

INTERNATIONALISATION FACTORS- COMPETENCY, COMMITMENT AND COORDINATION: A STUDY ON WOMEN- OWNED SMES

Norfarah Nordin * , A.K. Siti-Nabiha , Nur Farah Mohd Noordin 

Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

E-mail: norfarah@usm.my

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of competency on internationalisation orientation through the mediation of commitment to learning and coordination. This study also examines the moderation effect of length of business in international new ventures (INVs) on the model. This research focused on INVs belongs to women SMEs in Malaysia. Length of business since inception is hypothesised to interact with commitment and coordination, and thus leads to stronger effect on internationalisation orientation. Quantitative research employing a cross-sectional survey is the method chosen for the research design. These hypothesised relationships are tested using mediation effect test whereas, moderation effect test performed using product indicator approach employing Partial Least Squares-SEM technique. Survey data collected from 154 owned by women entrepreneurs. The samples selected based on directories of exporters in Malaysia employing purposive sampling. The research found commitment to learning and coordination are significant mediators transmitting the effect of competency towards internationalization orientation. The moderation effect of length of a business, also found to be significantly strengthens the effect from coordination towards internationalisation orientation, and strengthen the effect of commitment towards internationalization orientation.

Research paper

Keywords: Women, Internationalisation, Competency, Commitment, Coordination, Small medium-sized enterprise, Women

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Introduction

Despite being the subject of wide-ranging research on internationalisation, there is no apparent answer to how internationalisation occurs among the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Psychology and behaviour perspective are chosen to conceptualise this phenomenon. Backed by the Dynamic Capability View theory, the conceptual model for internationalisation orientation is proposed.

Internationalization orientation refers to the firm's behavioural tendency to involve in the process of expanding the firm's footprints beyond the home country, by branching out into international markets (Nurcholis, 2021; Acedo & Jones, 2007). Based on Oviatt & McDougall (2005) a firm that has the internationalisation orientation creates products or services based on their outlook into the opportunities across national borders. They are sometimes dubbed as global factories. These firms actively evaluate, exploit and discover opportunities and more focused on borderless world. This type of firm is called the international new ventures (INVs) or born-global company (Covin & Miller, 2014).

In Malaysia, the small and medium-sized enterprise (SMEs) INVs are mentored to develop their export competency (MATRADE, 2022). The mentoring involves; networking, training, and learning exposure to develop key competency prior to venturing into international trade business. The purpose of this paper is to develop understanding on how selected aspects of psychology i.e., commitment to learning and coordination mediate the relationship between exporters' competency and internationalisation orientation. The study focused on women-owned INVs in Malaysia.

The study is drawn from the fact that in Malaysia there are many programmes served as launchpad for INVs in particular SMEs to penetrate into international markets. Undoubtedly, exporters' competency of INVs is the focus of the programmes. In 2022 the Malaysian government allocated 6.584 million ringgits to Ministry of Entrepreneur and Cooperatives Development (MECD) for SMEs including the INVs for training, capital, development and related assistance. Despite the support, INVs in Malaysia have challenges surviving beyond its tenth birthdate and achieve minimal growth in sales (Shalizi, 2021). Consequently, this will have a significant impact on government budget and deterioration of internationalisation orientation behaviour, and thus huge loss to the countries' export market growth (Ghauri et al., 2021).

This paper is structured as follows. The next section presents the theoretical background of research, followed by literature reviews on women-owned SMEs and internationalization efforts in Malaysia. The subsequent section discussed the methodology of the research. This follows by the findings and conclusion.

Theoretical Background

Research on entrepreneurial behaviour and internationalisation orientation has seen much interest among the entrepreneurship scholar. However, there is a scarcity of research relating to the dynamic nature of INVs and in particular women-owned INVs in Malaysia (Noor et al., 2022; Alam et al., 2012). Internationalisation orientation, is a useful indicator for predicting the growth of sales in particular export products. Based on Abdul-Talib & Abd-Razak (2013), among the challenges faced by INVs are uncertainty in the laws, regulation and market volatility throughout the value chain. Therefore,

(a) dynamic capability view and (b) socially situated cognition perspectives provide pathways to explain entrepreneurship behaviour such as internationalisation orientation.

Dynamic capability view

Leveraging on the dynamic capability view (DCV) theory (Teece et al., 1997; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000) the theoretical framework of this study is concerned with improving INVs internationalisation orientation. DCV theoretically adopted for this study because of the competitiveness and the nature of internationalization exposes INVs to a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment in which INVs must be exercising their thinking (cognition) and commitment to learning to sustaining internationalisation. This is called for the firm's dynamic capability.

According to DCV theory, control over the firm's in-bound resources (e.g., commitment, tolerance to ambiguity, proactivity, risk perception) provides many benefits including enhancing the firm's growth and performance. The essential components of the DCV are related to identifying strategic organizational processes/competency, reconfiguring resources (integrating, gaining, and releasing), and identifying the path to follow to attain competitive advantage that is through internationalisation of ones' entrepreneurial venture (Acedo & Jones, 2007; Teece et al., 1997; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000).

Socially Situated Cognition Perspective

The notion of 'internationalisation orientation' is one that to date is not well understood. At the level of firm, the conceptual framework has been

developed to study the factors contributed to internationalisation orientation of women-owned international new venture (INVs). It is hypothesised that psychological factors (such as commitment to learning and coordination) are mediating the effect of cognitive factor (i.e., competency) towards behaviour (i.e., internationalization orientation). In other words, the conceptual framework centres on the how these psychological factors exert the effect of cognitive factor towards the desired outcome behaviour such as internationalisation orientation.

Conceptual Framework

From the premise that INVs' owner/manager plays a fundamental role in creating their firm's internationalisation strategy (Nummela et al., 2004; Zahra & George, 2002; Harveston et al., 2000), this research aims to examine the mediating effect of commitment to learning and coordination in the relationship between export competency towards internationalization orientation. Past researches claimed the need to link proper factor to stimulate competency in order to sustain INVs' involvement in internationalisation (Teece, 2012).

While commitment in learning and coordination capability are important, competency in exporting market is the prerequisite condition for developing internationalisation orientation. What has been missing in current discourse on internationalisation orientation research is a framework to systematically examine internationalisation orientation factors from the philosophy of psychology. This research conceptualises the relationship between commitment, coordination and competency, and explain how they affect the internationalization orientation. Moreover, the conceptual model illustrates

the order of these factors in affecting internationalisation by using data from women-owned INVs in Malaysia. These issues are less researched in the internationalisation and entrepreneurship hence, this paper is attempting to close this literature gap.

Without commitment to learning, many INVs will dissolve when faced with challenges. If there is one precursor to sustain the international business, it is the commitment to learning (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Navarro et al., 2010a; Navarro et al., 2010b; Da Rocha et al., 2012). However, past literature on internationalisation overlooked the psychological discourse of commitment to learning construct. In this research, commitment to learning is viewed as a disposition, and ability in controlling them is part of strategy to increase internationalisation. Since SMEs might not believe they have control over their commitment, developing this skill through training is necessary. Many entrepreneurs mistaken commitment with feeling of excitement. In fact, commitment in this study is considered a conscious act to be devoted. Therefore, the first research objective is to examine the mediation effect of commitment on the relationship between export competency and internationalization orientation among women-owned SMEs in Malaysia.

Another precursor of internationalisation is coordination. Coordination is the ability to organize, collaborate and work together with the people in the value chain (Reeves et al., 2018). SMEs' ability to coordinate depends on employees' skills. Coordinating international business requires the ability in organizing complex activities from upstream to downstream of the business value chain. On the other hand, coordination is attributed to SMEs' absorption capacity and apply new knowledge (Abdulaal & Nordin, 2020). Equally important is knowledge management skill and networking (Dow et al, 2017).

Acquiring new information and coordinating them wisely, leads to prospecting new opportunity within the business value chain. Innovation is possible for SMEs with coordinated team (Abdulaal & Nordin, 2023). Through excellent coordination SMEs are able to turn information received from within and from outside of their own company into innovation (Farida & Setiawan, 2022). Therefore, the second research objective is to examine the mediating effect of export coordination on the relationship between export competency and internationalization orientation among women-owned SMEs in Malaysia.

This study also hypothesised the moderating effect of length of business on relationship between commitment and coordination towards internationalisation orientation in the model. Therefore, the third research objective is to examine the moderation effect of Length-of-Business on the relationship between commitment and internationalization orientation among women-owned SMEs in Malaysia. Lastly, the fourth research objective is to examine the moderation effect of Length-of-Business on the relationship between Export coordination and internationalization orientation among women-owned SMEs in Malaysia.

Consequently, the following is the proposed research framework for this study.

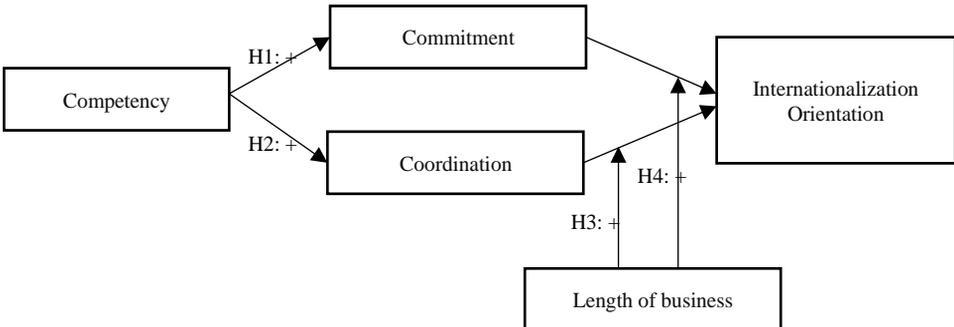


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework

In the next section, the development of hypotheses based on the above research objectives is discussed.

Construction of Research Hypotheses

Export competencies are important in an international business venture (Julien & Ramangalahy, 2003; Kumlu, 2014; Naidoo, 2010; Young, 2005). To compete successfully in the international business, exporters SMEs must be able to generate, disseminate and respond effectively to new information and technology related to export business. All three of these activities i.e., generate, disseminate and respond, are affected by the knowledge and experience found within the companies, or among the employees (Alinasab et al., 2022). Competency is measured by using the ability to identify sources, a base of specific information on export sales opportunities, information on overseas market legislation or regulations and an understanding of how best to conduct market research in a foreign market (Young, 2005).

Debates on exporter SMEs found export competency as critical. It exerts the firm's ability to exploit important resources and information into successful business performance (Nuryakin & Ardyan, 2018). In particular, the familiarity of an exporter with available resources, and information gathering is critical factor influencing their success (Cadogan, Diamantopoulos & Sig-uaw, 2002). Scholars are aware that as companies gain more global market experience, their market knowledge and familiarity with sources of information is increasing (Diamantopoulos et al., 1993). Hence, the endurance of a firm to maintain its involvement in international business is also key.

However, endurance and competency alone do not influence internationalization (Ipek & Tanyeri, 2020). Other factors catalyse the effect of competency on internationalization such as commitment and coordination. In the subsequent section, these research hypotheses are discussed.

Mediating effect of Commitment to Learning

Hypothesis 1. The effect of competency on internationalization orientation is mediated by commitment

Commitment to learning refers to the firms' dedication to a long-term course of action; engagement; involvement in exporting activities. Commitment is not a matter of chance but it can be nurtured and generated. Commitment is a form of psychological capital among entrepreneurs (Nordin et al., 2019), and commitment is the trait of focused purpose and determinant of SMEs success. Research has consistently pointed out that commitment is the antecedent to innovation and growth of SMEs (Abdulaal & Nordin, 2023; Abdulaal & Nordin, 2020; Arz, 2017; El Makrini, 2015). Without commitment, neither competency nor skill will be benefited.

Several notable articles have appeared over the past decade that tries to explain how competency translated into internationalisation orientation, and a handful of research did not support the hypothesised direct effect. Thus, in this research, commitment is hypothesised to mediate the effect of competency towards internationalisation. In other words, commitment is the conduit that passes the effect of competency towards internationalisation. Commitment is required to reshape the unique and non-imitable competencies of a firm into an internationalisation orientation. This interposition accurately captures the concept of dynamic capabilities.

Mediating effect of Coordination

Hypothesis 3. The effect of Export competency on internationalisation orientation is mediated by Export coordination

Coordination in this research refers to the ability of an SMEs to organize the different elements of a complex activity to enable them to work together effectively. In international business, coordination is a pivotal skill (Shukla et al., 2013; Reeves et al., 2018) because it involves intra-organizational and intra-functional harmonization ability. A well-coordinated SME is effective in managing cooperative efforts resulting in a dynamic relationship (Cadogan et al., 2001). Hence, the coordination of an SME plays an important role to translate its competency into successful internationalisation. Another indication that a firm is well-coordinated is the ability to integrate its competency. Hence, it is argued that competency alone will not translate into the internationalisation orientation of a firm. Coordination is hypothesised to play a mediation role. Therefore, in this research coordination is the mechanism that transmit the effect of competency towards internationalisation orientation.

Moderation effect of length of business operation

Hypothesis 3. Length of business strengthen the relationship between commitment and internationalization orientation.

Hypothesis 4. Length of business strengthen the relationship between coordination and internationalization orientation.

Length of business operation is a determinant of a firm's endurance to carry on, despite hardships; and it measures the firm's stamina to undergo or suffer business obstacles. Over a long period, the firm that sustains the

business will eventually establish the trust of its partners and customers. Therefore, some studies find that a firm with a longer ‘length of business’ (LOB) will have better competitive edges. The goal of this research is to determine whether internationalisation orientation is significantly stronger for firms with a lengthier period in business (LOB).

Context of study

Despite the continuous support of related agencies for the women-owned SMEs, many women business owners in Malaysia have doubts about their business performance (Shalizi, 2021). Support provides for various aspects, one of them is to sustain SMEs’ behaviour such as internationalisation orientation. Covid-19 Export Facilitation and Advisory is one of the many initiatives to help Malaysian exporters during the pandemic (MATRADE, 2020). This program provides support such as training and intervention programs that focused on nurturing the SMEs’ competency. Other than psychological support, technical competency such as digital competency and other relevant competencies in e-business are extended to SMEs. In fact, before the pandemic, an initiative such as Go-Export program has inculcated internationalization orientation, competency, coordination and enhanced export commitment among the INVs’ SMEs (MATRADE, 2020). Therefore, if support systems from outside of the business are available, there should be a higher internationalisation orientation among SMEs in Malaysia, but the current statistics show otherwise.

Widening the market share of a business is the driver for venturing into export market. However, many SMEs have the misconception that to widen the market share, increased resources are needed (Arikan & Shenkar,

2022), while to some extent this is true but that is not necessarily the case. Reeves et al. (2018) suggests another way of coping with resource deficiencies, SMEs should venture into internationalisation. Internationalisation can widen the opportunity for SMEs' market share across international borders. Joint venture is an option for internationalisation without having to open up manufacturing plants overseas. This means fewer resources are required, but SMEs must be resourceful in coordinating resources.

Resources can be tangible and intangible. Gathering new information for strategic business decision making is an example of coordinating intangible resources (Siti-Nabiha et al., 2021). Resourceful SMEs continuously improve their knowledge, skills and networks usually helps matching SMEs' strength with the foreign market needs (Alinasab et al., 2022). With the advance of social networking sites (SNS), collaboration and networking beyond the home country are possible (Nordin et al., 2020). Social networking sites and social media enabled SMEs to work with customers directly. Establish a collaboration network with the customers complement SMEs' knowledge gap, weakness and lack of resources requires good coordination skill.

Internationalisation factors

Internationalisation is an attractive strategy for SMEs operated in a small country like Malaysia. Moreover, geographically, Malaysia's neighbouring countries such as China, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia offer huge export potential for Malaysian SMEs. In September 2021, Malaysia's export to China registered a new high and makes export to China expand to

almost 20 per cent of Malaysia's total trade (MATRADE, 2020). If Malaysia's export expands, the INVs can strengthen and sustain their competitive advantage.

Debates on INVs particularly the SMEs found that the exporter's competency is critical to explain the firm's ability to exploit opportunities (Nuryakin & Ardyan, 2018). The ability to exploit skills and knowledge to improve firm performance is a precursor to business growth. Export competency is not limited to manage information using digital business technology (Cadogan et al., 2002). But Diamantopoulos et al. (1993) indicate that as companies gain more global market experience, their market knowledge and familiarity with sources of information is increasing. Therefore, experience formed the endurance for a successful SME. Hence, SMEs that endure the global market challenges for an enough time, will later achieve the state whereby their business stabilized, and gaining the trust from the customers. In other words, time to maturity is the essence to gain international business stability.

Another factor to less successful businesses is afraid of further committing resources to export market activities. Commitment is attributed to risk-taking but, risk-averse SMEs are not only afraid to commit, but they also failed in fostering coordination skills. Therefore, other factors that hamper the internationalization orientation are lack of commitment and coordination.

Subsequently, commitment is hypothesised to be an important predictor of the internationalization orientation of a firm (Sraha et al., 2020; Konadu et al., 2020). The more committed INVs indicate their optimistic expectations regarding the profitability associated with export operations (Cavusgil, 1984; Cadogan et al. 2001). In this scenario, higher commitment towards exports is likely demonstrated by the observable commitment of resources such as

greater allocation of time, human resources, financing, materials and effort to internationalization activities (Arslandere, 2020).

Coordination is identified as a catalyst agent of internationalization orientation (Diamantopoulos & Cadogan, 1996; Shukla et al., 2013). Coordination in the exporting sector captures not only synchronization within the internal process, but also the quality of relationships with other relevant stakeholders overseas (Reeves et al., 2018). Entrepreneurs need to be resourceful and foster relationships with foreign government agencies, suppliers, logistics companies to succeed. Moreover, SMEs have to master the process of organizing their people so that they work together properly. Coordination also refers to the ability to establish teamwork, and collaborative integration to achieve a common goal in business. Hence, it is necessary to note that, coordination is a determinant of internationalization orientation.

Hence, this research aimed to examine how competency, coordination and commitment influence internationalization orientation among the SMEs INVs that are women-owned in Malaysia. Moreover, this study aims to examine the moderating effect of length of business on internationalisation orientation. This argument is based on the hypothesis that time is the essence for business success and that more mature SMEs have a higher internationalisation orientation confidence.

In this regard, this research is centred on questions about a) Do coordination and commitment significantly mediate the influence of competency towards internationalization among women-owned SMEs? and if it can be casually modelled, how do they occur? b) Do SMEs with longer years of experience moderates the effect of coordination and commitment and explain higher internationalization orientation in the model?

Literature Review

Women-owned SMEs in Malaysia

The debate on women-owned SMEs in Malaysia has focused mostly on entrepreneurial behaviour, ethics, a supportive environment towards SMEs, challenges and barriers to performance (Hasan & Almubarak, 2016; Al Mamun & Ekpe, 2016; Rahman et al., 2022; Salamzadeh & Ramadani, 2021; Bouzari et al., 2021; Salamzadeh et al, 2021, 2022; Ramadani et al., 2022). In most women-owned SMEs research, samples are collected from micro-credits recipients and limited research on women-owned INVs or SMEs exporters in Malaysia (Al Mamun & Ekpe, 2016). To address this gap, the scope of this study is on women-owned SMEs that have already been involved in internationalisation through means of export.

In Malaysia, the issues related to women-owned SMEs are under the purview of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFCDD) and SME Corporation Malaysia (SME Corp). Besides, SME Corp, other major organizations work on women's development agendas such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, Ministry of International Trade and Industry, and their respective agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture, Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), Community Development Division (KEMAS) and Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE).

Through the support of inter-agencies in Malaysia, there is no doubt that an increase in women's participation in small medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) has brought significant growth to the Malaysian economy. About 20 per cent of SME businesses nationwide are owned, operated or managed by women (Department of Statistics, 2020). In the year 2018, the Malaysian

Government spent RM2.3 billion on ten women-entrepreneurship programmes to spur women's participation in business. This includes programmes that provided intensive training in entrepreneurship, export support, and financial assistance for women entrepreneurs (Tahir et al., 2018).

Census data indicates that women-owned businesses constitute 20.6 per cent of the total 907,065 SMEs in Malaysia. But this is significantly lower than their male counterparts (Tahir et al., 2018). In the 2016 economic census, 186,930 establishments are women-owned, or 20.6 per cent of total SMEs in Malaysia with an annual growth rate of 8.0 per cent. The majority of 173,323 establishments or 92.7 per cent were engaged in the services sector followed by the manufacturing sector of 9,519 establishments (5.1%). The remaining establishments were involved in the construction, agriculture, mining and quarrying sectors.

In short, most women-owned SMEs are businesses involved in service sectors. Service sector usually yield faster return and raises smaller capital to run, but it has to bear a higher failure risk due to higher competition (Gunay & Kurtulmus, 2021). Another reason for involvement in the service sector is because women-owned SMEs have the accessibility to women employees and the service sector is women-friendly i.e., tourism service, healthcare and F&B service industry. Therefore, women-owned SMEs have greater potential to succeed in the service sector.

SMEs exports performance in Malaysia

Department of Statistics Malaysia (2018) reported exports of SMEs have registered a growth of 3.4 per cent to RM171.9 billion in 2018 as compared to 7.2 per cent in 2017. These increases are driven by the manufacturing

(5.1%) and services (2.0%) sectors. SMEs' exports to agriculture sector in 2018 was RM2.48 billion (2017: RM2.53 billion), recording a negative growth of 2.0 per cent. This was due to a decrease in SMEs' exports of vegetables and fruit produce (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018; Batrancea et al., 2019, 2022).

Meanwhile, SMEs' exports in the manufacturing sector contributed 48.3 per cent of total SMEs' exports in 2018. Manufacturing exports are supported by beverages and tobacco, chemicals, manufactured goods and miscellaneous manufactured articles. Therefore, Malaysian SMEs' strengths are in three sectors namely manufacturing, service and agriculture.

The main destination for Malaysian SMEs' exports of the manufacturing sectors is; Singapore (18.6 per cent), followed by China (8.9%) and the United States (7.8%). SMEs' exports to the services sector increased to RM86.4 billion from RM84.7 billion in 2017. This was led by travel, other business services and transport activities. Share of SMEs exports to total exports remained at 17.3 per cent in 2018 where 8.7 per cent was from the services sector. Furthermore, the manufacturing sector contributed 8.4 per cent and the agriculture sector 0.2 per cent.

From the above statistics, service sector export performance appears to be among the sectors that has always shown an improvement from year on year, despite its small fraction compared to the manufacturing or agriculture sector. Another insight deduces from these statistics is service sector exporting business has gained traction among Malaysian SMEs despite badly hit by the Covid-19 pandemic challenges (Dheer & Salamzadeh, 2021). This is supported by a study in Malaysia by Adedoyin et al. (2022) and from China by Tan et al. (2022).

Internationalisation Support for SMEs in Malaysia

There is various mode of internationalisation i.e., export, joint venture, licensing, franchising and foreign direct investment, but export remains the most popular entry modes among SMEs (Dhanaraj & Beamish, 2003; Fuchs & Kostner, 2016). Moreover, export mode exposes SMEs to lower risk relative to other mode of internationalisation. However, internationalization often associated with expansion activities (Wright & Ricks, 1994). While, expansion activities offer benefits, in contrast, SMEs are exposed to uncertainty shock and geopolitical risk (Adedoyin et al., 2022). Most SMEs in Malaysia need support for export business development. The related government agencies provide training, managerial and technical assistance to reduce the risk for SMEs involved in exporting activities.

The Malaysian government provides space for export activities. They are located in various states in Malaysia. For example, Digital Free Trade Zone (DFTZ) has supported exporters to integrate their existing business process with digital business. The facility is set up to facilitate seamless cross-border trade and enable local businesses to export their goods by employing digital business technologies such as e-commerce, Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) and many more. With DFTZ, INVs' SMEs can better coordinate their business functions online with their business partners over a secure online transaction.

Besides spaces and infrastructure, the agencies assist exporters in finding potential partners and locate representatives who, after looking at the SMEs; product may be interested in marketing the products by taking the local exporters to overseas. Through local exhibition, the government brings

delegations of overseas buyers from around the world to the local SMEs exhibition and trade shows. These supports meant to match potential buyers.

Besides finding potential buyers for exporters, the government also provides export financial assistance such as export loans. In Malaysia, Export-Import Bank of Malaysia is an export credit agency of Malaysia. Despite all of these support, few special support programs are aimed solely at special groups for example, business assistance to women, bumiputra, rural and agricultural SMEs. All of these supports have increase small firm participation in export, foster digital business technology adoption and encourage small business innovation.

This section describes a number of external resources available for exporter SMEs to start, improve and grow their business. The next section explains the internal factors that include exporters' commitment, competency and coordination, conceptual explanation on how they are hypothesised to contribute to internationalisation orientation.

Research Methodology

Population and Samples

The unit of analysis for this study is the women-owned SME in Malaysia. Since this research is quantitative empirical research, a sufficient number of samples are taken from the population to make a valid inference about the population. Therefore, the group of potential participants to whom conclusions should be generalized refers to SMEs that involve in the export market and owned by women entrepreneurs in Malaysia.

The sampling frame for this study is drawn from the MATRADE directory. The reason for choosing MATRADE is due to the comprehensiveness of the directory and it provides in-depth profiles of SME export companies in Malaysia. Hence, women-owned SMEs that are involved in the export market can be identified.

To determine the minimum sample size, G*Power analysis is used. Based on the G*Power analysis, the minimum number of samples is 138. The data collection process begins by doing online research on the directory of exporters available in Malaysia. Before approaching the women exporters with the questionnaire, emails are sent out to the companies which belong to women exporters based on the list of directories from MATRADE to inform them of the study. The questionnaire was adapted from Naidoo (2010) is in the context of internationalisation of higher education institution. Some adaptation and addition made to the instrument to contextualise into internationalisation context of SMEs and its settings.

Data analysis

Data collected data are analysed using a Partial Least Squares (PLS) method employing SmartPLS. The first step after the data cleaning is to tabulate the demographic profile of the respondents. Then, the PLS algorithm procedures are employed to determine the significant levels of measurement items' factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE) and path coefficients (Dana et al., 2022). The standardised factor loadings and AVE of each construct are calculated to verify the convergent validity of the instrument. Moreover, the composite reliability (CR) for each construct is used to verify the convergent reliability. Then, the Bootstrapping technique is employed to

determine the significance level of the proposed mediation hypotheses. Followed by the Product Indicator Approach to test the moderation hypotheses. Lastly, the Blindfolding procedures are used to determine and assess the accuracy of the tested hypotheses and to obtain Q^2 of the internationalization orientation model.

Findings

Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of firms is shown in Table 1. 154 responses were obtained, from the four different industry types involved, which consisted of Manufacturing (12.9%), Services (53.5%), Food and Beverages (24.8%), and others (8.4%). The highest number of businesses exported countries were between 1 to 5 countries (68.4%) and exporting is the most internationalisation strategy used (51.6%). 24.5% of the firms reported an average sales growth of more than 21%.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Firms ($n=154$)

Item	Descriptions	Percentage (%)
Industry type	Manufacturing	12.9
	Services	53.5
	Food & Beverage	24.8
	Others	8.4
Length of Business Establishment	Equal to or less than 1 year	11.0
	2 to 5 years	56.1
	6 to 10 years	32.9
	More than 10 years	9.0
Average sales growth (compared to last year)	Less than or equal to 5%	18.1
	6-10%	20.6
	11-15%	15.0
	15-20%	21.8
	21% and more	24.5
Number of businesses exported countries	1-5	68.4
	6-10	23.2

Item	Descriptions	Percentage (%)
Internationalisation strategy	11-15	5.2
	More than 15	3.2
	Exporting	51.6
	Licencing	5.8
	Franchising	16.1
	Joint venture	24.5
	Foreign direct investment	2.0

Measurement Model Assessment

Multiple items are used to measure the firms’ resources (export competency, management commitment, export coordination and length of business) and the outcome is export market orientation. The measurement model was tested for convergent validity, which was assessed through factor loadings, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). According to Wu et al. (2018), for each construct, the standardized factor loading was above the threshold of .50 and the AVE estimate was higher than the threshold of .50, as suggested by Bagozzi and Yi (1989) and Fornell and Larcker (1981). As suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), the CRs were greater than the value of .60. These results revealed that the instrument had good convergent validity. As shown in Table 2, all items have exceeded the recommended value.

Table 2. Assessment of measurement model

Constructs and Items	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
<i>Export competencies</i>			
EXCOM1: identify prospective customers	0.672	0.940	0.710
EXCOM2: acquired export-market related information	0.627		
EXCOM3: monitoring competitive products in the export market	0.709		
EXCOM4: managing export marketing communications	0.748		
EXCOM5: abilities in managing export distribution channels	0.797		

Constructs and Items	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
EXCOM6: capabilities of firm's export sales force	0.797		
EXCOM7: comprehends the intergovernmental policy	0.840		
EXCOM8: know the markets influencing trade	0.884		
EXCOM9: understand product safety of foreign market	0.838		
<i>Commitment</i>			
MGCOM1: knowledge acquisition in exporting activities are important	0.916	0.9 60	0.790
MGCOM2: intends to increase the company's exporting activities	0.909		
MGCOM3: actively explores international market opportunities	0.865		
MGCOM4: emphasizes that it is vital to adapt to trends in the export markets	0.910		
MGCOM5: emphasizes that employees must be sensitive to the activities of the export competitors	0.863		
MGCOM6: emphasizes that we must gear up now to meet export customer's future needs	0.872		
<i>Coordination</i>			
EXCOR1: pull together in the same direction	0.786	0.9 50	0.850
EXCOR2: integrated into pursuing a common goal	0.862		
EXCOR3: communication as a group for problem solving	0.857		
EXCOR4: tendency to mimic other teammates	0.880		
EXCOR5: togetherness to accomplished intended result	0.876		
EXCOR6: synchronization in action	0.868		
<i>Internationalisation orientation refers to the disposition of an SME to generate, disseminate, and respond to the customer needs and its competitors.</i>			
<i>Generation</i>			
EMO1: examines the possible effects of changes in the export environment regularly	0.879	0.9 50	0.740
EMO2: regularly collects information on trends related to its major export markets (for example regulations, technological advancements, and economics).	0.781		
EMO3: obtains a lot of information about understanding the factors that affect the needs of foreign customers and their priorities.	0.695		
<i>Dissemination</i>			
EMO4: Vital information about export market trends (law, technology) always reaches our team of decision-makers promptly.	0.844		
EMO5: Information about our competitors' efforts is provided to the related employees immediately.	0.624		

Constructs and Items	Factor Loading	CR	AVE
EMO6: Information that might affect the way we serve our export customers is supplied to the export department quickly. <i>Responsiveness</i>	0.542		
EMO7: respond immediately to intense competition that might endanger our main export markets.	0.505		
EMO8: respond quickly to significant changes in the price of competitors' products.	0.832		
EMO9: respond promptly once our competitors set a campaign aimed to attract our foreign customers	0.860		
EMO10: frequent engagement with foreign market exploration activities	0.811		

HTMT (0.90)

Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) is an approach to assess discriminant validity. Discriminant validity refers to the extent to which the measure is not a reflection of other variables and it is indicated by low correlations between the measure of interest and the measure of other constructs (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2015). HTMT value should be lower than .85, or .90. In this paper, HTMT of lower than 0.90 is used to establish discriminant validity. Table 3 shows that all the values are below 0.90, it is confirming that the measurement model possesses acceptable discriminant validity.

Table 3. Discriminant validity HTMT

	1	2	3	4
[1] Commitment				
[2] Competency	0.795			
[3] Coordination	0.855	0.716		
[4] Intl. Orientation	0.818	0.702	0.848	

Coefficient of determination (R^2) and Predictive relevance (Q^2)

The accuracy of the model's predictions was determined by examining the proportion of variance explained. The R^2 is a way to evaluate the explanatory power of the model. The R^2 values for endogenous latent variables are classified as strong, moderate, or weak, whenever it R^2 is greater than the threshold values as much as 0.67, 0.33, or 0.19, respectively. The result of the present study shows that competency, commitment and coordination jointly explain 70.0% ($R^2=0.700$) of the variance of the endogenous construct, internationalisation orientation (IO). The same model estimation also explains that competency explains 56.2% ($R^2=0.562$) of variance in commitment, while competency explains 44.5% ($R^2=0.445$) of variance in coordination in this PLS-SEM model.

In this study, the blindfolding procedure to determine the predictive relevance, Q^2 was employed to test how well the collected data can be reconstructed empirically with the help of the model and the PLS parameters. A Q^2 value of greater than 0.00 indicate the model has predictive relevance, whereas Q^2 with value less than 0.00 indicates the model lacks predictive relevance. As shown in Table 4, Q^2 for all constructs indicate acceptable predictive relevance.

Table 4. Results of R^2 and Q^2 Values

Endogenous construct	R^2	Q^2
Internationalization orientation	0.700	0.339
Commitment	0.562	0.408
Coordination	0.445	0.286

Structural model Assessment

A bootstrapping procedure was conducted, with 5000 iterations to determine the significance levels of proposed hypothesis. The result of the structural model and hypothesis testing are show that factors of management commitment ($\beta = 0.310, p < 0.05$), export competence ($\beta = 0.140, p > 0.001$) and export coordination ($\beta = 0.110, p > 0.05$) on internationalisation orientation are significant and positive. The result show that export competence ($\beta = 0.240, p < 0.05$) and export coordination ($\beta = 0.520, p < 0.001$) have significant relationship towards Internationalization orientation. Management commitment ($\beta = 0.050, p > 0.05$) towards Internationalization orientation is also significant.

5.3.1 Mediation Effects of Coordination and Commitment

As shown in Table 5, export competence, management commitment and export coordination dimension have a positive indirect effect on internationalisation orientation.

Table 5. Specific Indirect Effect

Path	Path Coefficient	T-value	P Values	Decision
Competency → Commitment → IO	0.060	2.492	0.006	Supported
Competency → Coordination → IO	0.010	3.473	0.000	Supported

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (One-tail)

Moderation effect of Length of Years in Business

This research empirically examined the moderating effect length of business towards Internationalisation Orientation. It is hypothesised that the element of time has been crucial in helping INVs SMEs thrive, and heighten-

ing internationalisation orientation. The sample data shows that stronger commitment and coordination are leads to stronger internationalisation orientation among Malaysian women entrepreneur. This finding is further confirmed by the simple slope analysis (refer Fig. 3 & Fig. 4).

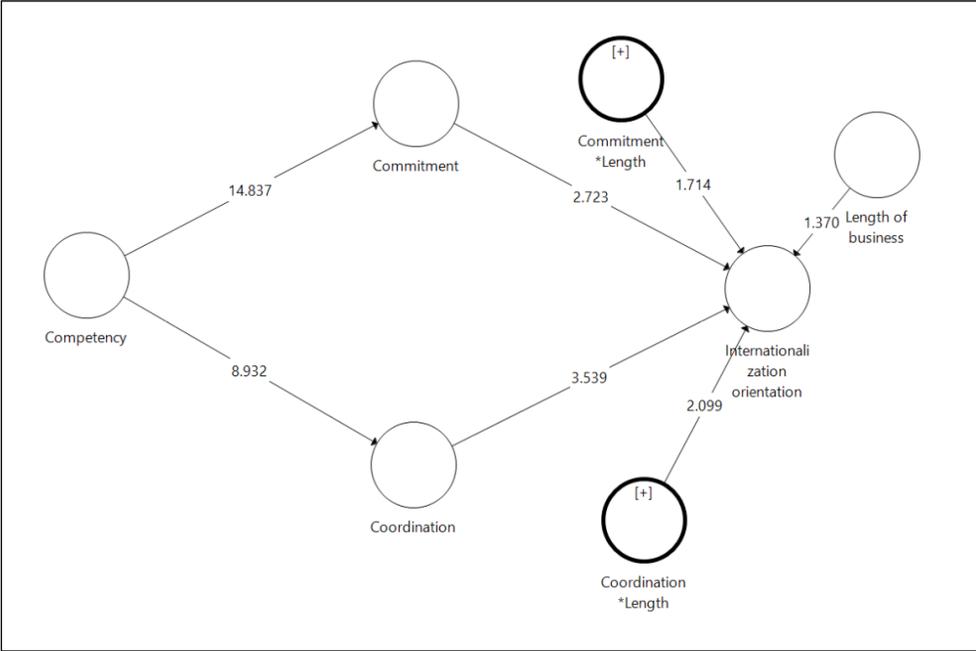


Figure 2. Structural model result including the interaction effect of Coordination*Length and Commitment*Length to Internationalization Orientation

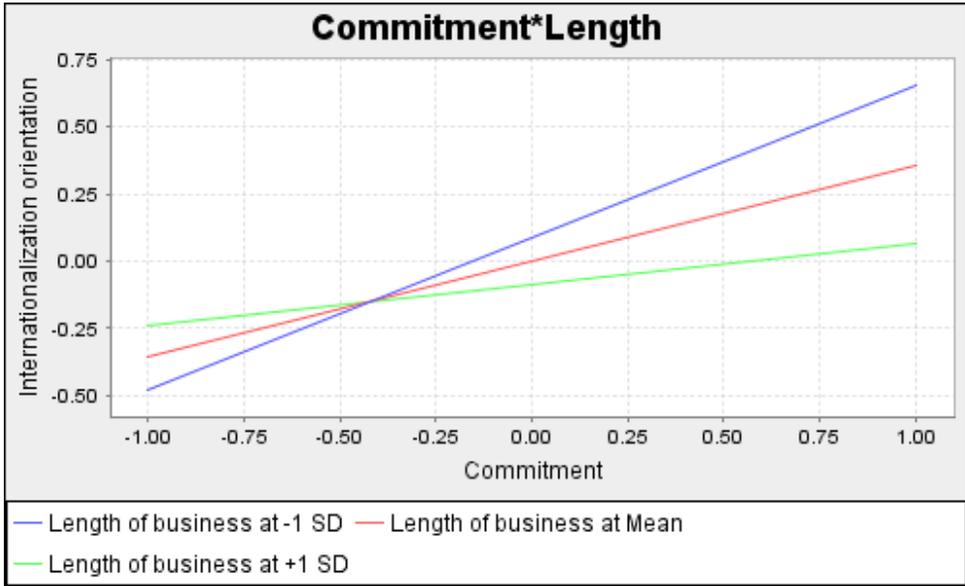


Figure 3. Simple slope analysis for the interaction effect of Commitment*Length to Internationalization Orientation

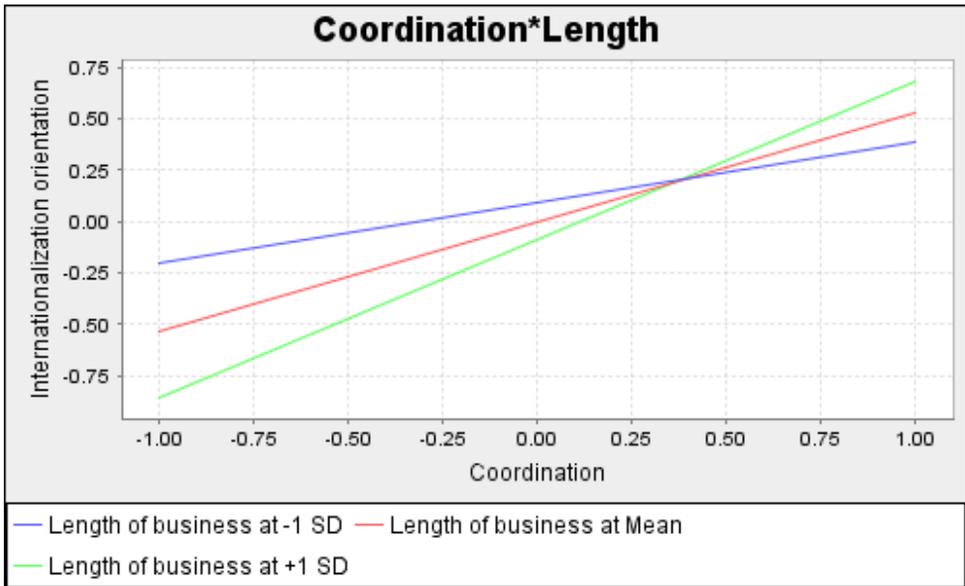


Figure 4. Simple slope analysis for the interaction effect of Coordination*Length to Internationalization Orientation

Discussion

Implications

The rationale for studying INV's internationalisation orientation is that despite the much research on internationalization, much of them did not specifically focus on women-owned SMEs. Gender-specific research is a huge gap in this theme. There are many reasons to study the internationalization of women-owned SMEs in Malaysia although women-owned SMEs are only a small fraction of the total number of SMEs established as compared to SMEs that are men-owned. But in term of their contribution to job creation, women-owned SMEs creates more job opportunities for women, particularly for the underprivileged women, such as the sole bread-winner women, whose spouse is unable to work due to critical illness, or widowers who are responsible to care for their children schooling. This inclination is due to researchers concerned to improve other women's socio-economics' status in the community. Therefore, despite their (women-owned) small fraction in the SMEs segment, women-owned SMEs have a higher social effect on the well-being of women in society.

Another reason to study women-owned SMEs in Malaysia is that some of the challenges faced by women-owned SMEs are specific to women due to the local cultural context within which it operates. Asian women have always been committed to family matters and care for the elderly. Hence, some businesswomen are sandwiched between family care and financial-wellbeing commitment. Therefore, this research is initiated to better understand the reasons behind the lag of women-owned INVs business growth, as compared to firms owned by men through a cross-sectional data observation from women-exporters in Malaysia.

This research studied the factors influencing internationalisation orientation among women entrepreneurs. The findings show that there is a significant positive mediation effect of management commitment and export coordination on the relationship between competency towards internationalisation orientation. Therefore, this indicates that management commitment and export coordination are the key factors that translate the influence of competency of women entrepreneurs to involve in the export market.

Therefore, these significant results have several important implications for Malaysian women entrepreneurs and small-medium enterprises in formulating strategies to encourage more women to participate in export markets. They are as follows:

Improving commitment to learning toward a higher degree of Internationalisation

This research found that the women-owned international new ventures (INVs) SMEs manager is committed to learning when they express desire to advance their global presence i.e., have a positive outlook on their internationalisation orientation. Women-owned INVs SMEs confidence in internationalisation ventures despite threats of intense competition. Therefore, stakeholder such as MATRADE should supports learning process of INVs. Absorptive capacity by improving knowledge acquisition to exploit opportunities will lead to growth in sales performance of INVs. In other words, commitment to learning must be nurtured among the INVs to ensure these incumbents' INVs continue their international business.

Commitment to learning could be accomplished through several decisions in various areas of the business, such as the establishment of a specific

structure for export activities assimilation, the allocation of a specific financial sum for exporting transformation process, and the development of an information system for export markets. Besides that, regular visits to their foreign markets and participation in international exhibitions could be effective in boosting commitment in learning and thus enhancing the company's business growth. The firm's managers should allow their employees to networked with the customers as they change and efforts should be made to meet them continuously. Moreover, managers would also introduce staff to courses for training and development that can enhance their skills and knowledge. In addition, as the management's commitment to learning activities increases, it continues to devote more financial and human resources to these activities, thereby increasing performance enhancement satisfaction. Improvements in export performance must be accompanied by a workforce with the skills to make the process of exporting become more effective and efficient. Therefore, commitment to learning may compensate INV's lack of experience and lack of resources.

Improving SMEs' coordination to improve internationalisation orientation

International trade is a complex process when compared to domestic trade. Therefore, besides competency, ones' coordination ability can effectively channel the talents, strengths and psychological capabilities towards achieving competitive advantage in the export market. Consequently, women-owned INV's SMEs must be adaptive in its development of coordination skill. Good coordination within and outside the company helps SMEs to cope with the changing situation and realities, hence making it unique. In addition, SMEs operating in turbulent or uncertain times such as post-Covid

pandemic need to train themselves and their employees on strategies to mitigate the impact of change to ensure their resilience. Without coordination skill, dynamic of a women-owned SMEs company is affected. Reason being, everyone brings to the organization tremendous psychological baggage from their life experiences. Despite being small-sized, SMEs should perceive employee coordination as a competitive edge which leads psychological dynamics among employees. Dynamic team remain positive to psychological change and renewal. Once a good coordination ideology is established and employees gain confidence that their managers perceive them as the most important asset, a positive spiral is likely to happen and paving the way for a measurable return on competitive advantage, especially in the export market for women-owned SMEs.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although this research has achieved its goals, several inevitable limitations need to be discussed. Firstly, there is absence of measurement tools for international new venture orientation in the literature. Therefore, this research considers the measurement instruments from internationalisation literature in general. But the measurement tools are contextualized and then checked for its reliability and validity. However, in future research this measurement tool can be further explored.

Secondly, this research focuses only on Malaysian women exporters as respondents. For future research, the scope of the study can be widened to understand is there a different between younger and older women entrepreneur involved in international trade business in Malaysia. Moreover, the sam-

ple data was selected from the MATRADE directory only. Although MATRADE has a comprehensive directory that provides in-depth profiles of SME export companies in Malaysia, there are few other agencies that sample data can be drawn from to widen the population of the study. Thus, future research may consider collecting data from other agencies for better generalization. Besides, the current study did not control the samples according to states or region.

Different findings might be drawn from controlled research because different region might have different entrepreneurship culture, natural resources that leads to compelling reason to participate in the export market. Control on international business strategy used can be another gap for further analysis.

Conclusion

The study of women-owned international new ventures (INVs) among the SMEs has an important area of inquiry within the research on entrepreneurship. A majority of entrepreneurship research has noted the importance of competency, commitment, coordination and length of business to the process of internationalisation. Despite the importance, little research has examined the role of length of business as moderator in the development of internationalisation orientation. Reconciling these factors; competency, commitment, coordination and length of business which led to nurturing internationalisation orientation among the women-owned INVs in a model illustrating how psychological and cognitive (Alinasab et al., 2022) aspect help explain internationalisation orientation development process for women entrepreneur

is the gap that this study tried to close. The parsimony of the proposed conceptual model and the theoretical background explained in this study makes it replicable for future research. However, some modifications on the conceptual model and to test the model with more samples participants is suggested.

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Norfarah Nordin is a Senior Lecturer at the Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Her research area focused on entrepreneurship and social network. Her current research focuses on social network analysis, social media listening and networking among entrepreneurs.

A.K. Siti-Nabiha is a Professor at the Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Her research interest is in the area of management accounting, specifically on issues related to accounting and organisational change, performance measurement and systems of accountability and sustainability control system in both public and private sectors.

Nur Farah Mohd Noordin completed her Master of Business Administration at the Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Her research interest is in the area of Small and Medium-sized Enterprise and internationalisation.