

The role of trust in shaping information collection behavior of exporters¹

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Abstract

Consistent with the literature on market orientation and interorganizational relations, this study develops and tests a conceptual model for performance in export relationships. Information generation is the first of the three market orientation dimensions discussed by Kohli and Jaworski (1990). The behavior of exporters in collecting information is posited to be influenced by the exporter's trust in its foreign channel partner. Data from 285 Norwegian exporters in the "bio"-industry (food and wood) was collected. We find that trust correlates positively with information collection from the representative and negatively with information collection from other sources. However, information from both these sources contributes positively to export performance. The longer the relationship has lasted, the more effect information gathering from other sources will have. Implications for management and research are discussed.

1. Introduction

Companies aiming to attain success in exporting face a wide range of decisions. Initially, a choice has to be made concerning the type of product to be launched internationally, the most appealing export market(s) and the most suitable entry strategy in the chosen market(s). The various decisions are obviously interrelated in the sense that a given decision at one stage has implications for the decision to be taken at the next stage. Sound decision-making requires the gathering of information concerning the likely outcomes of the different alternatives available at a given stage. The type of information and the sources used will vary according to the stage of the decision process. When screening possible export markets secondary data published by governmental sources or international organizations may be relevant and useful, while the appropriate marketing-mix in an established export market will require other types of information and other sources.

Exporters often rely upon foreign intermediaries and establish a channel relationship with agents or distributors to achieve their objectives (Sachdev, Bello and Verhage 1995). At a general level the middlemen chosen as «partners» are also one of the most important sources of information (Benito, Solberg and Welch 1993). Obviously, the partner does not have to be the sole source of information. Conceivably, the exporter may choose to gather relevant information from other sources (e.g. final consumers, other middlemen, competitors) to supplement the information provided by the «partner». The total amount of resources that should be devoted to information gathering - invariant of the source - is also worth considering. Once established in an export market with a foreign intermediary as partner, there are at least two reasons why information is needed by the exporter. First, the scope as well as the extent of

information needed will depend upon the functional «division of labor» between the exporter and the middleman. The less responsibility left to the partner the more information is needed by the exporter to make appropriate decisions. Second, the exporter may want information to control the performance of the partner. Lack of trust and fear of opportunistic behavior are the driving force in the latter case.

The aim of the present paper is to develop a model to analyze the relationship between the exporters' information behavior and export performance. The focal question is to what extent - if any - information behavior exerts a separate influence on export performance and trust in the partner influences information behavior. We are not aware of any studies that have addressed this issue specifically, but there are at least three streams of literature that are relevant in our context . In the next section, a short review of the literature concerning the *internationalization process*, *the market orientation* literature, and *channel relationship* studies is undertaken. Building upon this review, a model and a series of hypotheses are put forward, and then tested empirically. The paper concludes with implications for management and research.

2. Literature Review

The importance of information - or more generally knowledge - in the process of internationalization was pointed out by early contributors to the «internationalization process school» (Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul 1975, Johanson and Vahlne 1977). The «internationalization theory» suggests that companies gradually build up increased knowledge about foreign markets, which leads to increased commitment to internationalization by the managers. The process is continuous, and as more

knowledge is acquired the perceived risk of deeper involvement is reduced and the company will enter more distant (measured by psychic or cultural distance) markets as well as utilize more resource-demanding entry modes.

Knowledge is a more general concept than information. Seringhaus and Rosson (1990) argue that «The company that is knowledgeable about exporting will be able to determine what information to collect and how to use it, to a greater extent than their less knowledgeable counterparts. While based on information then, knowledge is clearly a much broader concept, guiding the company in all its endeavours. In a sense knowledge is a special resource that is present to varying degrees in companies. Like other resources, we should recognize that, without husbanding and replenishment, export knowledge will be depleted over time» (pp.154-55).

The internationalization process theory posits that the learning process comes primarily about through experience in the market. Johanson and Vahlne (1990) maintain that «experiential knowledge generates business opportunities and is consequently a driving force in the internationalization process». Experiential knowledge is acquired as part of a process you are involved in, and cannot be attained by formalized market information systems without involvement. It is reasonable to assume that a major part of the experiential knowledge has to be generated in informal ways. The importance of informal information gathering is supported by a number of studies. Cunningham and Spiegel (1971) identified personal visits of company executives to their overseas markets as the main source of market information. Benito et al. (1993) also found that in general informal information gathering was the most widely used method of gathering export marketing information. On the other hand,

notable differences were found between companies. In particular, large companies that relied heavily on exports used more formal information sources. The sources of information were also to a larger extent external to the exporter-middleman dyad (foreign consultants, industry associations, statistical information etc.) while the smaller firms mainly relied upon their local partners.

For our purpose, the importance attached to market knowledge by the internationalization process literature is worth noting. The main focus of this literature is, however, on the decisions that are being made in the initial stages of internationalization (e.g. choice of market, choice of entry strategy). The literature does not analyze information behavior as such, but mainly regards information and knowledge as byproducts of the internationalization process. The prominent position given to experiential knowledge in this literature is corroborated by the many studies that have found that informal information sources are particularly important for small companies with limited exports.

The importance of information gathering is an integral part of the market orientation concept, which recently has attracted a lot of interest in marketing. By the late 1980s, market orientation was typically identified as market information collection and usage (Siguaw et al. 1997). Two contributions - by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990) - have since exerted great influence on the literature. Marketing orientation was defined by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) as "the organizationwide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs, dissemination of the intelligence across departments, and organizationwide responsiveness to it" (p.6). Though the definition highlights the importance of

information processing regarding customer needs and preferences, the scope of information is defined wider. Both end users and distributors are included, and it is explicitly stated that information regarding exogenous factors "such as government regulations, technology, competitors and other environmental forces" should be taken into account.

Narver and Slater (1990) maintained that "market orientation consists of three behavioral components - customer orientation, competitor orientation, and interfunctional coordination - and two decision criteria - long-term focus and profitability. Customer orientation and competitor orientation include all of the activities involved in acquiring information about the buyers and competitors in the target market and disseminating it throughout the business(es)" (p.21). In later studies (e.g. Slater and Narver, 1994), market orientation has been limited to the three behavioral components, while long-term focus and profitability are viewed as consequences of market orientation. In doing this, the approach originally suggested by Narver and Slater is modified and brought closer to the definition proposed by Kohli and Jaworski. As the literature on market orientation has evolved, various refinements of the original definitions have been put forward by various authors and different measurement scales have been developed (Despandé and Farley 1996, see Sandvik (1997) for an in-depth analysis of the market orientation concept).

The market orientation literature is general in the sense that the theory is not developed specifically for companies facing international challenges, let alone for exporters in particular. Comparing the internationalization process literature with the market orientation literature, the common denominator is the importance attached to

information gathering and knowledge generation. The market orientation literature specifies to a larger extent the scope of information required (consumer, distributor, competitor etc) but does not place much importance on the *method* of information collection. As we have seen, the internationalization process literature underlines the importance of experiential knowledge and it has been demonstrated empirically that exporters to a large extent rely upon personal and informal ways of gathering information. The market orientation concept is multidimensional, and information gathering is only one of three dimensions regarded as equally important. The dissemination and implementation dimensions are more implicit in the internationalization process literature. Furthermore, work in the market orientation tradition is much more concerned with developing rigorous measurement models for the concepts involved.

Empirical work has demonstrated that exporters - in particular small companies - to a large extent rely upon market information from their channel partners in foreign markets. These middlemen may provide information about their own needs as well as the needs of the ultimate consumers, inform about competitor actions, governmental regulations etc. While collecting information from all of these areas are considered part of the market orientation construct, this stream of literature does not address the source of information utilized by the company - in our case the exporter. In principle, the information collected concerning for instance trends in consumer preferences may be acquired in a number of ways. One of these ways is to rely upon reports from the middleman which the exporter is currently working with in the market. Another way may be to undertake independent research, either in-house or by soliciting external agencies. The choice of information strategy pursued by the exporter is deemed to

depend on the relationship established between the exporter and the middleman, both when it comes to the functional responsibilities of the two partners contained in the contract (explicit or implicit) and the degree of trust established between them.

The exporter-middleman channel may be organized and governed in different ways. The choice between using a foreign distributor or a foreign agent has been analyzed from a transaction cost perspective by Bello and Lohtia (1995). It is argued that in terms of market governance the use of a distributor represents a market solution, while the use of an agent is a quasi-integrative type of governance structure. According to Root (1987) «the distributor takes on a full range of responsibilities, but is more difficult to control than the agent» (p.62). The agent is mainly responsible for the selling function and earns a sales commission. The selling and buyer contact functions are the most difficult for the exporter to integrate because these functions require unique familiarity with the local market and acceptance by local buyers. Bello and Lohtia (1995) find that various transaction and production cost indicators discriminate between the use of the two types of middlemen.

The observation that lasting relationships often develop between exchange partners has formed the basis for a reconsideration of the traditional focus on *transactions* in marketing (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987). Even if the emergence of long-lasting relationships may be explained based upon an «economics of organization» type of reasoning, the relationship marketing paradigm typically rely upon behavioral concepts like commitment and trust (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Stern and Reve (1980) argued that the traditional disparate economic and behavioral approaches to channel research should be viewed as complementary, each focusing on a part of the relevant

entity only. In accordance with this view the use of trust has been regarded as an alternative to price and authority in governing a relationship (Braddach and Eccles 1989; Haugland and Reve 1994).

In an export channel context Johnson and Raven (1996) have explored how *relationship quality* will affect export channel outcome as measured by satisfaction and performance. Relationship quality may be defined in various ways, and constructs like trust, absence of opportunistic behavior, cooperation and stability may be included (Johnson et al. 1993). In Johnson and Raven (1996) it was examined in terms of fairness, commitment, cooperation and communication intensity. Communication intensity was found to result in more cooperation and commitment, but no support was found for the proposed link between communication intensity and satisfaction and for the proposed link between communication intensity and performance.

3. Conceptual Model

Based upon the literature review information collection should have an impact on performance. Reliable and valid information is necessary to make optimal decisions and we assume that the exporters will not engage in information collection for its own sake.

Information is a multidimensional construct, and in this study we have decided to focus on the sources of information used by the exporters. The setting is established exporter – representative dyads. It seems reasonable to assume that the more the exporter trusts his representative, the more he/she is used as a source of information regarding the market and the less other sources are consulted. Exporter performance

is, however, likely to improve with more information regardless of the source utilized. In this context, the duration of the relationship may have a moderating effect. Collecting information from other sources may be more important when the relationship has lasted for a long time. Information provided by the partner may be more reliable initially in the formative stages of the relationship. If the exporter continues to utilize the representative as the sole provider of information, he/she may be tempted to conceal "unpleasant" pieces of information and dedicate less resources in general to promoting the interests of the exporter. The general model is depicted in Figure 1.

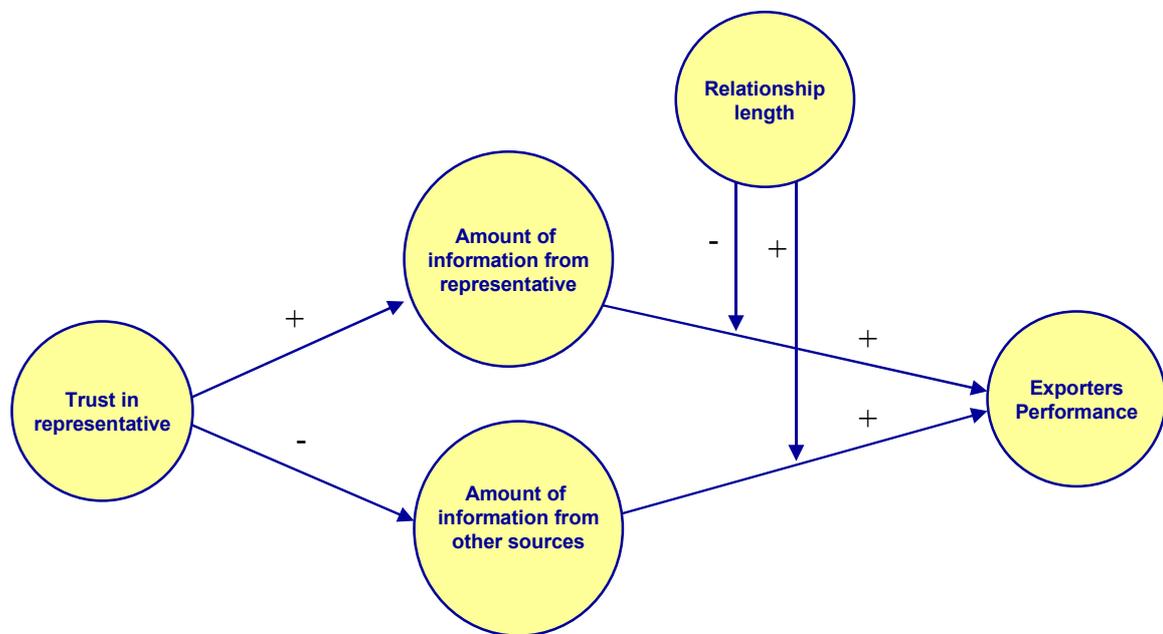


Figure 1. The conceptual model

Trust and Information Collection: There are many benefits related to the development of relations and thereby trust in relationships (Morgan and Hunt 1994, Heide 1994, Heide and John 1992, Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987, Kaufman and Stern 1988, 1992). First, it will be easier to communicate across the organizational

boundaries. Second, development of trust will make companies more prone to disclose information, which they under other circumstances would conceal. This again may reduce the tendency to opportunistic behavior. Trust has been called “a fundamental relationship model building block” (Wilson 1995) and involve confidence that the other party will behave in a fair, non-coercive, concerned manner (Rotter 1967).

According to Noordewier, John and Nevin (1990) the impact of norms (including information sharing) on performance is higher when uncertainty is high than when uncertainty is low. Exporters relations with their trading partners in different countries will normally take place under high uncertainty. As a result; trust, personal relations and sentiments should play a significant role in many companies international engagement, since the level of uncertainty normally will be higher than in their domestic and more familiar markets. It also seems to be a general agreement both in the business and the research communities that trust and relations can contribute to increase companies’ competitive ability (Morgan and Hunt 1994). One form of trust is identification based; this manifestation of trust is defined as “the highest order of trust which assumes that one party has fully internalized the other’s preferences” (Shapiro, Sheppard and Cheraskin 1992). Trust is seen as development over time, where the companies involved in exchanges learn to know each other. Long-run relationships offer better opportunities to reduce waste, and increase quality (e.g. Håkansson et al 1982). The exporter’s trust in its partner is also specially preferred when the knowledge about the local market is low. An effective strategy dealing with products connected with performance ambiguity (i.e. difficulty evaluating the quality of the product) is to use trust as a governance mechanism. As argued by Siguaw, Simpson

and Baker (1997) individuals trust organizations that allow open communication and the opportunity to participate. Exporters gather information to satisfy customer and market needs. Partners in foreign markets perceive greater trust in exporters who are market oriented (e.g. Siguaw, Simpson and Baker 1997). The access to valid information from the partner will therefore as a result be greater, when there is high trust. On the other hand trusting behavior creates trust. Exporters who trust their partners will be likely to collect trusted information from the partner, rather than from the other sources. This gives us hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1: The higher trust in the representative the (a) more information is collected from the representative and (b) less information is collected from other sources.

Information Collection and Performance: Export performance has been the subject of a growing body of studies (see for instance Madsen 1987, Axinn 1988, Aaby and Slater 1989, Cavusgil and Zou 1994, Bello and Gilliland 1997, Diamantopoulos 1998, Shoham 1998). It has been linked to factors such as export commitment (Aaby and Slater 1989), adaptation of marketing mix as well as distributor support (Cavusgil and Zou (1994) and control (Bello and Gilliland 1997). However, as far as we know the possible link between performance and the information collection behavior of exporters has not been investigated. Indeed, Benito et al (1993) examined the impact of export share – a performance measure used by some authors (Cavusgil and Zou

1994) - on such behavior, but they found only scant differences between different groups of exporters.²

In an unfamiliar and changing environment the exporter needs information to be able to make the optimal decisions. Information collection is an important dimension of the market orientation construct, and it is argued in that stream of literature that more market orientation will entail an increased performance. We assume that exporters will not collect information without utilizing the information as a basis for decisions, and therefore information dissemination and implementation - the two other dimensions of market orientation – have not been measured.

Information should have a positive influence on performance irrespective of the source utilized, given that the information acquired is reliable and valid. In our conceptual model we have made a distinction between the representative in the foreign market and all other sources of information. In both cases we expect more information to be beneficial:

Hypothesis 2a: There is a positive correlation between the extent of information collection by exporters from their representative and export performance.

Hypothesis 2b: There is a positive correlation between the extent of information collection by exporters from other sources and export performance.

² Also export share is a measure with only limited value when measuring the overall export performance of firms. It only includes one element of a long range of factors constituting the concept of export performance. For a further discussion – see section on measurement in this paper.

The moderating role of relationship length: Ford and Rosson (1982) suggest that the exporter-foreign representative dyad goes through a number of phases – new, growing, troubled, static, inert. Lye (1998) suggests a “smoother” development pattern – from introduction to decline - akin to the relationship development process taking place between buyer and seller as suggested by Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987). During the development of the relationship from the introduction to the mature phase, the company learns the “ins and outs” of the representative. Long term relationships between the exporter and its foreign representatives are therefore deemed to be associated with extensive exchange of information. On the other hand, firms in the early phases of their internationalization are typically inhibited by limited resources – both financially and in terms of management (Seringhaus and Rosson 1990). In the present context this implies that the exporter new to a market may have to make short-cuts in its information collection, leaning chiefly on the one link it has to the market: its local representative. The information from the representative is therefore deemed to play a relatively larger role in the first phases of the relationship, and consequently, it will have a greater impact on the firm’s export performance. We therefore postulate:

*Hypothesis 3a: The effect of information collection from the representative on performance will be **stronger** in relationships having lasted a short time than in relationships having lasted a long time.*

Conversely, as the relationship evolves, the exporter will normally get more embedded in the different networks of other players in the market – customers, competitors, other middlemen, government agencies etc. Information from the partner

will consequently most likely be supplemented with information from sources external to the relationship with the partner. Furthermore, the capability of the exporter to adopt the information thus collected is deemed to be better for “old timers” than for “newcomers”, as the former are supposed to have a better skills of sorting out relevant information. Hence:

*Hypothesis 3b: The effect of information collection from other sources on performance will be **stronger** in relationships having lasted a long time than in relationships having a lasted short time.*

4. Method

Research setting and sample

The research hypotheses were examined in the context of Norwegian exporters of bio-products and their relationship with their local representatives in their most important export market. Based on Kompass Norge (1999 edition) – a Norwegian industry directory and a list received from The Norwegian Seafood Export Council, we randomly selected and interviewed altogether 285 Norwegian exporters among 1,089 firms in the combined sample frame. These were distributed as follows: (1) Fishing industry n= 151, (2) Forest related industry n=117 and (3) Agriculture industry n=17. The interviews were carried out by telephone.

Measures

Performance: A number of writers have operationalized and examined export performance from different angles (see for instance Madsen 1987, Axinn 1988,

Cavusgil and Zou 1994, Bello and Gilliland 1997, Shoham 1998, Styles 1998). The present survey has adapted the scale developed by Styles for its robustness in a cross national comparative study (UK and Australia). The items used were: 1) You have achieved a good foothold in this market, 2) You have achieved to strengthen your market share in this market, 3) You have a better profitability in this market than the overall profitability of the firm, 4) You have a good profitability in this market, 5) The exports to this market has succeeded particularly well the last five years, 6) Your most important competitors would claim that your firm has succeeded especially well in this market. The items are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

Amount of information: The measures of information collection were developed for this study as formative scales. We assessed the different sources of information directly by asking about the amount or degree of information collected from the representative and from other sources about the specific market and about the partner. The measures are; to what degree is the information that you possess about this specific market collected from: (1) The representative (2) Other sources. To what degree is the information that you possess about this representative and the results that the representative obtains collected from: (1) The representative (2) Other sources. This gives us four items that reflect both the amount of information from who and about what. The items are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from “to a small extent” to “to a large extent”.

Trust in representative: This scale is mainly based on the Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande (1992), and reflects trust in a way that is closely related to risk. The measures are: (1) Your company is willing to let the representative make important

market decisions without your involvement. (2) Your company trusts the representative to get the job done right without the need of monitoring during the relationship. (3) Your company trusts the representative to do things that we can't do ourselves. (4) The representative is reliable. (5) We generally trust our representative to a great extent. Item 1, 2, 3 and 5 is based on Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande (1992) and item 4 is added based on prior research on trust and the formal definition of trust suggested by these authors. The items are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Relationship length: Relationship length was measured by the following question: "How long have your company exported through this representative?". The exporters were asked to indicate the number of years the relationship had lasted. In the data analysis the sample is split in two: short term relationships (less than five years) and long term relationships (more than five years).

5. Analysis and results

Measurement model: The development of the measurement model was conducted in several phases. First we used factor analysis in SPSS to examine the items. The information items were tested by the use of principal component analysis as extraction method and oblimin as rotation method. The results from the test are reported in table 1. The items loaded on two distinct factors. Further we tested all constructs in LISREL 8 one by one. All constructs showed a satisfactory construct validity (the results from these tests can be obtained from the authors).

Table 1
Discriminant validity of degree of information collection

	Amount of Information from partner	Amount of information from other sources
Representative about market	.917	
Representative about partner	.813	
Other sources about market		.873
Other sources about partner		.805

Reliability: The reflective constructs trust and performance all show a satisfactory reliability. The results are provided in table 2.

Table 2
Reliability and descriptive data

	Number of items	Alpha	n	Mean	Standard deviation
Amount Information from partner	2	na	250	3.7	1.1
Amount Information from other sources	2	na	256	2.7	1.1
Trust	5	.73	250	4.0	0.8
Performance	5	.78	285	3.8	0.8
Long-run ties	1	na	244	8.6	9.3

Discriminant validity: Discriminant validity of the constructs deals with to what extent the constructs are different from each other, and thus non-redundant. Table 2 provide the results, and none of the constructs are highly correlated, and thus discriminant validity can be claimed to be satisfactory.

Test of hypotheses: Since the test of convergent and discriminant validity above were satisfactory the conceptual model can be tested. We tested the five hypotheses outlined earlier by using regression analysis. First we tested the effect of trust on the two sources of information. Then we tested the effect of both sources of information

on performance. Tests of the moderating effect of relationship length were also conducted. The results are listed in table 4 through 7.

Table 3
Correlation matrix of the constructs

	Performance	Trust	Information from representative	Information from other sources	# years
Performance	1.000				
Trust	.127	1.000			
Information from representative	.152*	.278*	1.000		
Information from other sources	.047	-.237*	-.352*	1.000	
# years	-.004	.147	.112	-.103	1.000

* significant at the 0.01 level (one-tailed)

Table 4
Regression analysis for the effect of trust on exporters information collecting and performance

	Amount of information from representative	Amount of information from other sources	Performance
Trust in representative	0.28 ^a (4.58) ^b	-.24 (- 3.79)	.12 (1.80)
Amount of information from representative			.21 (3.01)
Amount of information from other sources			.12 (1.72)
R ²	.08	.06	.06
Adjusted R ²	.07	.05	.05
F-ratio	20.49	14.39	5.20
dfn, dfd	1, 244	1, 242	3, 239

^a : Standardized regression coefficients, ^b :T-values > 1.282 are significant p < 0.10, T-values > 1.645 are significant p < 0.05, T-values > 2.326 are significant p < 0.01 (one-tailed test).

According to the results in table 4, H1 is supported. More trust in the partner leads the exporter to collect more information from the partner (beta = .28, $p < 0.01$) and less information from other sources (beta = - .24, $p < 0.01$).

Furthermore, the figures indicate that amount of information from the representative (beta = .21, $p < 0.01$) and from other sources (beta = .12, $p < 0.05$) has a positive and unique influence on exporter performance. Hypotheses 2a and 2b are therefore confirmed. The effect of trust as a control variable on performance is also significant (beta = .12, $p < 0.05$).

Table 5 indicates that relationship length has a moderating effect. Amount of information from partner has a stronger effect on performance in relationships that has lasted less than five years (beta = .31, $p < 0.01$) than in long term relationships (beta = .18, $p < 0.05$). Hence, H3a is supported.

Table 5
Regression analysis tests of the moderating effects of relationship duration

	Relationship length	
	Longer that 5 years	Less than 5 years
Amount of information from partner	.18 ^a (1.93) ^b	.31 (3.19)
Amount of information from other sources	.25 (2.67)	.02 (0.16)
R ²	.07	.09
Adjusted R ²	.05	.08
F-ratio	4.23	5.95
dfn, dfd	(2, 115)	(2, 116)

^a : Standarized regression coefficients ^b : T-values > 1.296 are significant $p < 0.10$, T-values > 1.671 are significant $p < 0.05$, T-values > 2.39 are significant $p < 0.01$ (one-tailed test).

Hypothesis 3b is also supported. The effect of amount of information from other sources on performance is higher in relationships that has lasted longer than five years (beta = .25, $p < 0.01$) and insignificant for relationships that have lasted less than five years (beta = .02, NS).

6. Summary and Conclusions

Our analysis confirms that trust in export partner seems to play an important role in the choice of information source used by the exporter. The more the exporter trusts its partner the more it will rely on the latter to collect market information. In the same vein, the less its trusts its partner the more information will be sought from other sources. The data also suggest that the effects of information from partners are greater (beta=0.21) than that from other sources (beta=0.12). Also the length of the relationship moderates the effects of the information collection on performance: the longer the relationship the greater the effect of information from “other” sources on performance.

An important implication of these findings is that information - although the explained variance is limited – correlates positively and significantly with performance. In other words it pays off to collect information, both from the partner and from other sources. The low explained variance is not surprising given other factors (strategy and environment) having a far greater direct influence on performance. The greater importance of information from the partner may be “economic” in the sense that the exporter has limited resources and that “it is not necessary” to get information from alternative sources as long as the partner is

trustworthy and knowledgeable. On the other hand, using information from other sources enhances export performance. Therefore exporters should consider complementary information even in cases of good relationships with their partners.

The data also suggest that trust may be hazardous. We found that information collected from other sources has greater impact ($\beta=0.25$) on performance in long lasting relations than information from the partner ($\beta=0.18$). On the other hand we found that trust correlated negatively with search through this source of information ($\beta=-0.24$). One may therefore presume that too much trust leads the exporter to rely solely on information from the representative and that – as a result – it will be subject to opportunistic behavior by the latter. The control element that is embedded in “other sources” seems to be particularly important in situations where the exporter trusts the partner.

Whereas length of the relationship seems to be a critical moderating factor, we have not examined whether length of presence in the market (as that the exporter may have switched partner over the years) has some moderating impact on the role of different information sources. The effect of experience in the market (and not only with the representative) should be the object of a follow up study. Furthermore, the information constructs used in this research should be supplemented with other measures such as satisfaction to see if they behave in the same way. Also, we have earlier in this paper argued that control information (on the partner and its activities) differs from market information (about general market conditions). The two load together in the factor analysis. However, theoretically the two concepts are distinct and – given the appropriate operationalization – should be analyzed separately.

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