.981	0.850		0.926	0.715
SAT1			0.882		
SAT2			0.808		
SAT3			0.900		
SAT4			0.817		
SAT5			0.817		

n.a.: not applicable.

distributors in foreign markets has a positive and significant impact on relational norms, hence validating H2. In this sense, the more the exporting firm perceives a greater dependence on its foreign distributors in order to achieve its aims, the greater its wish for the basis of the relations to be cooperation, information exchange and flexibility (Yilmaz et al., 2005). This reasoning is due to the fundamental need to create an atmosphere of trust in the exporter–foreign distributor relation, thus avoiding any opportunistic behavior of the foreign distributor (Kim, 2007).

Third, the exporter's international competences influence the way in which the exporter means to govern the relation with its foreign distributors, thus confirming H3. In this context, international experience and the exporter's knowledge of foreign markets help create stable relations with its international distributors, increasing the exchange of information, cooperation and the willingness of both parties to adapt to

circumstances not considered in the initial agreements (Styles & Ambler, 2000).

Fourth, the volatility of foreign markets has a positive and significant impact on the mechanisms which govern the exporter–foreign distributor relation. This result confirms H1, in line with the premises of the contingency approach (Gaur et al., 2011; Navarro-García et al., 2014). Therefore, the greater the competitiveness and complexity of foreign markets, the greater the exporter's interest in setting up norms whose basis is information exchange, flexibility and cooperation in its relation with its foreign distributors. This interest in these norms is that normally, through them, the exporter can adapt and respond to changes in the international environment.

For academicians and practitioners, this paper provides more specific knowledge on the exporter–distributor relationship. In this context, long-term relationships offer important sustainable competitive

Table 2
Correlations between constructs.

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
1. Relational norms	0.77				
2. Exporter dependence	0.42	0.83			
3. International capabilities	0.31	0.55	0.85		
4. Foreign market environment	0.60	0.42	0.43	0.93	
5. Export performance	0.58	0.36	0.32	0.62	n.a.

The main diagonal shows the square root of AVE; n.a. not applicable.

Table 3
Parameters from hypothesis tests.

Hypothesis	B	t-Value	Supported
H1: Relational norms – export performance	0.419	6.573***	Yes
H2: Exporter dependence – relational norms	0.283	3.931***	Yes
H3: International capabilities – relational norms	0.302	2.808***	Yes
H4: Foreign market environment – relational norms	0.140	1.941*	Yes

***p < 0.001, *p < 0.05 (based on t(999), tail test).

advantages to firms. The long-run relationships will probably involve cooperation, goal sharing and risk sharing. Export managers should make idiosyncratic investments in the relation.

In summary, this paper contributes significantly to filling an important gap in the research field of exporting. Taking the relational paradigm as a reference, the study specifically demonstrates the interrelationships between relational norms and export performance. Furthermore, in line with channel theory and the contingency approach, the study shows the interrelations between the exporter's dependence on its foreign distributors, the exporter's international capabilities, the foreign market environment and relational norms.

6. Limitations and future lines of research

This study offers important and novel contributions to the export marketing literature, but has a number of limitations that can serve as a starting point for future lines of research. The first limitation concerns the type of study, since the basis for the study comes from information from a single point in time. A longitudinal study is advisable for future works to analyze the relationships between the relational norms, the exporter's dependence on foreign distributors, the exporter's international capabilities, the foreign market environment and export performance. The second limitation has to do with the fact that the sample comes from a single country. In order to generalize the conclusions, the analysis should include firms from a wider geographic area. The final limitation is the potential effect of other factors which this study overlooks. Thus, in future works researchers could consider, for example, the characteristics of the export product, the sector of activity or the organization's dynamic capabilities (Leonidou, Katsikeas, & Samiee, 2002; Navarro-García, Arenas-Gaitán, Rondán-Cataluña, & Rey-Moreno, in press).

Appendix A. Item descriptions

A.1. Relational norms

Regarding your export channel relationship... (seven-point strongly disagree... strongly agree scale).

A.1.1. Information exchange

- IE1. It is expected that both parties will provide proprietary information if it can help the other party.
- IE2. Exchange of information in this relationship takes place frequently and informally.
- IE3. It is expected that both parties keep each other informed about events or changes that may affect the other party.

A.1.2. Flexibility

- FLB1. Both parties are flexible in their response to last-minute requests made by the other party.
- FLB2. Both parties are open to each other's request to modify a prior agreement.
- FLB3. When some unexpected situation arises, both parties would rather work out a new deal than hold each other to the original terms.

A.1.3. Cooperation

- COOP1. Problems that arise in this relationship are treated as joint rather than individual responsibilities.
- COOP2. Both parties are committed to improvements that may benefit the relationship as a whole and not only the individual parties.
- COOP3. The relationship between the parties is better described as an "arms-length negotiation" than a cooperative effort (reversed).

A.2. Exporter dependence on foreign distributor

Regarding the dependence on a foreign distributor your firm... (seven-point strongly disagree... strongly agree scale).

- EDP1. It would be very hard for us to replace the foreign distributor.
- EDP2. There are very few alternative distributors we could use to export to this market.
- EDP3. It would take us a lot of time and effort to find a suitable replacement for this distributor.
- EDP4. Overall, switching to a new distributor would be difficult for us.

A.3. Exporter international capabilities

Knowledge of foreign markets (seven-point strongly disagree... strongly agree scale).

- ICP1. My firm knows the needs of foreign markets very well.
- ICP2. My firms know well its competitors in foreign markets.
- ICP3. My firm knows very well how it must act in each foreign market.
- International experience.
- ICP4. Number of years exporting – <6; 6–10; 11–15; 16–20; 20–25; 26–30; >30.

A.4. Foreign market environment volatility

Describe the business environment for the particular foreign country... (seven-point semantic differential scale).

- FME1. Stable environment/volatile environment.
- FME2. Changes slowly/changes rapidly.
- FME3. Certain/uncertain.
- FME4. Stable industry volume/volatile industry volume.

A.5. Export performance

Quantitative dimension: State growth in your firm's export sales in each of the past 3 years (2009; 2010; 2011): (1) negative; (2) zero; (3) 1–5%; (4) 6–10%; (5) 11–15%; (6) 16–20%; (7) >20%.

Qualitative dimension: State managers' satisfaction with results of your firm's export activity: scale 1–7 (1 = totally unsatisfied; 7 = totally satisfied).

SAT1	Growth in export sales
SAT2	Awareness and image of firm in foreign markets
SAT3	Profitability of export activity
SAT4	Market share
SAT5	Firm's international expansion

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