

## INTERNATIONALIZATION AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES IN SMES IN THE EXPORTING SECTOR OF SINALOA, MEXICO<sup>1</sup>

### *INTERNACIONALIZACIÓN Y VENTAJAS COMPETITIVAS EN LAS PYME EN EL SECTOR EXPORTADOR DE SINALOA, MÉXICO*

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#### ABSTRACT

The internationalization of SMEs is a topic widely studied in a lot of countries looking to become more competitive and certainly seek to obtain greater economic growth. More and more nations that interact with goods and services in a highly demanding market as part of the phenomenon called globalization that forces them to enter that market dynamics, however, that such an accelerated way to enter this dynamic sometimes find it successful and the other leads to mistakes that lead to failure. This paper is proposed from the study of internationalization and its relationship with competitive advantages by reference to the evolutionary process of knowledge through border studies on this matter, identifying strategies that could lead to SMEs who would like to venture in such process of internationalization.

**Keywords:** Internationalization, competitive advantage, international trade, globalization, competitiveness. SMEs.

#### RESUMEN

La internacionalización de las empresas PyMES, es un tema ampliamente estudiado en una gran parte de países que buscan ser más competitivos y desde luego que pretenden obtener un mayor crecimiento económico. Cada día son más las naciones que interactúan con bienes y servicios en un mercado altamente exigente como parte del fenómeno llamado globalización que las obliga a entrar a esa dinámica de mercado, sin embargo, esa forma tan acelerada de entrar en esta dinámica en ocasiones les resulta exitosa y en otras las lleva a cometer errores que las conducen al fracaso. El presente trabajo se propone a partir del estudio de la internacionalización y su relación con las ventajas competitivas tomando como referencia el proceso evolutivo del conocimiento a través de estudios de frontera sobre este tema, identificando así las estrategias que pudieran servir a las PyMES que desean incursionar en este tipo actividades.

**Palabras clave:** Internacionalización, ventaja competitiva, comercio internacional, globalización, competitividad y PyMES.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this article, the competitive advantage and the internationalization of the firms are analyzed based on the premise that competitiveness is the most important to achieve long-term growth of the economy factor and manifests in improving the quality of life within the country, industry or company. The study was conducted by reviewing scientific articles through an exhaustive search of reliable databases which in turn provide insight into the outlook of SMEs in the context of internationalization, finding the problems they face and identifying advantages of this type of competitive strategy.

The environments will also be studied in order to maintain an adequate level of long-term competitiveness, designing management strategies aimed at maximizing the overall or global efficiency from the consideration of competitive factors, both internal and external, and it also does not matter if the company is young and already a few years in the market to ensure that internationalization will be positive or negative.

This work is part of a highly globalized scenario that in recent years has been affected by international economic and financial crisis, where companies and business realities faced with a highly complex international competition makes local presence, which engages businesses regardless of size, to seek alternative growth markets beyond the borders largely unaware with dynamic languages and cultures very different and where it is required a stage of comprehensive and competitive preparation that must guide the company in the route to internationalization, Segura. (2014).

Organizations are living a reality that is characterized by constant changes resulting essentially from the Information Technology and a process of globalization of economies that have changed the ways of acting and competing companies, which are currently dominated for intangible assets and the people that make or use them. For this reason, companies are acting globally with special attention to the management of their human resources, conceiving these assets as a strategic component.

Globalization has made available to any company, the same competitive resources, so the need to find sources of advantage difficult to imitate by the competition has become imperative for organizational success. Hence, today, there has been a boom in the management of intangible assets due to its own characteristics that make them difficult to copy or imitate.

The phenomenon of liberalization and globalization have led employers to update their processes, characterized by flexibility and deregulation as well as new forms of work organization with a purpose to enable management to act more freely.

## Context

The impact of globalization highlight of the collapse of international trade was probably, its spread so fast and synchronized global impact. Most countries of the world have seen their exports decrease significantly in similar period following the crisis that engulfs the world economy and consequently where Mexico is not exempt, Segura (2014).

Moreover, Jara, Moreno and Tovar (2009), agree that Latin America was significantly affected after the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, like other emerging regions. Still, compared to past crises, dysfunctions of domestic financial markets have been, by far, less severe. The unusual accumulation of foreign assets (other than reserves) by residents in some countries and the progress made in the development of domestic debt markets (especially government bonds) seems to have emerged as explanatory factors.

It is in this era of globalization, where new forms of organization required by the role performed by them in that economic interdependence. These new organizations, according to Rodríguez P. (2003) have to be designed with flexible, participatory, and competitive structures with a high degree of automation, which must have an orientation towards internationalization and participation in international markets.

The international markets are increasingly complex because of the enormous competition and high turbulence existing in the global economic arena. Thus, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are increasingly aware of the need to develop skills and competencies that allow them to expand their business geographically. For SMEs is a matter of survival for many of them, considering that make up an overwhelming majority in the whole economic structure of each country. Estrella J, Ruiz and Sanchez (2012, p.87)

In the case of the European Union, there are seven countries where these companies employ more than three-quarters of the labor force over the average and globalization has brought the key to an economic environment with progressive disappearing of barriers and borders in order to face new markets and international competition. In this geographical region there are approximately 23 million SMEs generate about 100 million workspaces and more than 99% of the total population of companies in the European Union. Therefore these organizations are considered the core of the economy of this region, Stoian (2010).

In Mexico, the group of the SMEs need help to move forward to international markets. Currently the total SMEs in Mexico, between 30 and 40 thousand SMEs generate 80% of sales abroad, to the main destination market of United States and some to Central America so it should be to diversify the market. Maron (2012, p.1)

In the economic sphere, the importance of investigating such phenomena is due to the great impact that exporting SMEs represent his generation of jobs and their consequent contribution to GDP through their sales abroad. SMEs account for over 99 percent of the affordable units in Mexico; 35 percent of GDP is generated by SMEs. But something more important than GDP itself, eight of every 10 jobs generated in our country are fortunately small and medium enterprises, regarded as the key factor of balanced regional development Calderón H. (2012).

The importance of SMEs in Mexico as generators of jobs and income forces to develop this work. It is believed that the effort in that field, as momentum Internationalization through its competitiveness, it is imperative on the part of all stakeholders, public and private economic operators.

### **The Problem**

Historically, developing countries have traditionally based their economies the strength of comparative advantage, i.e. on renewable resources and nonrenewable natural product. By contrast, in developed countries the engine of their economies was industrialization, which relies on competitive advantage, which is given by the value added by man.

This phenomenon accounts for new local business conditions that have to absorb, balance and compensate through effective strategies to prevent the loss of competitiveness; another challenge is the increasing price competition requires companies to higher levels of productivity and efficiency; additional pressure to improve the quality of products is another challenge of increased investment for the company. All these challenges require balanced policies based on sustainability, which means for the company to retain a favorable market position while remaining profitable and without any decrease. Canals (1994).

In the case of Mexico, the government has implemented laws and initiatives to boost competitiveness in the opinion of some authors that address the issue, this law for the development of competitiveness has not been sufficiently disseminated as mentioned Cereceres, Borboa Castillo and Rodriguez (2005), their schemes were very limited and most important factor was the credit at preferential rates with a partial content and that did not solve the problems of the sector.

In the case of Sinaloa Cereceres (2007), notes that companies are dying for lack of competitiveness and Sinaloa entrepreneurs in their organizations must implement good management that emphasizes above all to recognize that international competition is something that is here to stay and you have to turn your eyes within the organization and analyze what are the advantages of local companies against transnational and exploit.

Companies for their lack of competitiveness faced very adverse scenarios in their internationalization. Olguin and Lerma (2014), agree that competitiveness is a major problem and a major challenge for SMEs in their internationalization processes.

It would be ask questions about how competitive we are in areas such as differentiated technology, products and quality services, patent registrations and trademarks, brand positioning, competitive costs, certification of international quality, trained and qualified personnel and if there has information updated and available markets. This is trying to identify those advantages that make companies different competitively with the rest of the competitors in international markets.

Once the context and problem statement where competitiveness and internationalization variables are involved, the analysis of different themes that make up the study begins.

### **Theoretical framework**

In the theoretical framework are include some of the concepts and theories of competitiveness and internationalization that are taken as guides of this research, accordance with the principle of the evolving knowledge studies that have addressed the phenomenon.

The terms of the theoretical frame of reference of this study was structured in compliance with the principle of relevance, framing research in theories of management and organization to be considered as framework theories where the analysis and review of the theories incubate internationalization and competitiveness.

The review of the state of the art began with an exhaustive search for those basic references and boundaries knowledge that have addressed the phenomenon of internationalization and competitiveness of SMEs in order to support the research.

There for this article start by describing the definition of the Small and Medium Enterprises as the main subject of this research:

### **Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**

The study of SMEs raise some forces, generally referred to the number of employees differs between countries statistical definitions. The most widespread consider option involves between 10 and 250 workers, as distinct from micro (fewer than 10 employees) and large (more than 250). Romero (2006).

These SMEs are elementary organizational structure, with particular relevance to the area of production, and have great administrative centralization because the owner is usually the leader. Contreras (2008).

In Mexico, the SME definition was published in the Official Journal of the Federation (2009, June 30), establishing the next definitions:

- Small business for a range of 11-50 workers.
- Median 51-250 employees.

SMEs in Mexico are the most representative and according to INEGI (2013 July) the total of economic unit are approximately 4 million 410 thousand 198 economic units in the country, of which about 99% are SMEs, which generate a little over 50 % of Gross domestic Product (GDP) and contribute approximately over 70% of national employment.(see table 1).

**Table 1.** *Stratification by number of employees*

Size	Sector	Number of workers	Amount of anual sales(mp)	Maximum limit combined
<b>Micro</b>	All	To 10	To \$4	4.6
<b>Small</b>	Trade	from 11 to 30	From \$4.01 to \$100	93
	Industry and services	from 11 to 50	from \$4.01 to \$100	95
<b>Medium</b>	Trade	from 31 to 100	from \$100.01 to \$250	235
	Services	from 51 to 100		
	Industry	from 51 to 250	from \$100.01 to \$250	250

*Source: Official Journal of the Federation, June 30, 2009, Mexico*

Once that the definition about Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) is set up, the theoretical framework proceed to analyze some theories about the competitiveness in order to begin the structure of the state of art of the research.

### **Competitiveness**

This approach ranks as an important reference on the study of internationalization and arises from the consideration of the company's own characteristics, its competitive advantage and market needs. Asymmetries of the market allow a country to lead the company to exploit its competitive advantage in this country, either through exports or through contractual relationships or even investing in that nation.

This competitive advantage can be given by several factors, both endogenous and exogenous, or a combination of both. Among the endogenous or specific advantages can be found the technology control, management skills, marketing management, to name a few, as distinctive elements that give the organization an advantage over other companies in a third country and, thus, it can exploit its output to it.

These ideas certainly show one of the leaders of the contemporary competitive advantages as Porter (1991), that part of his work based on competitive advantages, highlighting an important role in competition between companies in the foreign market.

Competitiveness is defined by the World Economic Forum - WEF (2011) as a set of factors, policies and institutions that determine the level of productivity of a country and, therefore, determines the level of economic growth that can reach an economy.

The concept of competitiveness relates to achievement in productivity as a whole reaches a certain country, and adding, that is productivity, which directly determines the level of economic growth that reaches an economy in a given time.

Competitiveness is defined by the productivity with which a nation uses its human, financial and natural resources. They are the underlying sources of prosperity that a country possesses. The standard of living of a country is determined by the productivity of its economy, which is measured by the value of goods and services produced per unit of human, economic and natural resources. (Porter, 2005). Traditionally, companies based their competitive advantage in economies of scale, the ability to obtain patents, market regulations and access to capital. The strategies were aimed at getting high-tech as a barrier to prevent competition, increase its size, gain greater market share and reduce costs generally by way of retrenchment. (Pleffer cited in Calderon 2003).

Competitiveness says Kotler (1984) which is the ability to compete, usually in the international plan. This is derived from talent, productivity and technology and is an appropriate mix of quality, innovation, and opportunity costs in the markets. Based on the statements of the leaders, competition is a direct function of productivity achieved by a company, industry or country, it is nothing more that the efficient use of human, financial and natural resources that account a country.

Therefore we can say that competitiveness can and does determine the level of growth of an economy, which is measured through the growth recorded by the GDP of a country in a year compared to last next year, and if this growth is maintained uniformly in time (we refer to the growth rates of the economy in the long run), we would be facing an economy that shows signs of sustainable development.

Competitiveness in general and to link it with the internationalization, the term international competitiveness is understood as the ability of a country to produce and distribute goods and services in international markets steadily emerges. An integration of the advantages of a country and the differential skills that a company may explain why the medium term some companies are internationally competitive Canals (1997).

Following the emergence of the concept of competitiveness in enterprises competitive behavior also arises. Hitt, Ireland and Hoskisson (2008, p. 240) note that competitive behavior is understood as the set of competitive actions and responses developed by a company in order to build or defend its competitive advantages and improve their position in the market. It is considered that the Competitive Advantages of the product or service passports will be towards the internationalization of the company and its existence would be useless without starting any venture having as look internationalization.

### **Internationalization**

Although there is no consensus on the definition, it is clear that internationalization is an evolutionary, dynamic and complex process that involves an important set of strategic decisions (Rialp 2001). Internationalization means the operations that facilitate trade, the links between the company and international markets, along a process of increasing international involvement. Welch, Loustarinen, (1988)

The internationalization process is conceived as the jump of the company from the country of origin to the country area target area where the target market (Research Team University of Vigo, 2001, 40 cited in Lugo (2007). Internationalization has a broader meaning than exports, it means having relation with the outside markets, is a signal to do business: import - export products or services, technology, outsourcing, working with external companies and of course investing in outside. Lugo (2007).

After describing the subject of the study, it is important to mention that the easiest and most common way for the companies to start the internationalization process is thru the exportation:

Exportation that requires very low amount of investment compared with some others ways to get into the internationalization.

### **Exportations**

This is the most common form of internationalization of the firm and requires comparatively low invest-

ment by relating with any other modalities of internationalization of the company on going abroad, there for in this context, the options for a company to export, whether products and / or services, go from indirect exporters to direct ones.

#### **• Indirect export**

It is the simplest form of internationalization of the firm, as it is done indirectly by using a third company or export agent which is actually the one is doing the exportation process, You sell to an intermediary in your own country. By using this way of internationalization, you normally don't get the collecting payment from customer in abroad.

#### **• Direct export**

This mode is more complex than the previous one, since the own company manages export in full, in the country of origin and destination, so the firm assumes all responsibility. It is important to note that the modality of sale abroad can take various forms, according to the reality of each exporting company in its relationship with their target markets.

### **Theories of Internationalization**

Even that the background of the internationalization began its gestation from classics of international trade, whose main references refer to Adam Smith (1776), David Ricardo (1815) and John Stuart Mill (1850), in this article we will consider those contemporary theorists who for his contributions to scientific papers, have become benchmarks in the bibliometric study of the phenomenon of globalization, among which are a Weidersheim and Johanson (1975) and Johanson and Valhne (1977 analyzed) with gradual internationalization theory; Dunning (1988) eclectic theory and Madsen and Servais (1997) with the theory of rapid internationalization, also known as "Born Global" .Segura (2014).

### **The Gradualist Theory or Uppsala Model**

The Uppsala model is considered as the most suitable to explain the behavior of SMEs, describing how they perform their internationalization in stages and gradually theoretical aspect. It is based on empirical observations of their studies in International Business at the University of Uppsala, showing that Swedish companies often develop their international operations in small steps, rather than by large foreign investment on the production time. Usually companies start exporting to a country via an agent, later establish a sales subsidiary, and eventually, in some cases, begin production in the country. Weidersheim and Johanson (1975) and Johanson and Vahlne (1977).

Johanson and Vahlne (1977) developed a model of the internationalization of the company that focuses on the development of the individual firm, and particularly in the gradual acquisition, integration and use of knowledge about foreign markets and operations and its commitment to increase on foreign markets. Consider that all decisions, taken together, constitute the process of internationalization decisions to start exporting to a country, to establish export channels to start a sales subsidiary, and have some common characteristics that are also very important for further internationalization.

With the increasing knowledge of the market, the company will expand its international participation and proceed through certain stages. Each stage represents a higher degree of internationalization, the same time as it increases market awareness, increased internationalization of companies from nearby countries from the geographical point of view and psychically more distant in succession, Meckl & Schramm (2005, p 13.)

The model of gradual internationalization (Uppsala Model), has been a leader in the research of the internationalization phenomenon in recent years, but also has been heavily criticized. Some authors conclude that the Uppsala model has limitation because of the main focus on just four companies from Sweden and ignores other ways of internationalization like the born global or the eclectic approach among others.

### **Eclectic approach Theory**

This theory was created to try to assemble within a system of theoretical contributions of industrial organization, the paradigm of transaction costs and location theories and international trade. The eclectic theory suggests that the company chooses to exploit its competitive advantages abroad through direct investment, which involves becoming a multinational corporation by satisfying the conditions. Both modern commerce and the theory of international production have adopted this type of product allocation or assignment often is mobile between countries but not between companies. In fact, in the last twenty years there has been a convergence in explaining the movement of goods and factors of production across national borders, Dunning (1980). Must recognize that the traditional assumption that the capacities of the individual firm is limited to their property boundaries (and, outside these limits, the factors influencing the competitiveness of firms are exogenous to this) (Dunning 1995, p. 481).

There is an end to the eclectic theory of international production section. The possession of ownership advantages determines that companies provide a certain foreign market, while the localization pattern of endowments or production assignments explain whether the company will supply that market through exports (via trade) or production Local (non-commercial). Dunning (1980, p.11)

### **Rapid Internationalization Theory**

It refers to the establishment of new companies that are international from the beginning or birth. These companies often raise capital, manufacture and sell products on several continents, especially in high-technology industries where many established competitors are of global scope. Madsen and Servais, (1997).

The formation of organizations that are international from the start-ups are increasingly an important phenomenon that is incongruent with the traditional features expected of MNEs. It is the most radical manifestation of the internationalization of the new company, as a significant competitive advantage from extensive coordination between the various activities of the organization is derived, the locations of which are geographically unlimited. These companies not only respond to the globalization of markets, but also act proactively on opportunities to acquire resources and sell products anywhere in the world that have the most value. Oviatt & Philips 1994.

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This theory highlight the existence of the internationalization of new ventures, and appears to be useful in the description of the different types. In contrast to companies with the Uppsala approach beginning with a proactive international strategy and gradually evolves.

### **Internationalization strategies**

Internationalization strategies become a growth medium in organizations facilitating entry to foreign markets and ensuring the development of business without mishap. In most cases tend to win with the presence of the company in the host country and maintain competitiveness allow it to continue growing.

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<sup>1</sup> Journal of International Business Studies is the official publication of the Academy of International Business, publishing papers of significant interest that contribute to the theoretical foundation of business and management studies. Journal of International Business Studies

Before venturing into foreign markets and to compete in them should be considered external factors such as the country's attractiveness, market potential, customer characteristics, the degree of protectionism, political, state aid, local suppliers and employees qualified as internal factors to consider people, products, international experience, available resources, service capacity and coordination of departments. Canals (1994).

These segments are being supplied by associated companies working in partnerships across network borders. The overview should cover the whole as a reality that we must know, interpret, accept and use. Drucker, P. (1997).

Kotler (1984) identifies two factors that may lead firms to choose their foray into foreign markets being pushed towards international trade due to the weakening of domestic marketing or government initiative to encourage business expansion to an external order to increase the exchange to reduce its trade deficit.

*Competitive Strategy*: refers to the source of obtaining sustainable competitive advantage. In this approach the two classic competitive strategy variables are collected from an international context: cost reduction (related to overall efficiency through scale and standardization) and differentiation (related multidomestic sensitivity and local adaptation). In this strategic area should answer the question what is our sustainable competitive advantage abroad? Villarreal (2008).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

To carry out research, secondary sources were used as a central part considering the importance of SMEs for the Mexican economy, and particularly in the region of Sinaloa.

The study was conducted by reviewing scientific articles through an exhaustive search of reliable databases which in turn provide insight into the outlook of SMEs in the context of internationalization in the State of Sinaloa in Mexico, finding the problems they face and identifying advantages of this type of competitive strategy. The analysis was performed through a bibliometric study of the kind undertaken between February and July 2014.

The result of analysis showed qualitative type information explaining the correlation between competitiveness and internationalization of business and the influence or importance of competitive advantages in the internationalization process of SMEs in the region.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The internationalization of the company is one of the alternatives is becoming more attractive to companies looking to develop its growth strategy as a way to increase their economic value in a globalized and interconnected world.

While each of the analyzed approaches has strengths and weaknesses, there are different opinions that support one or the other, as in the case of Rugman (1980), Buckley (1988), Dunning (1979, 1988, 1994), Alonso (1994) Duran (2001) Muñoz (1999), to name a few authors, making it difficult to establish which of all approaches is more accurate

Agreeing with (Porter, 2005), what matters most is not the property or exports or whether firms are domestic or foreign ownership, but the nature and productivity of economic activities taking place in a given country. Purely local industries do contribute to competitiveness as productivity not only sets the level of wages in each sector, but also has a significant impact on the cost of living and cost of doing business in that country.

In the SME sector there are lots of failures in internationalization that can be explained by something as simple as a lack of competitive advantages through innovation or failing reasonably withdraw consider checking out other markets. But there are success stories, which not only highlight the benefits of the company's internationalization but how this translates into positive numbers in employment.

Combining the above is also important to note based on the findings that multinationals can act as catalysts for the internationalization of SMEs and that this becomes an alternative that can be used to perform this activity if they dare try in particular, but also SMEs are less productive than large companies, these resources can be mobilized to move clusters and networks by locating areas to overcome the economic costs incurred by expanding into foreign markets.

In the study, the internationalization of competitiveness arises from the consideration of the company's own characteristics, its competitive advantage and market needs. The evidence actually marked asymmetries markets notably allowing a country to take the company to exploit its competitive advantage in this country, either through exports or through contractual relationships or even investing in that nation.

This competitive advantage can be given by several factors, both endogenous and exogenous, or a combination of both. Among the endogenous or specific advantages can be found control technology, manage-

ment skills, marketing management, to name a few, as distinctive elements that give the organization an advantage over other companies in a third country and, thus, it can exploit its output to it.

The firms that adopt competitiveness as some of the main strategy, based in the results of some internal competitive advantage or market possibility shows a greater interest in evolve to the internationalization markets.

Competitiveness becomes coinciding with authors like Cereceres (2007), a permanent threat to the lives and safety of exporting SMEs and disturbingly at the level of internationalization by such unequal competition facing firms so would to identify those products and services that are produced and sold in the domestic or national market from that screening and search or identify some competitive advantage that enables SMEs to be able to start the adventure towards internationalization attacking geographically closer markets and evolve gradually to foreign markets form expectations of success.

Both the internationalization and the competitiveness has become one of the most important issue when research of the internationalization of the firm and the success are the major finfing.

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