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Strategic Capabilities and Competitive Strategies: The Moderating Role of Exporting

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Key words: Strategic capabilities, competitive strategies, exporter activity regime, capabilities, manufacturing companies, positive relationship

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Abstract: This study aims to discern the moderating role of the activity regime (exporter or not) on the relationship between strategic capabilities and competitive strategies. Referring to the resource-based approach we examine, through a score, the simultaneous effect of five groups of strategic capabilities; including managerial, technological, marketing, information technology and market linkages; on competitive strategies. Using a quantitative hypothetico-deductive approach and among the structural equations method, the study confirms the moderating role of the activity regime on the relationship between strategic capabilities and competitive strategies in a sample of Tunisian manufacturing companies. Nevertheless, this moderating effect has just reversed the sense of the positive relationship between strategic capabilities and competitive strategies.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely accepted that exporting holds considerable weight in the economy of any country in the world. In addition to being the major source of Foreign exchange, it also offers the potential benefits of economies of scale, thereby reducing production costs and protecting the interest of domestic consumers (Mohsenzadeh and Ahmadian, 2016). Nevertheless, although, many studies have sought to determine the consequences of competitive export strategies including superior performance, attention to the antecedents of these strategies needed to build a sustainable competitive advantage in export markets has been much less studied. In addition, while the effect of strategic capabilities on competitive strategies has been studied in the export activity regime (Kaleka and Morgan, 2019; Efrat *et al*., 2018; Mohsenzadeh and Ahmadian, 2016; Kaleka, 2011), studies comparing this effect in an export activity regime with a non-exporting regime are highly tentative.

The purpose of this study is therefore, to contribute to filling this void by attempting to conceptualize with reference to resource-based theory, the capacities needed to set up a competitive strategy in the export market comparatively to the local market. The question then will be:

What is the moderating role of the activity regime on the relationship between strategic capabilities and competitive strategies?:

Literature review

The resource based view

Emergence and basic ideas: This approach dates back to the researchers of Penrose (1980) and the Harvard School. However, it has only been fully institutionalized with the works of Wernerfelt (1984) who while drawing on the SWOT Model, refers resources to the strengths and weaknesses of a company. Nevertheless, it is with the works of Barney (1991) that resources have been recognized as the origin of tenable and sustainable competitive advantage. This researcher extends the field of resources to “all the assets, the capacities, the organizational processes, the attributes of the firm, the information, the knowledge, etc., controlled by a firm that allows it to design and implement strategies that improve its efficiency and effectiveness" (Barney, 1991). This definition which seems to us the most complete, integrates the company's capacities in the field of resources.

The resource approach is a theoretical breakthrough in strategy and competitive advantage research. The main idea behind this approach is to recognize the company as a collection of unique resources able to influence its evolution and its strategic development choices as well as its competitive advantage and its rents (Barney, 1991). This approach breaks with the hypotheses of the neoclassical approach that admits the mobility and the homogeneity of resources. Indeed, this new approach admitsratherthe heterogeneity of companies and goes back to the resources available to them which are not perfectly mobile between them (Barney, 1991). In addition with reference to this approach, some firms have at a moment given, better resource endowments than others (Foss, 1997). This approach is based on two main ideas. The first explains the strategic choices of firms based on the unique resources they hold. As for the second, it tends to link the competitive advantage and the performance of the company to these specific resources. According to, Barney (1996), the choice between Porter's two competitive strategies (Porter, 1980) depends on the presence or absence of certain resources. In this regard, Fernandez and Le Roy ensure that the RBV theory encourages the company to pursue an individual strategy that through its isolation arrives to create sustainable unique resources.

Strategic capabilities: Although, most founding research does not explicitly distinguish between the term "resources" and "capabilities", Amit and Schoemaker (1993) has just distinguished between the two concepts. Thus, while considering the company as a "Resource Node" (bundle of resources) they specify that the latter correspond to the assets that it owns and controls whereas the capacities refer to their ability to exploit and combine these resources through organizational routines to complete one's pathway. These capabilities are based on specific, tangible and intangible information processes that develop through complex interactions between resources.

However, these capabilities can only be of a strategic nature if they satisfy the following conditions. They must enable firms to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (cost/differentiation), increase the efficiency of production, improve deliveries and therefore, increase competitiveness (Day, 1994; Spanos and Lioukas, 2001; DeSarbo *et al*., 2005).

A quick overview of the literature reveals a wide range of strategic capabilities. More specifically, the literature review on the capabilities and skills needed by companies operating in export markets, distinguishes three broad categories of skills: production, informational and marketing and sales (Morgan *et al*., 2004; Ritter, 2006). These capabilities are expected to contribute to the creation of value for customers. Nevertheless, some research, focused on the export market, integrates managerial or organizational capacities (Beleska-Spasova *et al*., 2012).

The role of production capability is the development, integration and conversion of resources and the creation of value in the market (Morgan *et al*., 2004). In fact, to be able to respond to export orders and seize the opportunities that emerge these capacities make it possible to satisfy demand and accelerate product development. Marketing capabilities can include marketing planning, market analysis, targeted marketing, ability to obtain information, management of distribution and development of communications in Foreign markets, research and observation, pricing, distribution and practice of personal marketing (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994; Kuppusamy and Anantharaman, 2008). These capabilities seem to be highly indispensable to own on the export market. Information capabilities which aim to collect real-time information on customer expectations and international competitors in turn, carry considerable weight in export markets.

We focus our interest in this research on all of these strategic capabilities including: managerial, technological, marketing, market linkage and information technology capabilities. Indeed, technological capabilities that include production capability, correspond to "the ability to perform any relevant technical activity or business activity including the ability to develop new products and processes and operate the facilities effectively" (Teece *et al*., 1997). Market link capabilities which have been incorporated by several researchers into marketing capabilities, correspond to the ability to create and maintain lasting relationships with customers, suppliers, channels (Day, 1994). According to, Chae *et al*. (2014), information technology capabilities correspond to the organizational skills that enable the IT function to provide value to the various activities of the company. These abilities are of great importance in the wave of international competition. Finally, management skills support all other capabilities and include management of human resources, financial management, revenue and profit forecasting, etc. (DeSarbo *et al*., 2005).

Competitive strategies: Competitive strategies can be traced back mainly to Porter (1980) and thereafter made the subject of several theoretical and empirical research (Dess and Davis, 1984; Miller, 1988). According to Porter (1980), competitive strategies, widely known as generic (activity strategies) depend on two dimensions: competitive advantage and the field of competition.

Three types of succeed competitive strategies are therefore, identified: the cost-dominating strategy of dominating competitors which consists in dominate

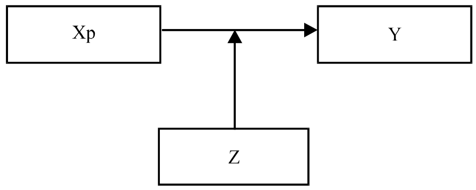

Fig. 1: Z moderating effect

competitors while producing at a lower cost for the entire sector. The differentiation strategy which seeks to "create something that is felt to be unique across the sector" (Porter, 1980) in order to achieve above-average profits in the sector as a whole. And the concentration strategy of differentiating and or dominating costs not at the level of the entire sector but exclusively for a particular target particular group of customers, a segment of the product mix, geographic market) (Porter, 1985). However, according to Porter (1980), any company is obliged to choose only one of these three strategies if it believes that it is taking a strong position relative to the competition. Failing this, it risks becoming bogged down in a middle way which results in a permanent situation of low profitability (Hambrick, 1983; Galbraith and Schendel, 1983; Dess and Davis, 1984; Parker and Helms, 1992; Porter, 1980, 1985).

In the export markets, Namiki (1988) has identified four types of competitive strategies most commonly adopted which are implicitly derived from those of Porter (1980), namely marketing differentiation, segmentation differentiation, differentiation and differentiation. innovation and product service. In the same line of ideas, Denis identifies four competitive strategies that are the most adopted for export, namely: product strategy, distribution strategy, pricing strategy and promotion strategy.

Model development and hypothesis: Starting from the premises of the RBV presented above we propose a model with double interest, explaining the choice of the competitive strategies (Fig. 1). Our conceptual model proposes that strategic capabilities explain the different competitive strategic choices of companies. In addition, this model also makes it possible to decipher the moderating effect of the activity regime (exporting, not exporting) on the relationship between strategic capabilities and competitive strategies, given that the competitive intensity relative to these two regimes activity is disparate.

The impact of strategic capabilities on competitive strategic choices

The exclusive impact of strategic capabilities on competitive strategies: According to Barney (1991), the choice between the two generic strategies, cost-dominated or differentiated by Porter (1980), depends on the presence or the absence of certain resources. Thus, three types of resources are supposed to create a competitive advantage by pursuing the competitive strategy of domination by costs, namely the presence of a significant experience effect, privileged access to certain productive factors, a know-how advantage of production. With regard to the competitive differentiation strategy, the company needs to acquire and develop the following resources/skills: the ability to link together certain functions of the firm, the 'timing' (especially, the advantage to the first incoming), geographical location, reputation, distribution channels, after-sales service.

Many studies empirically grounded the impact of strategic capabilities on competitive strategies. We cite as such the rigorous empirical study of Spanos and Likouas (2001). These researchers have demonstrated empirically that managerial, marketing and technical capabilities constitute necessary preconditions for the development of competitive strategies and hence, the construction of a sustainable competitive advantage. According to these researchers in the current context characterized by policies of pro-competition increased free trade, high levels of competition, Ricardian rents underlying the benefits to resource base basic foundation of the RBV (Peteraf, 1993) are more likely to account for performance changes and competitive strategies than competitive forces.

In digging into the analysis, Parnell (2011) also proved in an empirical study conducted in Argentina, Peru and the United States that strong strategic capabilities pave the way for pursuing pure competitive strategies. Specifically, this researcher argues that the cost leadership strategy positively depends on the managerial capabilities that ensure cost control and efficiency of production. For their part, De Sousa *et al*. (2016) on a sample of companies from the Brazilian textile sector, provide empirical evidence of the positive and significant impact of managerial capabilities on Cost's competitive strategies. In the same perspective, Ortega (2010) demonstrates the positive and significant effect of technological capabilities on competitive differentiation strategies. From a close perspective, DeSarbo *et al*. (2005) empirically prove that firms with information technology capabilities are "prospectors" that can differentiate their supply and innovate. According to, Weerawardena and Mavondo (2011), prospectors correspond to firms adopting competitive differentiation strategies. Martin and Javalgi (2016) confirm the positive effect of marketing capabilities on cost and marketing differentiation competitive strategies as these capabilities provide superior coordination of business operations by supporting choices about how the firme will compete for target clients to achieve the desired goals (Teece *et al*., 1997). Other researchers discuss the effect of marketing capabilities on competitive niche strategies. We quote De Sousa *et al*. (2016) which confirm the significant relationship between marketing capabilities and concentration competitive strategies in the textile sector in Brazil. For its part, Parnell (2011) argues that a competitive concentration strategy requires specific attributes related to marketing capabilities in order to focus efforts on a particular market niche. Another panoply of research demonstrates the positive impact of market linkage capabilities on competitive strategic choices. On this point, Parnell (2011) establishes that market-link capabilities can be considered as catalysts for moving towards competitive niche strategies. Other researchers including Collis and Montgomery (2008) and Jusoh and Parnell (2008) certify the positive association between capabilities in the field of market linkage and the use of a competitive focus strategy. From a similar perspective, DeSarbo *et al*. (2005) show that firms with market relations capabilities essentially correspond to "defensive" firms.

However, De Sousa *et al*. (2016) in their empirical study of Brazilian firms in the textile sector do not prove the impact of technological capabilities on the differentiation competitive strategy. For their part, Chandler and Hank (1994) failed to provide empirical support for the relationship between cost-cutting resources and competitive cost-dominating strategies. Thus, with reference to these researchers we can formulate the following hypothesis:

- H_1: the strategic capabilities held have a positive effect on competitive strategies

The moderator role of the activity regime on the relationship between capabilities and strategic choices: To better understand the effect of the competitive environment dictated by the activity regime (exporter or no) on the relationship between strategic capabilities and strategic choices we aimed to study the moderating effect of the activity regime on this relationship. In fact, "a moderating variable is a variable that essentially, acts on the relationship between two other variables. It is a variable that systematically modifies the magnitude, intensity, direction and or form of the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable cited by Akermi and Roussel". Consequently, according to Akermi and Roussel, the observed link between the two variables changes according to the different levels of a third variable qualified as moderator. "This link can become stronger or weaker or become negative when it was positive without the intervention of the moderating variable". According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a moderating variable is "a qualitative variable (e.g., sex, race, social class) or quantitative (reward level) that influences the direction and or strength of the the relation between the independent variable and the dependent variable (...) An elementary moderating effect can be represented by an interaction between a principal independent variable and a factor that specifies the appropriate conditions of its impact on the dependent variable (...)".

To better substantiate our hypothesis we refer to Kaleka (2002) which based on the RBV, showed on a sample of small and medium-sized British manufacturing firms (employing up to 500 people) and having experience (minimum 5-year participation in commercial export operations), the effect of the resources and capabilities needed to create a competitive advantage (cost/product/service) stands out for exporting companies compared to other types of companies. Thus, this researcher has identified different combinations of export-related resources and capabilities (informational, customer relationship, product development and supplier relationship) that are necessary for the implementation of a creative strategy of competitive advantage (cost, service advantage and product advantage). Nevertheless, the ability to build lasting relationships with customers appears to be essential for achieving all three types of competitive advantage.

In a close perspective, Ling-Yee and Ogunmokun (2001) demonstrate that in order to gain a competitive advantage of cost and differentiation in export, firms must necessarily have the financial resources and the management skills of the supply chain export. In the same vein, Julien and Ramangalahy (2003) confirm that export-related capabilities and those of acquiring and managing information have a positive impact on competitive strategies for exporting firms. Except, the ability to perceive information seems to have no effect on the competitive strategy. More recently, Morgan *et al*. (2004) also show, through a quantitative study of 287 export activity units in the industrial sector, the weight of resources and skills in the determination of corporate strategy in an international context. In addition, these researchers are able to prove the moderating role of environmental factors on this relationship.

In the same vein, Kaleka (2011) confirms that experiential resources nurture customer relations and information capabilities and that financial resources support information and product development capabilities. According to this researcher, these customer-relationship and product-development capabilities can guide the competitive strategic choice of exporting companies toward achieving differentiation competitive advantage through service. By referring to the theory of dynamic capabilities, Li and Liu (2014) reveal in their turn, through an empirical study of 217 firms in China that dynamic capabilities have a markedly positive effect on competitive advantage. These claims were again demonstrated by Efrat *et al*. (2018) who after a survey of 213 Chinese exporting organizations, reveal that the dynamic capabilities for innovation, unpredictability and flexibility of tasks are positively related to competitive advantage. Only the adaptability capability shows a negative effect on competitive advantage. In addition, they found that for adaptability, innovation and tasks flexibility capabilities their impact on competitive advantage decreased with higher levels of competitive intensity and became insignificant. However, for the ability to unpredictability, its impact on competitive advantage becomes negative when competitive intensity increases.

In an Iranian context, Mohsenzadeh and Ahmadian (2016) empirically show that marketing and sales skills strongly determine competitive strategies for exporting firms. However, production and information skills do not show an effect on competitive strategies for these firms in the export market. In a recent study and examining a range of marketing capabilities, Kaleka and Morgan (2019), confirm on a sample of UK exporters, the positive impact of information and product development capabilities, both on marketing differentiation and domination by the costs. However, these researchers also prove the absence of the moderating role of the competitive intensity of the export market on the association between marketing capabilities and strategies of domination by costs or differentiation.

Referring to these guidelines and given the mixed results of this research on the effect of strategic capabilities on competitive strategies in an export activity regime, we propose to introduce the variable "activity regime" as a moderator variable to test its effect on the relationship between strategic capabilities and competitive strategic choices. Indeed, the competition is certainly more intense for companies working for export (international competition) who face major challenges in order to satisfy customers in a global context. However, competition is less intense when the firm only works in the local market. We assume then that the link between strategic capabilities and strategic choices differs depending on whether firms operate in an exporting regime or not. These presumptions and the resulting tests are meant to confirm the combined effect of competitive intensity (across the business regime) and strategic capabilities on competitive strategic choices. From these developments, the following hypothesis emerges:

- H_2: the business regime strengthens the positive relationship between resources and competitive strategies

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research methodology

Measurement of variables: With regard to the measurements of the constructs of the different strategic capacities we make use of the scales of measurement proposed by DeSarbo *et al*. (2005). With respect to competitive strategies, the scales chosen refer to the studies developed by Zhara and Covin and Le Roy who based their research on the work of Dess and Davis (1984), Kotha and Vadlamani (1995), Miller and Dess (1993) and Miller (1988).

The activity regime is a binary variable that takes the value 1 when the company is an exporter and 0 if not. For all the items on the chosen scales of measurement, respondents are asked to rate on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "very low" to 7 "very high" their attitudes towards the different variables of the study.

Sampling, administration and data collection: The selected sample includes companies operating in the textile and clothing, electrical, electronics and household appliances, chemical and food industries. This sample is heterogeneous and contains companies of small, medium and large size, any activity regime combined (exporting and non-exporting). The sampling method chosen is that of reasoned choice. After checking the validity of the questionnaire content (consensus validity and facial validity) by submitting it to the peer and expert assessment we put it to the test via a pre-test with 12 companies. Subsequently, we administered it according to the face-to-face mode in its final version with the directors (CEOs) of the companies surveyed. About 400 questionnaires were distributed of which only 236 were returned with a return rate of 59% but only 203 were exploitable and fully filled or 85.5%.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A number of conditions have been verified before testing hypothesis. In particular, the reliability and the dimensionality of the different scales chosen and this through a first purification by means of the PCA and the calculation of Cronbach's α then a second purification via. AFC. Subsequently, the use of the structural equations method, revealing a good quality of fit of the global model, enabled us to empirically validate the research hypotheses and obtain the following results. The relationship between strategic capabilities and competitive strategies is seen to be positive and significant, confirming H_1.

Similarly, the test of the moderating effect of the activity regime on competitive strategies is significant. However, the activity regime seems to change the sense of the positive relationship between strategic capabilities and competitive strategies. This relationship becomes negative under the effect of the activity regime as shown in Fig. 2. Hence, the rejection of H_2.

This model allowed us to obtain the information summarized in Table 1. The effect of the moderator variable "activity regime" on the relationship between strategic capabilities and pure competitive strategies can be schematized in Fig. 3.

Effect of strategic capabilities on competitive strategies without moderation effect: The global model test confirmed the positive effect of strategic capabilities on competitive strategies. This means in total concordance with our theoretical convictions and the attractive conclusions of Parnell (2011) that Tunisian firms wishing to succeed in their competitive strategic choices are invited to take on fortifying strategic capacities. This result seems in full compliance with the premises of the resource approach. In addition, the result we have achieved seems consistent with that of Weerawardena (2003) who through an empirical study is able to show the benefits of market-based learning capacity in the competitive strategy. It also corroborates the one found by De Sousa *et al*. (2016) on a sample of companies belonging to the Brasilian textile industry. We also join Chandler and Hanks (1994) and Ortega (2010) who have empirically proven the positive impact of technological capabilities in pursuing competitive differentiation strategies. This result also appears to be consistent with that of DeSarbo *et al*. (2005) which demonstrates that IT strategic capabilities play a major role in supporting competitive differentiation strategies. Our result is still in line with Collis and Montgomery (2008) and Jusoh and Parnell (2008) who show that the capabilities in the field of market connection serve as necessary precursors to the competitive niche strategy.

However, it should be kept in mind that our results partially contradict those found by Chandler and Hanks (1994) with companies in Northwestern Pennsylvania. It also appears to be in partial divergence from De Sousa *et al*. (2016) which justify the origin of the competitive strategy of differentiation of the companies of their sample by the acquisition of the equipment with incorporation of the technology and not by the research and development effort within these companies.

Moderating effect of the company's business regime on the relationship between strategic capabilities and competitive strategic choices: The results of the statistical tests of the impact of the activity regime on the relationship between strategic capabilities and pure competitive strategies are significant, thus, confirming that there is in fact a moderating effect exerted by the variable regime of business activity in the relationship between strategic resources and competitive strategies. However, contrary to our expectations, the activity regime has reversed the positive relationship that exists between strategic capabilities and pure competitive strategies, thus, reversing hypothesis (H_2). More specifically, the link between strategic capabilities and competitive strategies goes from positive to negative when the company operates in an export regime.

This result which does not correspond to our expectations and which contradicts the premises of the RBV can be explained by the fact that in the context of an exporting activity regime, the strategic capabilities under

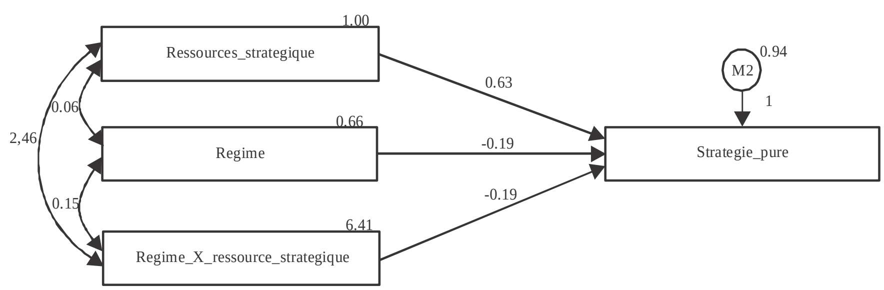

Fig. 2: Measurement model of the moderating effect of "activity regime" on the relationship between strategic capabilities and pure competitive strategies, RS: Strategic capabilities, SP: Pure competitive Strategy, REG: Business Regime

Table 1: The results of the moderation test of "activity regime" variable on the relationship between strategic resources and pure competitive strategies

	Estimated beta					
Variables	NS	S	SE	CR	p-values	Results
SP←RS	0.630	0.630	0.165	2.158	0.031	Significant
SP←Regime	-0.185	-0.151	0.084	-2.210	0.027	Significant
SP←REG_X_RS	-0.192	-0.488	0.115	-1.671	0.095	Significant

RS: Strategic capabilities; SP: Pure competitive Strategies; REG_X_RS: Factorial multiplication of the variable "activity regime" by the strategic capabilities variable NS: Not Standardized; S: Standardized

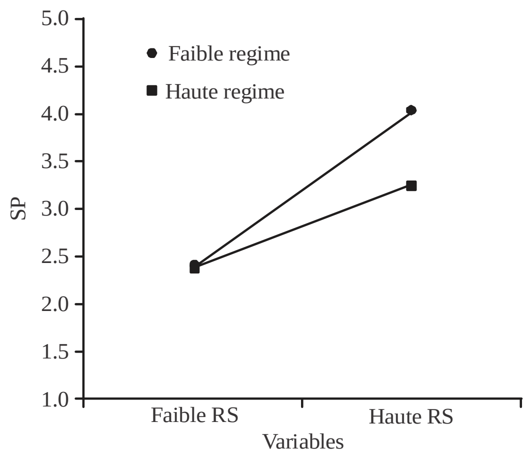

Fig. 3: Effect of the moderator variable "activity regime" on the relationship between strategic capabilities and pure competitive strategies

study prove to be insufficient to enable the company to pursue individually competitive strategies, satisfy the demand of highly demanding customers and face tough international competition. It is likely that some other resources not considered in this research, particularly financial are behind the direction towards these competitive strategies. In addition, it is possible that even companies with these capabilities are not seeking to pursue pure competitive strategies and instead are moving towards hybrid competitive strategies to meet the diverse requirements of a diverse customer base worldwide. In addition, it may be accepted that these companies have turned to cooperation or coopetition strategies to start expensive projects or to succeed in innovation in a highly competitive export market.

This result can also be explained by the fact that the weight of information, production and marketing capacities which are considered indispensable for export activity by many researchers Morgan *et al*. (2004) and Ritter (2006) is low by compared to other capabilities under study. The study of the exclusive effect of each type of capacity can bring more reliable results.

A third possible explanation for this result is that the capacities held by Tunisian firms are not sufficiently developed compared to those required for the pursuit of competitive strategies on the export marketor to those in occident countries where their positive effect on competitive strategies has been established. To do this, Tunisian companies, if they wish to face international competition and conquer the export markets, must seek to obtain and control capabilities that are truly rare, valuable, difficult to imitate and not substitutable.

This result corroborates that found by Efrat *et al*. (2018) that empirically prove the negative effect of adaptive capability on competitive advantage. We are also moving closer to Mohsenzadah and Ahmadian (2016) who provide empirical evidence that argues for the lack of relationship between production capabilities and competitive strategies as well as between information capabilities and competitive strategies. Our result is also relatively close to that of Julien and Ramangalahy (2003) who find a non-significant relationship between certain information capabilities and competitive strategies at export market. This result is as close to that of Navarro-Garcia *et al*. (2016) who deny the effect of human resources on export marketing mix strategies. Finally, we note that this result is relatively similar to that of Zou *et al*. (2003) who do not fail to confirm the lack of relationship between price marketing capabilities and cost competitive advantage as well as between the communication marketing capabilities and the competitive advantage of differentiation in the export markets.

However, this result seems to contradict Kaleka and Morgan (2019) who provide empirical assertions about the strong positive relationship between information, market relationship and product development strategic capabilities and the pursuit of both types of competitive strategies, cost and differentiation. This result also diverges from that of Zou *et al*. (2003) who find that product development capabilities and distribution capabilities play their full role in improving the differentiation advantage and that distribution and communication capabilities are positively related to the cost advantage on the export market. Our result is still in opposition to that proven by Li and Liu (2014) which confirm the positive and significant impact of dynamic capabilities on the competitive advantage for the export market. Similarly, our results are not in line with those of Ling-Yee and Ogunmokun (2001) which show well and truly the beneficial effect of financial resources and supply chain skills on both the competitive advantage of cost and differentiation.

Managerial implications: The results of this research can on the one hand, provide support to the RBV, arguing that resources are the determinants of strategic choices. Our results can also bring a lot of implications to managers of Tunisian companies that are exporting and non-exporting. These managers will thus gain a diagnostic guide that enables them to identify competitive strategic choices based on their strategic capabilities including managerial, technological, marketing, market linkage and information technology. Managers can therefore assess whether or not they have the strategic capabilities to develop competitive strategies. This result has refuted the literature claiming the inapplicability of Western theories to societies whose socio-economic conditions differ greatly (Lin and Germain, 2003).

The second managerial implication which can be drawn from the negative relationship between strategic capabilities and competitive strategies under the effect of the activity regime and which contradicts the basic principles of RBV can be addressed to exporting companies. For the latter, it appears that this stock of capacity seems to be insufficient in an exporting regime to be able to implement a competitive strategy individually. As a result, companies that aspire to export must have other strategic capabilities and resources that have not been studied here and that justify their use of these competitive strategies. These firms also likely need to think about reconfiguring their capabilities and implementing dynamic capabilities that may eventually support the pursuit of competitive strategies (Teece *et al*., 1997). Thus, faced with the challenges of the export market, Tunisian producers must take steps to promote these capabilities in order to support their competitive strategies. Indeed, the risk of not being able to meet the export expectations of the customer leads to a decrease in these companie's share of exports. Choosing the export requires to realizetenable and sustainable competitive advantagesin terms of cost or differentiation which cannot be ensured if the competitive strategy adopted does not correspond to the appropriate choice of capacity. As a result, these companies may become bogged down in the middle path.

Another lesson that can be drawn from our research is that companies operating as part of an exporting activity regime can use these capabilities under study to adopt other strategies including hybrid competitive, cooperative or coopetition. Our results can also be useful for companies in other emerging countries which in turn need to strengthen the strategic nature of their capabilities or build and control other capabilities or resources if they are thinking of moving towards exporting (Li and Liu, 2014). Finally, the present results can also send a message to the public authorities who must become aware of the complexity of the export experience and who must, therefore, initiate export promotion actions to help these companies to succeed in their competitive strategies at the export by achieving sustainable competitive advantages.

CONCLUSION

This research is part of the approaches of exporting business strategies including internal factors that explain competitive strategies. The current study, contributes to the enrichment of the debate on the determinants of competitive strategic choices of exports. This debate often focused solely on the antecedent of performance, explaining it directly through the possession of strategic capabilities without considering the impact of these capabilities on the pursuit of competitive strategies that may possibly explain the performance of these companies. Our study has the merit of showing that these strategic capabilities have considerable weight in determining competitive strategic choices. Nevertheless, the capabilities required under an export regime differ from those required locally, thus, confirming the moderating effect of the regime of activity on the relationship between strategic capabilities and competitive strategies.

However, some limitations of this research need to be raised. First, we discuss the heterogeneity of the sample gatheringcompanies from various sectors which can skew the results. Studying the moderating effect of the business sector on the relationship between strategic capabilities and competitive strategies can thus contribute to a better understanding of the subject.

Another limitation refers to our focus on studying the combined effect of different capabilities on competitive strategies which can skew the results. Separate study of the effect of each proposed capability on competitive strategies can better clarify and distinguish the heaviest capabilities. In addition, other resources and capacities, including financial resources and knowledge may provide further clarification. We also can not ignore the importance of the ability to integrate, construct and reconfigure the resources that matter in an environment marked by rapid change (Teece *et al*., 1997) thus, calling into question our use of a static approach (RBV) to base our work. Studying the effect of dynamic capabilities on competitive strategic choices could potentially enrich the explanatory power of the model (Efrat *et al*., 2018).

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