

The role of sustainability environment in export marketing strategy and performance: a literature review

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Abstract Increasing environmental issues, economic and cultural differences, the regulatory framework and the great attention to social responsibility, have forced companies to face the challenge of sustainability. Thus, the adaption of a proper marketing strategy in order to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage in the market (specially export markets) has become an important principle in accepting companies. In this regard, this study is a systematic literature review, which investigated 102 published articles in international journals between 1964 and 2015. In the literature review, the main focus was on key issues such as sustainability, marketing strategies, financial and market export performance. In this article, at first, the concept of sustainability from different aspects was collected and described. Then, external factors, such as competitive intensity, public concern, regulations, technology, cultural/social, and economic, as well as internal factors, such as managers, employees, stakeholders, affecting sustainability, were studied. Finally, adaption of export marketing strategies in order to achieve sustainability export performance is discussed.

Keywords Sustainability · Marketing strategy · Strategy fit · Export performance

1 Introduction

In recent years, one of the issues that companies have been faced with for being accepted in the markets, especially foreign markets is sustainability. Also, by reviewing the recent studies, it is quite evident that sustainability has become one of the most important issues of

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the effectiveness of marketing strategies of the companies (Leonidou et al. 2013a, b). In the meantime, Leonidou et al. (2013a, b) have stated in their research that sustainability of the company's marketing strategies has emerged due to changes in climate, population and environmental problems. In this regard, Chabowski et al. (2011) also stated that due to the changes, public concerns have increased worldwide, hence the company's activities in relation to sustainability issues are examined by consumers, stakeholders and even the staff. Governments, and mostly the governments of developed countries at higher levels, have also imposed standards and regulations in connection with sustainability issues for companies. Therefore, companies and particularly Managers decision-makers have made special concentration on adopting sustainability in their strategies, for sales and achieving higher profits.

Azmat and Samaraturunge (2009) examined the sustainability approaches in marketing strategies of companies. They showed that companies should direct their business activities and development toward a path that the whole organization can have the lowest risk for non-renewable resources and preserving them for posterity. Therefore, given the circumstances, companies, like citizens of the community, must accept social and environmental responsibilities in relation to the issues and consequences of their actions and behavior (Schmeltz 2014; Kumar et al. 2012). Of course, this is not known as the cost or limitation, but creates a special purpose for companies and can be considered as a competitive advantage. To explain more, it not only respects the customers but also leads to long-term communication with them (Kumar et al. 2012). In this regard, Lenssen and van Wassenhove (2012) have also argued that the management of sustainability marketing strategies has helped the organizations to gain a source of innovation, opportunities and competitive advantages. Thus, by applying these marketing strategies, companies have achieved superior performance.

In terms of export, companies' sustainability activities in foreign markets are also of particular importance due to various reasons such as intensified interest of consumers in sustainability issues, and markets and domestic producers being unresponsive to them. Therefore, export companies have been able to achieve a competitive advantage in foreign markets by adopting sustainability strategies (Becker-Olsen et al. 2011). Of course, it should also be acknowledged that socio-cultural, economic, regulations, technological and environmental differences between the host country and the target country have been influential in sustainability activities of export companies. Due to which the exporting companies have faced serious problems in adopting sustainable strategies and entering into foreign markets. Furthermore, the impact of these factors on exports sustainability strategies is such that it has been addresses sporadically in the international sustainability literature (Zeriti et al. 2014; Hultman et al. 2009).

Therefore, this paper presents a systematic literature review of studies and empirical research in the field of sustainability and sustainable marketing strategies of export companies that have been published in international journals. Moreover, given the increasing growth of environmental issues in global level (Varadarajan 2014), emphasis on sustainability in marketing strategies of export companies is considered as a competitive advantage and a way to differentiate and to manage the costs. The recent studies have shown that adopting sustainability marketing strategies has a positive effect on performance of export companies in global markets (Zeriti et al. 2014), and it has been followed by special attention of companies to this issue. Considering the importance of this topic, the purpose of this article is to review previous studies on sustainability issues of export companies and the impact of various factors on sustainability and sustainability marketing strategies and its impact on the export performance of companies. The examination of these issues will provide a detailed overview of the factors affecting the strategy and adoption of sustainability marketing strategies in order to improve export performance.

This paper is organized as follows: Sect. 2 expresses a full description of sustainability topics and its related objectives. Therefore, with clear objectives and global sustainability approach, Sects. 3 and 4, respectively, discuss external and internal factors influencing the adoption of sustainability by exporting companies. In Sect. 5, a variety of marketing strategies for sustainability that exporting companies can adopt with regard to the factors affecting them are identified and discussed. Then, in Sect. 5.1, the performance of the adoption of export sustainability strategies will be discussed. Then, Sect. 6 is the discussion and conclusion in relation to the export sustainability strategies that should be adopted by export companies to achieve superior performance in relation to the protection of environment and also to gain more profit and higher market share. Finally, in the last section, some suggestions will be offered for future studies on sustainability in export marketing strategies.

1.1 Methodology

To review the literature of sustainability, we have searched for different combinations as well as different key words such as sustainability, marketing strategies, export, export performance and environment in the database, such as Science Direct, IEEE, Springer Link, Wiley Online Library, SAGE, Elsevier, and ACM. Table 1 provides an overview of the number of articles obtained from various databases. Then, we repeated the same process separately for other sectors such as factors affecting sustainability, marketing strategies, export and export performance. Finally, we came to the conclusion that it is better to concentrate on some more papers for each of the segments and objectives of this study while studying and using the extracted articles. In conducting the systematic review for this article, key literature was identified via a keyword search using Web of Science combined with data analysis using Bibexcel. Then, a subsequent coding framework was developed and thematic charts created to construct themes for discussion.

Thus, in addition to examining sustainability dimensions and definitions in numerous articles and from different points of view, we concentrated on articles related to economy, culture, regulatory framework, environmental technology and human resources in sustainability in order to study the factors affecting sustainability, its dimensions, and types. For sustainability in export marketing strategies, its dimensions and types, we mainly concentrated on the recent articles in relation to the export environmental marketing strategies. In relation to the export performance, its dimensions and types, we focused on the articles associated with adopting sustainable strategies, financial and market export performance.

2 Sustainability

Sustainability is derived from the Latin word “Sustinere” meaning for maintenance (sustain also means protection, support, or tolerance; Onions 1964). Since 1980, sustainability is mainly used as human sustainability on the Earth. This view has led to the most widely quoted definition of sustainability by the United Nations Brundtland Commission in 1988, “sustainability is the development that meets the needs of the present without endangering or ignoring future generations” (United Nations General Assembly 1987). As a result of this definition, an important principle in sustainability is to avoid the use of non-renewable resources and preserving it for future generations by replacing them with renewable resources. As Godfray et al. (2010) have pointed out, the principle of sustainability is concentrating on the use of renewable resources according to the standards and

Table 1 Reviewed articles published by journals

Name of journals	Number of articles
Journal of International Marketing	19
Journal of Marketing	11
Journal of International Business Studies	7
Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	7
Strategic Management Journal	7
Academy of Management review	6
International Marketing Review	6
Journal of Business Research	4
Academy of Management Journal	3
Journal of Business Ethics	3
Journal of World Business	3
Business Horizons	2
Business Strategy and the Environment	2
Development and International Cooperation	2
Harvard Business Review	2
International Business Review	2
Journal of Environmental Economics and Management	2
Journal of Marketing Management	2
Long Range Planning	2
Social and Behavioral Sciences	2
Advances in International Marketing	1
Boston: Pitman	1
British Journal of Management	1
Business Week	1
California Management Review	1
Cambridge University Press	1
Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences	1
Corporate Governance	1
Ecological Economics	1
Ecological Indicators	1
Emerald Group Publishing Limited	1
Environmental Science and Technology	1
Harper and Row	1
Human Resources and Environmental Management	1
Industrial Marketing Management	1
International Journal of Business Communication	1
International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management	1
International Journal of Production Research	1
International Marketing	1
International Studies of Management and Organization	1
Journal of Applied Business Research	1
Journal of Banking and Finance	1
Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing	1

Table 1 continued

Name of journals	Number of articles
Journal of Consumer Marketing	1
Journal of International Management	1
Journal of Management	1
Journal of Management Studies	1
Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice	1
Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice	1
Journal of Organizational Change Management	1
Journal of Small Business Management	1
Journal of the Market Research Society	1
Marketing Letters	1
New Society Publishers	1
Orthopedics	1
Oxford English dictionary	1
Progress in Developing Studies	1
Sage Publications	1
Science	1
Service Industries Journal	1
Social Psychology Quarterly	1
Sociology	1
The International Executive	1

considers the use of non-renewable resources unstable even toward sustainability. However, it should be noted that it is not possible just to rely on renewable resources in order to meet human needs on the Earth; therefore, an appropriate and optimal strategy should be applied for the use of non-renewable resources.

In this regard, according to the comprehensive definition of sustainability and the review of the literature about the concept of sustainability, three points can be referred to people (social justice), earth (environment), and profits (economic), (Fig. 1). These factors have been considered as a long-term vision of development strategies based on ethics and social responsibility (Kumar et al. 2012; Mokthsim and Salleh 2014). The environmental aspect of sustainability with regard to the effects of environmental changes on the world has turned into an important factor in the recent studies. Its related issues have also become a value for consumers, companies and organizations as well as at the university level (Varadarajan 2014). In the meantime, companies have more emphasized the sustainability in their strategies, because the concept of sustainability will improve their social, environmental and economic performance in the long term (Galphin et al. 2015). In this regard, most of the

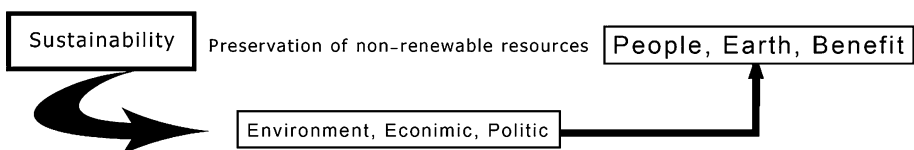


Fig. 1 Sustainability process

companies have adopted sustainability as a social responsibility response. Therefore, it should be noted that not only economic interests are the drivers for companies, and they are also looking for environmental and social benefits (Elkington 1998).

Furthermore, the review of sustainability literature shows that another important factor in the development and importance of sustainability for companies especially exporting companies is globalization. One of the effects of globalization is easy access to information and expansion of communications, which has led to the increase in people's awareness of environmental issues and investigating the way and the type of companies' activities. Thus, given the increasing growth of globalization of communication and social media, the topic of sustainability in marketing strategies of companies to meet the needs of consumers, employees and other stakeholders and to earn credits (Fraj-Andrés et al. 2009) has become a significant and influential factor.

On the other hand, globalization has spread enhanced companies activities in foreign markets (exports), because exports are known as one of the fastest and the most common methods to enter foreign markets (Gao et al. 2010; Johanson and Vahlne 1977, 1990). Since companies in the field of export require minimal financial resources, human resources and commitment (including low investment and financial risk) in comparison with home market. This would allow more flexibility to exporters in the export markets (Young et al. 1989). As a result, companies need to change their procedures in order to enter foreign markets to expand their sales (Aulakh et al. 2000).

In this regard, export companies have made decisions in relation to selecting and recognizing the needs of target market and their own exporting route (Child 1972). Of course, the decisions have not been made very easily, because companies have faced a great micro- and macroenvironmental difference in the outer space (Samiee and Walters 1990; Czinkota and Ronkainen 1998). Moreover, in research conducted in connection with the impact of micro- and macroenvironmental factors on export sustainability strategies, a significant relationship has been obtained among them (Zeriti et al. 2014; Hultman et al. 2009). Thus, according to differences in culture, economy and regulatory environments of countries that lead to limited activity of exporting companies, the companies need to select a sustainable strategy (Sousa et al. 2010; Navarro et al. 2010). Therefore, by the review of international sustainability literature, it can be stated that companies have generally achieved a better performance in their marketing strategies in foreign countries by adopting sustainability strategies (Chan 2010). As a result, sustainability is used as an attitude by the companies to widely adapt to business conditions and thereby the change in rules and regulations made in favor of globalization (Engardio et al. 2007).

As previously noted, several factors have influenced corporate sustainability strategies, among which external factors (competitive intensity, public concern, regulations, technology, cultural/social, economic) (Zou et al. 2003; Yalcinkaya et al. 2007), internal factors (managers, employees, stakeholders,...) (Chabowski et al. 2011), can be pointed out. All the mentioned factors are shown as a model in Fig. 2.

3 External factor affecting sustainability

In the past, management theory considered the environment as legal, political, economic, social and technological factors, but today, due to the health and environmental needs (sustainability), management theories have changed (Hart 1995). Therefore, the environmental management dimension has concentrated on companies activities to protect the



Fig. 2 Factors affecting sustainability

environment not to destroy it (Bansal 2005; Hart 1995). Thus, environmental changes (climate changes, population changes, scarcity of resources, global warming, etc.), have changed the sustainability at the international level into a factor for the failure of companies’ activities (even companies that have seriously affected economic, cultural and political issues) (Varadarajan 2014; Stern 2006). On the other hand, the studies on the environmental tendency of consumers indicate that the purchase of eco-friendly products has satisfied the more (Leonidou et al. 2010). This is because, the shopping culture of the customers with regard to the environmental issues has changes and they consider it as a factor for choosing their own purchase (Christmann 2004). Therefore, the environmental activities of companies in their sustainability strategies beyond the laws and standards of countries in relation to the customers’ awareness of environmental issues have created a value for the company and an imagination in the mind of the customers (Christmann and Taylor 2001).

The review of sustainability literature clearly shows that various external factors (see Fig. 3) are involved in making sustainability of export companies such as microenvironmental factors (competitive intensity and public concern) (Langerak et al. 1998) and

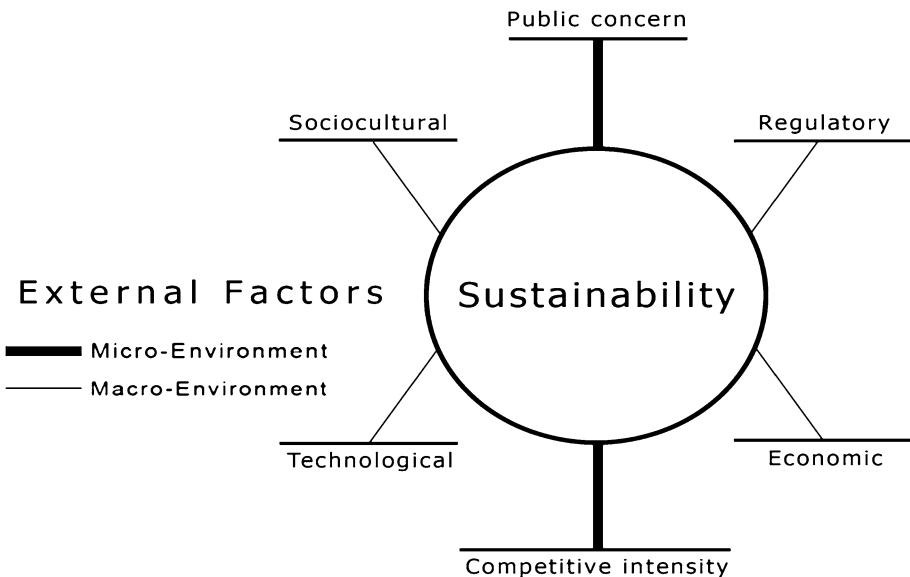


Fig. 3 External factors affecting sustainability

macroenvironmental factors (regulations, technology, cultural/social, economic) (Zou et al. 2003; Yalcinkaya et al. 2007). In addition, these factors lead to different behaviors from the market and consumers. These issues have forced the companies to change their behaviors in terms of sustainability. Table 2 shows a summary of the researches in this field.

3.1 Competitive intensity

With the development and expansion of markets around the world through globalization, a strong competition has emerged among exporting companies to enter foreign markets. In this regard, export companies in an effort to achieve a competitive advantage by investing in sustainability issues have surpassed their competitors (Bellesi et al. 2005). Thus, the intensity of competition is a motivating factor for companies in order to enter sustainability issues (Jaworski and Kohli 1993). On the other hand, the intensity of competition has imposed more costs on companies due to more activities (Menon et al. 1999). This serves as a barrier to exporting companies, while the conducted studies indicate a positive correlation between the competitive intensity and sustainability strategies of exporting companies (Katsikeas et al. 2006; Zeriti et al. 2014; Leonidou et al. 2015). Hence, it can be concluded that competitive intensity has a positive effect on the usefulness of sustainability activities of export companies (Leonidou et al. 2013a, b). Of course, it should also be borne in mind that sustainability activities are imitated by competitors in the markets with high intensity of competition. Therefore, export companies have to choose their sustainability methods in such a way that its imitation could be difficult by the competitors (Christmann 2004).

3.2 Public concern

Expansion of consumer awareness of the issues around them and the world through globalization has been followed by public concerns in the area of environmental sustainability. In this respect, some groups have been formed with various shapes in different societies with regard to the sensitivity to environmental issues that have had significant effect on companies' sustainability activities. In this connection, the findings of Arora and Cason (1995); Henriques and Sadosky (1996) have shown that public concern and consumer pressure toward sustainability issues are determining factors in practicing companies' sustainability activities. In addition, the research on public concerns and environmental impacts shows that the more are environmental impacts the greater is the role of public concerns. This is because, if inconsistent behaviors with the environment are observed, the company will be boycotted by consumer groups and will be fined by the government groups (Banerjee et al. 2003). On the other hand, foreign markets also have shown similar behaviors toward environmental issues due to the activity of companies, which is as either as incentives and rewards or on the contrary some punishments have been determined for it (Miles and Covin 2000). As a result, it should be acknowledged that export companies prepare and set their sustainability behavior in foreign markets with regard to the needs of consumers.

In addition, conducted research on the impact of public concern on sustainability strategies of export companies in foreign markets has shown a positive effect, which is more visible in macroenvironmental factors particularly economic factors (Leonidou et al. 2013a, b). In support of this, findings the studies of Banerjee et al. (2003) can be referred to have stated that in conditions that customer sensitivity toward environmental issues has grown, the impact of macroenvironmental factors on the company's activities has also

Table 2 Articles related to the external factors affecting sustainability

Author	Hypothesis	Research results	Year	Publisher
Leonidou et al.	The factors that shape consumer environmental attitudes and behavior, as well as on the resulting outcomes	Both the inward and outward environmental attitudes of a consumer are positively influenced by his/her degree of collectivism, long-term orientation, political involvement, deontology, and law obedience, but have no connection with liberalism The adoption of an inward environmental attitude was also found to be conducive to green purchasing behavior that ultimately leads to high product satisfaction An outward environmental attitude facilitates the adoption of a general environmental behavior, which is responsible for greater satisfaction with life	2010	Journal of Marketing Management
Christmann	Analyzes the determinants of global standardization of multinational companies' environmental policies	MNCs standardize different environmental policy dimensions in response to pressures from different external stakeholders MNC characteristics also affect environmental policy standardization The nature of stakeholder demands affects firms' responses to stakeholder pressures	2004	Academy of Management Journal
Zeriti et al.	Examined marketing strategy sustainability issues in international settings Examined drivers and performance consequences of adaptation/standardization of marketing strategies in international markets	Various macro- and microenvironmental factors are responsible for sustainable export marketing strategy adaptation, which shapes the nature of sustainable export marketing strategy fit and its export venture performance outcomes Sustainable export marketing strategy adaptation is the outcome of the differences between home and export markets in terms of economic and technological conditions, competitive intensity, customer characteristics, and stakeholder pressures The performance relevance of sustainable export marketing strategy adaptation requires adequate fit with these macro- and microenvironmental factors	2014	Journal of International Marketing

Table 2 continued

Author	Hypothesis	Research results	Year	Publisher
Leonidou et al.	Examines the external and internal determinants of green export business strategy and its effects on export competitive advantage and performance	<p>The instrumental role of both external forces (i.e., foreign environmental public concern and competitive intensity) and internal factors (i.e., top management green sensitivity and organizational green culture) in crafting an environmentally friendly export business strategy</p> <p>A strategy was more prevalent among larger firms and more experienced exporters, as well as among firms producing industrial goods, having a high technological intensity, and exporting to developed countries</p> <p>This strategy positively affected firms' export product differentiation advantage but had no effect on export cost leadership advantage</p> <p>Export product differentiation advantage was positively associated with both export market performance and export financial performance. However, no such link with these performance dimensions appeared for export cost leadership advantage</p>	2015	International Business Review
Banerjee et al.	How does a business firm manage its relationship with the natural environment?	In the high environmental impact sector, public concern has the greatest impact on corporate environmentalism, followed by regulatory forces	2003	Journal of Marketing
	What are the factors that influence the choice of such strategies?	In the moderate environmental impact sector, competitive advantage has the greatest impact on corporate environmentalism, followed by regulatory forces		
	Does industry type matter?	There are strong direct and mediating influences from top management commitment, which is the antecedent with the greatest impact on both industry groups		
		The influences of regulatory forces, public concern, and competitive advantage are all significantly mediated by top management commitment and moderated by industry type		

Table 2 continued

Author	Hypothesis	Research results	Year	Publisher
Becker-Olsen et al.	Examines the impact of marketing-oriented corporate social responsibility (CSR) communications on perceptions of the firm and its brands among consumers in two diverse cultures, economies, and political landscapes Consumer perceptions are enhanced if the brand is viewed as global	Support the notion that multinational firms emphasizing global CSR efforts engender more positive perceptions across multiple dimensions The importance of some specific needs according to local tastes and experiences	2011	Journal of International Marketing
Qiu	Explores how macroenvironmental factors—cultural dimensions and globalization forces—affect the relationship between product diversification and market value of large international firms	Firms in countries with cultures characterized by high uncertainty avoidance and low power distance have a higher degree of product diversification, and product diversification in turn has a significant positive impact on firm market value Economic and social globalization, as indicated by actual flows, personal contacts, and information flows, positively moderates the relationship between product diversification and market value of large international firms	2014	Journal of International Marketing

expanded. This is because the companies have been able to change social concerns into market opportunities by adopting sustainability strategy (Menon and Menon 1997). Of course, it should also be borne in mind that at higher levels, this matter is noticed by governments and is investigated by greater sensitivity (Christmann and Taylor 2001; Leonidou et al. 2013a, b).

3.3 Regulations

Regardless of public concerns by consumers, as mentioned earlier, governments have also posed some rules and standards in relation to their environmental issues that are important for companies particularly export companies. In this regard, some research (e.g., Cavusgil and Kirpalani 1993; Rugman and Verbeke 1998), argued that countries have imposed some regulations in relation to sustainability and adaption with environment on companies and have required them to adopt sustainability strategies to be accepted in their markets. Moreover, with the expansion of this issue at the international level, the exporters have encountered with harder conditions than the home market. The results of the findings of Zeriti et al. (2014) in relational to regulatory conditions indicate that the differences between home and export markets have a negative effect on the sustainability strategy of companies. This is because different monitoring, environmental rules, regulation, and local standards have provided conditions that have made companies in export markets change their strategies in comparison with home market (Rugman 1995). Eventually, sustainability rules and regulations, and their adoption by export companies apart from being a competitive advantage are known as a pass to enter foreign countries.

3.4 Technology

Technology factors refer to the differences between skills, technological resources and the speed of technology development. The effects of technology on sustainability in the studies of Katsikeas et al. (2006) have shown that there is a significant correlation among them because the growth of technology and the increasing awareness and knowledge of people have forced companies to create innovation in their own products particularly eco-friendly ones. This is while that in the absence of perfection of technology, products are considered to be useless or worn out (Hultman et al. 2009). Therefore, in order to solve this problem, companies can standardize their products using the technological needs of consumers and make them acceptable in the target markets (Katsikeas et al. 2006). In relation to technological conditions of companies, the researchers have come to the conclusion that technological trends of companies have a positive effect on their sustainability strategy (Zeriti et al. 2014; Hultman et al. 2009). Moreover, technology has made it easy for the consumers to access the information of companies' activities at global level. So that the consumers and stakeholders can monitor companies sustainability behaviors, and it has made them revise their own decisions (Kirchoff et al. 2011). Of course, it should also be noted that companies have partly dealt with environmental issues due to sustainability technologies and have reduced the risk to face such issues (Leonidou et al. 2013a, b).

3.5 Cultural/social

Culture can be defined as a set of social values and methods that are created by a group of people throughout the society by expansion and distribution (e.g., Dwyer et al. 2005;

Hofstede 1980). Therefore, according to the cultural studies (Hofstede 1983), different cultural aspects (such as individualism/collectivism, power difference, avoidance due to uncertainty and masculinity/femininity) are the factors influencing strategic decisions in sustainability. The ignorance of these factors leads to inefficiency of companies' sustainability strategies. The importance of this matter is more obvious in exports, and the studies conducted on the effect of cultural differences on foreign markets show that there is a positive correlation between cultural differences and companies' sustainability strategies (Zeriti et al. 2014; Hultman et al. 2009). However, the studies conducted by Becker-Olsen et al. (2011) indicate that cultural/social differences have served as a barrier to the acceptance of sustainability issues. Therefore, export companies require a particular culture in their own sustainability strategies in order to be accepted in export markets (Johnson and Arunthanes 1995).

3.6 Economic

Another factor affecting sustainability is the economic differences among countries that are influenced by the level of industrial development, inputs, distributors, consumers' power, products demanded by consumers and their purchase (Boddewyn 1981; Jain 1989). In the meantime, the studies of Day et al. (1988) have shown that companies must fulfill their operations in accordance with the economic conditions in each country. Therefore, research in connection with economic similarity of home and export markets has shown the negative effect of sustainability strategy acceptance on the export market (Katsikeas et al. 2006). This is because the sustainability issue requires additional spending in different parts. It should be noted that whether the additional costs imposed on products or services are in proportion with the economic level of target market or not? This is because countries with low economic level are less interested in sustainability and their selection criteria are based on their income level and their costs and earnings (Auger et al. 2010). Therefore, it has been proved that if companies standardize their sustainability activities toward the economic level of the target market, they will have better performance. The studies conducted by Zeriti et al. (2014), Hultman et al. (2009) indicate that the economic differences between home and target markets have led to the effectiveness of companies' sustainability strategies.

4 Internal factors affecting sustainability

Different studies (e.g., Langerak et al. 1998; Pujari et al. 2004; Baker and Sinkula 2005) have shown that although companies' sustainability strategies are adopted based on external factors, internal factors (such as managers, employees, stakeholders) (Fig. 4) are also effective. Therefore, some studies have been carried out on the driver role of internal forces in sustainability including: environmental awareness of marketers (Langerak et al. 1998); business sensitivity to the environment (Langerak et al. 1998); integrating companies' performance (Pujari et al. 2004); senior manager support (Pujari et al. 2004); senior manager risk aversion (Leonidou et al. 2013a, b); and weakness of organizational resources (Leonidou et al. 2013a, b).

Among the companies that desire to enter into the sustainability those which have a shared vision among their employees to reach an environmental sustainability are more successful in markets, especially export markets. Of course, it should be noted that this has

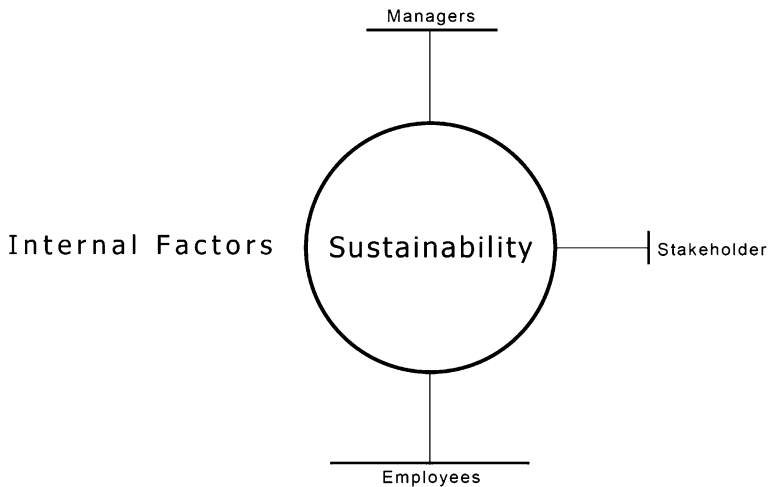


Fig. 4 Internal factors affecting sustainability

been done only with the cooperation of all employees in the company (Wehrmeyer and Parker 1996; Russo and Fouts 1997; Sharma et al. 2004). In the approval of these findings, the studies of Hart (1995), Leonidou et al. (2015) in relation to the presence of a shared vision among the company's employees have shown that the effectiveness of sustainability strategy of those companies is more than the rivals. This is because the value and culture, which are created among the internal factors of the company as a shared vision in environmental area, have an important and effective role in the activities and sustainability strategies of the company (Menon and Menon 1997). In this connection, successful companies have examined the environmental tendency of their employees and have identified which one of the employees are in agreement with the environmental values and standards created by the company (Banerjee 2002). As a result, the more is the human resources and other stakeholders' awareness of sustainability issues the more will be its effectiveness on the company's sustainability strategies.

On the other hand, managers are obliged to consider the issues of sustainability in their corporate strategies. This is also because of the fact that the attention of employees, stakeholders and customers to environmental issues according to their being pragmatic, has pushed companies toward sustainability (Magnusson et al. 2009; Chabowski et al. 2011). Hence, the increasing awareness and the pressure of the companies' employees and stakeholders to participate in sustainability activities related has become an important issue for executive decision-makers (Zeriti et al. 2014). These effects are more tangible in societies with little power difference because in such communities, the tendency toward consultation is more than other communities and the managers get the employees to be more involved in company's strategies and decision-making. As a result, the information related to the companies' sustainability activities is accessible to the staff and this will affect the strategic decisions (Qiu 2014).

It should be acknowledged that in international level and export issues, the role of senior managers in companies' sustainability strategies is more prominent; mainly because the variations in laws and policies, technologies, cultural and social environments between home and target markets have increased (Leonidou et al. 1998). Such diversity in the international business environment has obliged the senior managers to have a set of skills

and effective comprehension of environmental opportunities in different foreign markets and to set the sustainability strategies (Stone et al. 2004). Given the crucial role of managers in environmental activities of managers, much research has been done in relation to their responsibilities, such as:

Determining objectives and policies for the selection and implementation of environmental programs and investment is company's sources and capabilities for solving environmental problems (Drumwright 1994).

Developing environmental issues as value among employees and responding appropriately to the environmental needs of foreign purchasers (Stone et al. 2004).

Identifying environmental elements appropriately in core business operations (such as development of new products, manufacturing, and market measures) that are crucial to achieve a market-based organization (Pujari et al. 2004).

Coordinating environmental plans and supporting them by assigning right people to monitor green activities of the company, training and motivating the staff to value environmental issues (Banerjee et al. 2003).

In this regard, the studies of Banerjee et al. (2003), Leonidou et al. (2015) in relation to the role of senior managers in companies' sustainability strategies show that senior managers have a positive effect on the effectiveness of companies' sustainability activities.

The other groups affecting sustainability are stakeholders, which are known as any group or individual that can be effective by achieving organizational objectives (Freeman 1984, p. 46). The review of the studies conducted by Rueda-Manzanares et al. (2008) on the effects of stakeholders on companies' sustainability activities reveals that when the stakeholders are more integrated, they will have positive effects on companies' sustainability activities. This is because the stakeholders theory argues that a stakeholder affects the environmental sustainability strategies and activities of the company in two ways: first by refusal strategy (not shopping from the company) and second by selecting the use strategy (supporting the company) (Frooman 1999). Therefore, the managers are expected to, when the sustainability activities of the company are parallel to and aligned with the concerns of the stakeholders, pay particular attention to them. In general, stakeholders scan observe the market and its changes in parallel with sustainability activities of companies and take conscious decisions (Shields et al. 2002). Table 3 shows a summary of the researches that related to impact of internal factors on sustainability.

Thus, by examining the various factors affecting sustainability, it is quite evident that growing environmental problems have made companies consider the field of sustainability in their strategies, while this attention is due to internal or external factors (Leonidou et al. 2013a, b). However, the marketing sustainability strategy that companies apply for the adoption of sustainability is very crucial. The next session deals with the adoption of those strategies.

5 Adopting export sustainability marketing strategies

Expansion of environmental issues in countries and their global growth have caused the development of sustainability strategies in companies programs for entering foreign markets (Mirvis 1994). Therefore, studies conducted on the adoption of sustainability strategies have claimed that adopting such strategies will improve business performance and sustainable competitive advantages (McDaniel and Rylander 1993). Therefore, export sustainability marketing strategies play a key role in achieving the organization goals in

Table 3 Articles related to the internal factors affecting sustainability

Author	Hypothesis	Research results	Year	Publisher
Yalcinakya et al.	Employ the dynamic capabilities perspective to gain a greater understanding of the conversion of firm resources into exploitation and exploration capabilities and the influence of these firm capabilities on firm outcomes	Marketing resources influence an importer's development of exploitation capabilities, whereas technological resources influence the development of exploration capabilities Exploitation capabilities provide a foundation for the development of exploration capabilities Whereas exploitation capabilities are negatively related to the degree of product innovation, exploration capabilities positively influence both the degree of product innovation and market performance	2007	Journal of International Marketing
Leonidou et al.	Investigate the effect of resources and capabilities on eco-friendly export marketing strategy and its effects on export performance	Certain organizational resources (i.e., financial, physical, and experiential) and capabilities (i.e., shared vision, cross-functional coordination, and technology sensing/response) are conducive to the deployment of an eco-friendly export marketing strategy (comprising product, price, distribution, and promotional elements) Such a strategy is more evident for exporters of industrial (vs. consumer) goods as well as for firms that sell to developed (vs. developing) countries The adoption of a green export marketing strategy has a positive effect on the firm's export performance The strength of the link between eco-friendly export marketing strategy and export performance is positively moderated by foreign market environmental public concern and competitive intensity	2013	Journal of International Marketing

Table 3 continued

Author	Hypothesis	Research results	Year	Publisher
Henriques and Sadorsky	How firms react to environmental issues	<p>A firm's formulation of an environmental plan is positively influenced by customer pressure, shareholder pressure, government regulatory pressure, and neighborhood and community group pressure but negatively influenced by other lobby group pressure sources and a firm's sales-to-asset ratio</p> <p>Firms which view environmental issues as important in the next 5 years are also more likely to have a plan</p> <p>Firms in the natural resource sector are more likely to formulate environmental plans while firms in the service sector are less likely to have plans</p>	1996	Journal of Environmental Economics and Management
Langerak et al.	<p>Incorporates external and internal antecedents and consequences of the integration of environmental issues in marketing</p> <p>The external antecedents of green marketing include consumer environmental sensitivity, competitive intensity and regulatory intensity</p> <p>The internal antecedents consist of marketers' environmental consciousness and business sensitivity towards environmentalism</p>	<p>Environmental regulation is still the most important reason for marketers to adopt environmentally friendly marketing programmes</p> <p>Businesses that voluntarily adopt green marketing are able to exploit green market opportunities and improve their business performance</p>	1998	Journal of the Market Research Society
Baker and Sinkula	Operationalizes the enviropreneurial marketing (EM) construct and examines its relationship with firm performance	<p>According to the resource-based view of the firm, a resource such as EM should directly influence firms' capabilities (e.g., new product development success) but not competitive advantage (e.g., change in market share)</p> <p>Although market turbulence also affects new product development success, it does not have an impact on EM</p> <p>EM formation is driven by internal rather than external forces</p>	2005	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science

Table 3 continued

Author	Hypothesis	Research results	Year	Publisher
Rueda-Manzanares et al.	Examine how complexity, uncertainty and munificence in the general business environment moderate the association between a firm's stakeholder integration capability and its environmental strategy	An organizational capability of stakeholder integration is associated with a service firm's adoption of a proactive environmental strategy An uncertain business environment has a direct positive influence and a complex business environment has a direct negative influence on a firm's environmental strategy Complexity has a negative moderating influence on the relationship between a firm's stakeholder integration capability and its environmental strategy	2008	British Journal of Management

export markets by considering factors such as: the existence of a culture associated with environmental issues in export companies (Leonidou et al. 1998), and public concerns in relation to the environment (e.g., Leonidou et al. 2013a, b; Menon et al. 1999). For example, export companies can create a better image of their products than their competitors' products in the mind of consumers by using product differentiation in relation to the environmental issues in their strategies such as recyclable packaging, toxin-free materials and recyclable products (Polonsky and Rosenberger 2001).

It should also be stated that sustainability strategies refer to the points such as production, marketing, research and development (R&D), purchase, financial and human resources. These strategies can contribute to the competitive advantage through product differentiation as well as the reduction of company's costs (Fig. 5) (Porter and van der Linde 1995). Leonidou et al. (2015) have shown in their studies that the competitive advantages of cost leadership and product differentiation affect the sustainability strategies and their effectiveness. In other words, the cost leadership advantage in export companies due to the adoption of sustainability strategies has solved environmental issues and has supported the environment on one hand and has reduced the costs such as energy and water and other vital resources, on the other hand (Shrivastava 1995). For instance, in using the cost leadership advantage have export companies reduced their costs on non-essential items, which has been followed by the reduction of production price and satisfaction of new and old customers in foreign markets (Miles and Covin 2000). On the other hand, the existence of a shared vision in relation to the environmental issues in companies' sustainability strategies has led to the improvement and growth of export activities. This also has reduced the costs by considering the role of employees, suppliers, and contractors and their mutual cooperation (Zeithaml and Zeithaml 1984). On the contrary, it should be noted that concentration on product differentiation advantage has directed companies toward more earnings and better sales in foreign markets and consequently better financial results (Bharawaj et al. 1993; Carmona-Moreno et al. 2004). Therefore, cost leadership in companies has focused on the management and reduction of products price to retain customers

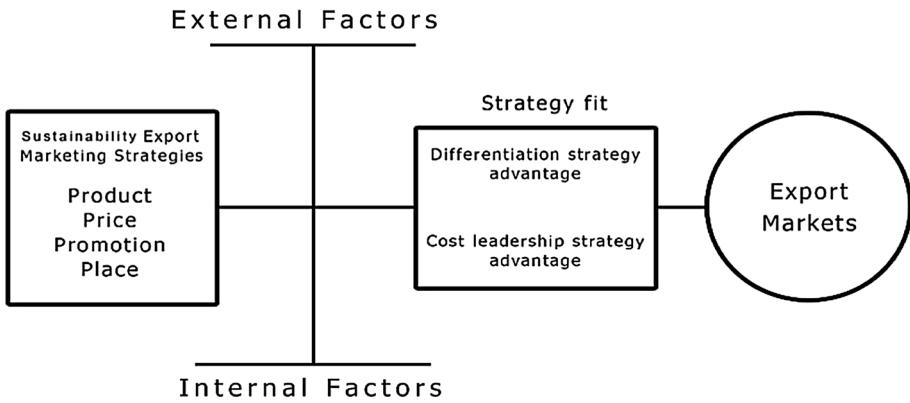


Fig. 5 Adopting sustainability export marketing strategies

and attract new customers, and product differentiation has focuses on more profitability (Orsato 2006).

The review of literature and previous studies have shown that adopting an export sustainability marketing strategy by the company leads to the company’s involvement and commitment to:

Sustainable products (e.g., improvement of recyclable packaging of product, designing sustainable new product).

Sustainable distribution methods (e.g., setting up production facility near the target market, transporting products in thinner packages to be able to transport greater number of them with less impact on the environment).

Product promotion methods (e.g., providing information on social and environmental characteristics of products, setting up a web site with information on sustainability behavior of the company).

Sustainable pricing methods (e.g., combining and adding environmental adoption costs to products price, adding a premium price for sustainable production lines) (Zeriti et al. 2014).

Moreover, companies are also involved in; sustainable division methods (such as the use of customer behavior toward sustainability as a criterion for the market analysis).

Sustainable targeting methods (such as running products in markets that meet the social and environmental needs of informed consumers).

Sustainable political situation (such as the position of company or brand as sustainable in the market) (Zeriti et al. 2014).

It should also be stated that export companies can adopt various marketing strategies in relation to sustainability. One of the strategies of export sustainability marketing to enter foreign markets and get market share with regard to the export intensity is product diversity which can be defined as “companies management on different market segments using various or distinct products” (e.g., Bowen and Wiersema 2005; Gabriellsson et al. 2012; Griffith and Rubera 2014). Varadarajan (1986) has shown that selecting product diversity strategy by companies while entering export markets is used as a general policy to grow and cope with competitive pressures. It is evident from the review of the research conducted by Miles and Covin (2000) that product diversity has a positive impact on the effectiveness of export sustainability strategies of companies. Therefore, by considering the rapid growth of globalization, export companies—for coping and surviving in the

competition—have expanded more in export markets via adopting innovative marketing strategies such as product diversity (Dos Santos et al. 2008; Gabrielsson et al. 2012).

As stated before, one of the factors that export companies face in order to enter foreign markets is unidentified business environment and the risk of investment. Therefore, product diversity in these cases has become one of the most important strategic plans for export companies (e.g., Chiang 2010; Griffith and Rubera 2014). That is, product diversity can ensure the plans of companies' sustainability strategy. However, it should be noted that too much diversity of product will reduce the value of company. Thus, this strategy is not responsive at all companies, and so, major international companies have more chance to survive and to make profit because of having more experience and resources (Qiu 2014).

Another strategy of export sustainability marketing is to create competitive advantage and to improved performance. In this regard, companies need resources that cannot be imitated by their competitors and that are unchangeable and rare (Barney 1991). Hart (1995) has also shown that competitive advantage is rooted in creation of capabilities like high savings of natural resources, green product design, and the use of technology. In this regard, the theory of resource-based view (RBV) has created a special relationship between resources, capabilities and performance of the company. RBV is a perspective that has made the capabilities and resources of the company valuable and reliable and has made it very costly and difficult for the competitors to imitate or duplicate them. Such capabilities also have let the companies experience some degree of sustainability and have improved the performance of firms in foreign markets (Drumwright 1994). It is also evident in the studies conducted by Leonidou et al. (2013a, b) that companies' resources and capabilities have a significant impact on the effectiveness of export sustainability strategies of companies. Table 4 shows a summary of the researches that related to adopting sustainability strategies.

Adopting export sustainability strategies by companies is highly desirable when it makes a superior performance consistent with the objectives of the company. Therefore, in the following, we will review export performance and the effect of sustainability marketing strategies and will express the results of the conducted studies on sustainability literature.

5.1 Sustainability marketing strategies and export performance

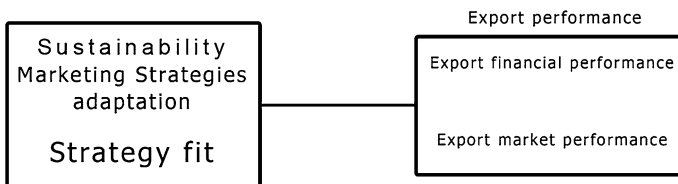
Performance is a multi-functional concept and includes effectiveness and being affected and compatibility dimensions (Walker and Ruekert 1987). Moreover, companies' export performance refers to the accomplishment of export companies strategies in competitive and financial fields so that the preset objectives of the companies in foreign markets are achieved (Cavusgil and Zou 1994). Two important aspects of export performance are market performance and financial performance; market performance refers to the results of investment, high rate of customers, growth of returns on sales, market share in the target export markets, while financial performance refers to the financial results, benefits and costs in the performance of investment market with regard to the investment returns (Morgan et al. 2004). The studies conducted by Hultman et al. (2009), Katsikeas et al. (2006), Leonidou et al. (2013a, b) have shown that superior performance of exports has always been dependent on sustainability strategies compatibility (Fig. 6). Given that export performance is influenced by sustainability strategies, sustainability has become a major factor affecting the total performance of export companies (Martin-Tapia et al. 2009). For instance, selling eco-friendly products (such as the use of recyclable biodegradable materials); adopting eco-friendly pricing (such as offering special discounts on the purchase of an eco-friendly product); using eco-friendly distributors (like cooperation with

Table 4 Articles related to adopting sustainability export marketing strategies

Author	Hypothesis	Research results	Year	Publisher
Katsikeas et al.	Appropriateness and performance consequences of marketing strategy standardization vs. adaptation	Degree of strategy standardization is significantly related to similarity between markets with respect to regulatory environments	2006	Strategic Management Journal
	Investigates international marketing strategy for a specific product or line multinational corporations. (MNCs)	Superior performance results from strategy standardization only to the extent that there is fit or co-alignment between the MNC's environmental context and its international marketing strategy choice		
Cavusgil et al.	Success factors in international product entry for small and large firms	A higher proportion of large firms, mainly MNCs, with old-line and medium technology were reported to be successful as compared to smaller firms However, in the high-tech industries neither group dominated in terms of success Further, more large firms, mainly MNCs, were found to have a greater degree of long-term export success than small firms on all the strategic and marketing mix variables except where the differences were very marginal	1993	Journal of Business Research
Hultman et al.	Investigates the issue of balancing the benefits gained through standardized strategies with those achievable when adapting to local conditions	Find support for an array of forces from the macro-, micro-, and internal environments drives product adaptation, which affects the nature of product strategy fit and its performance outcomes	2009	Journal of International Marketing
	There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the export product strategy adaptation decision	In terms of the performance relevance of product strategy fit, sociocultural environment, technological environment, marketing infrastructure, stage of product life cycle, scope of exporting experience, and duration of exporting experience all matter The pattern of significant and non-significant findings cautions against excessive aggregation of environmental variables in conceptualizing environment-product strategy fit to performance linkages		

Table 4 continued

Author	Hypothesis	Research results	Year	Publisher
Drumwright	How and why socially responsible buying comes about in organizations	Two factors have been key to the success of socially responsible buying initiative One factor is the presence of a skillful policy entrepreneur. Policy entrepreneurs are found to have many of the same characteristics as business entrepreneurs, but invest their resources in instituting new organizational policies. Their zeal for socially responsible buying is rooted in a commitment based on a complex and often difficult process of moral reasoning The second factor influencing the success of socially responsible buying is the organizational context within which policy entrepreneurs operate	1994	Journal of Marketing
McDaneil and Rylander		“Green Marketing” is taking shape as one of the key business strategies of the future, and that the increasing environmental consciousness makes it incumbent on consumer marketers not just to respond to it, but to lead the way in environmental programs	1993	Journal of Consumer Marketing
Miles and Covin	Explore the interrelationships between environmental marketing performance, reputation, competitive advantage, and financial performance	There is strong support that being a good environmental steward helps create a reputational advantage that leads to enhanced marketing and financial performance	2000	Journal of Business Ethics

**Fig. 6** Sustainability marketing strategies and export performance

eco-friendly foreign distributors) and embarking on environmental advertising practices (like designing ads with emphasis on environmental features) can have contributed to the achievement of superior performance in export markets (Polonsky and Rosenberger 2001).

In this regard, the existing evidence (Leonidou et al. 2013a, b; Martin-Tapia et al. 2008) shows that social/environmental approaches of the company in marketing mix have a positive effect on export performance.

In relation to the effect of macro- and microenvironmental factors, the review of the studies by Zeriti et al. (2014) shows that macroenvironmental factors have a significant effect on export performance. This is because various differences such as cultural/social, economic/political, regulation/law differences in export markets have created competitive advantages for exporters in foreign markets (Zou et al. 2003; Yalcinkaya et al. 2007). Of course, it should also be noted that this important event success has been gained only by the proper selection and use of capabilities and resources available to export companies. Therefore, it can also be stated that export performance is exploiting the competitive advantages of the company (Olson et al. 2005). In relation to microenvironmental factors, the studies have shown that competitive pressures, supervision intensity, public concerns about environment and other factors have a positive effect on export performance (e.g., Langerak et al. 1998; Menon et al. 1999). Therefore, in countries where there is much public environmental concern, sustainability marketing strategies have more effects on the export performance of the company. In addition, the intensity of competitive pressures in an export market creates a better yield of financial conditions than sustainability strategies (Leonidou et al. 2013a, b). On the other hand, experimental results show that companies' resources, capabilities, features and properties including size of company, participation in global market (Schilke et al. 2009) export activities and duration (Hultman et al. 2011) have moderating effects on export sustainability strategies and export performance. In this connection, Morgan et al. (2004) have confirmed that the development of specific resources (such as finance) and capabilities (such as new product development) by export companies has improved competitive advantages, which in turn has helped to boost export performance.

Therefore, it is quite evident that many variables of marketing strategy have had a positive impact on export performance, but it has not always had high confidence level. This is because companies should consider several factors in the adoption of their sustainability strategies in order to achieve superior performance. Since performance evaluation is subjective (self-reporting) and depends on measurement tools such as return on capital and sales growth (Dess and Robinson 1984; Han et al. 1998), companies must consider factors that are consistent with the goals they have set. However, many studies in this field have shown that export sustainability marketing strategy of companies has a good effect on export performance (Leonidou et al. 2015). Table 5 shows a summary of the researches that related to export performance of sustainability strategies.

Table 5 Articles related to export financial and market performance

Author	Hypothesis	Research results	Year	Publisher
Zou et al.	Investigate the effect of export marketing capabilities on export performance	General support between an exporter's product development capability, distribution capability, communication capability, and pricing capability with its positional advantages (low-cost advantage and branding advantage) and its performance in the export market	2003	Journal of International Marketing

Table 5 continued

Author	Hypothesis	Research results	Year	Publisher
Carmona-Moreno et al.	Study of the environmental strategies adopted in the service industry and their impact on a firm's performance	Firms in the groups with more developed environmental strategies are associated with a higher level of environmental performance but not necessarily with economic performance	2004	Service Industries Journal
Martin-Tapia et al.	Look at the relationship between pursuing an environmental strategy and undertaking export activities	A proactive environmental strategy is positively related to a company's export performance General uncertainty imposes a moderating effect on the relationship between proactive environmental strategies and export intensity for SMEs Some appealing differences in the role of perceived uncertainty for SMEs and large firms	2008	Ecological Economics
Schilke et al.	Investigate the organizational factors that moderate the standardization–performance relationship and, thus, to explore the types of firm for which standardization is particularly beneficial	The standardization–performance link is significantly stronger for large firms with a homogeneous product offering, high levels of global market penetration, a cost leadership strategy, and strong coordination capabilities	2009	Journal of International Marketing
		Resources and capabilities affect export venture competitive strategy choices and the positional advantages achieved in the export market, which in turn affect export venture performance outcomes	2004	Journal of Marketing
Morgan et al.	The factors associated with firms' export performance	The competitive intensity of the export marketplace does not have a direct effect on export venture positional advantages or performance Competitive intensity moderates the relationship between export venture competitive strategy choices and the positional advantages realized		

6 Discussion and conclusion

The literature review shows companies by use of their resources and capabilities as well as attention to differences among countries related to the global environmental concerns have been able to adopt sustainability export marketing strategies, which has led to achieving

the best export performances (Leonidou et al. 2013a, b). The export companies, by using product differentiation and cost leadership strategies, have developed sustainability export marketing strategies. It should be noted that the results of companies' sustainability activities could be achieved by creating a competitive advantage. The implementation of sustainability export marketing strategy has facilitated access to the competitive advantage when product differentiation is placed instead of cost leadership. This happens when the cost competitive advantage does not have a positive impact on both market and financial export performances (Leonidou et al. 2015).

Time is an important point that makes companies to consider different strategies. Leonidou et al. (2015) have shown the positive impact of product differentiation advantage on the performance is faster than cost leadership. This is because customers are able to understand the benefits of this distinction quickly and show a positive reaction. In contrast, sustainable investments, such as energy saving and pollution reduction, need more time to achieve improved performance (Shrivastava 1995; Miles and Covin 2000). On the other hand, companies in order to adapt sustainability activities and get their effectiveness need integration within the organization as well as considering the macro-/microenvironmental factors of target market in their sustainability marketing strategy. In the regard, continuous presence of experienced exporting companies has played a crucial role in adaptation of sustainable strategies; therefore, companies had considered different strategies (Hultman et al. 2011).

According to Cavusgil and Kirpalani (1993), companies should have a clearer perception of the situation and adapt their export marketing strategies to the target market. Based on Magnusson et al. (2013), there is a significant and positive integration between sustainability strategies and export performance. Thus, it can be stated that companies should benefit from greater compliance in export markets to achieve superior export performance. However, empirical theories have shown the optimal strategy, which works for all conditions, does not exist (Hultman et al. 2009). Therefore, the export companies require integration in factors affecting sustainability marketing strategy, which could be achieved by understanding the target market, and consumer needs, and also taking into account the conditions and the future requirements.

7 Future works

As mentioned before, the main focus of most studies was investigating the impacts of different factors, such as cultural/social, regulation, and economic factors, as well as public concerns and the competitive intensity on sustainable performance and strategies. Sustainable strategies are considered as benefit, not social responsibility or obligation, and lack of research investigating the effects of consumer personality, company and market character are evident in the sustainability literature. Thus, the impact of these effects in adopting sustainable strategies by the company and its consumer and market acceptance and also the performance should be investigated in the future. Most of the research in field of sustainability has been done within a specific market and/or geographic area. Due to the business globalization, companies are faced different market conditions. In the future, more research should investigate the cultural/social, economic differences among markets.

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