

1 Combined Effect of Competitive and Manufacturing Strategies 2 on Export Performance of Small and Medium Enterprises in 3 Malaysia

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7

8 **Abstract**

9 It is generally accepted that business strategy has a significant influence on the success of
10 many organizations. However, it has been rarely tested in the context of export operation and
11 performance on SMEs. Thus, the objective of this research is to determine the combined effect
12 of competitive strategy and manufacturing strategy on export performance of small and
13 medium enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia. Quantitative survey method was employed and data
14 were collected from 201 exporting SMEs through structured questionnaires. The results from
15 regression analysis found both competitive strategy and manufacturing strategy have
16 significant and positive relationships to export performance. Manufacturing strategy was also
17 found to be a more significant contributor to export performance of SMEs. These findings
18 emphasize the importance of adopting both the competitive strategy and manufacturing
19 strategy among the owner/managers of SMEs to enhance their performance and be successful
20 in the international markets.

21

22 **Index terms**— Competitive strategy, manufacturing strategy, export performance, small and medium
23 enterprises.

24 **1 Introduction**

25 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) play an increasingly important role in a country's economy, and thereby
26 the well-being of these businesses is a necessity for that country's future success. Malaysia boost around SMEs
27 which employ over 56 percent of the total workforce and contributes 32 percent to the country's GDP, and makes
28 up 19 percent of the nation's total export (Singh, 2013). The extent of this sector's economic consequence is
29 highlighted by the fact that 99.2 percent of the total business establishments in Malaysia are SMEs (Business
30 Times, 2012). Despite the increased attention paid to this sector, comparatively little is researched on SME
31 export performance in Malaysia (Singh & Mahmood, 2013).

32 Past literature have seen a variety of variables being engaged to determine the effect on firms' export
33 performance (Cadogan et al, 2002; Zhang et al, 2003; Styles et al, 2008; Boehe & Barin-Cruz, 2010) but only
34 a few researches have incorporated the element of in strategy relation to the export operation and export success
35 (Namiki, 1989; ??ingh & Mahmood, 2014). In addition, most of the studies on business strategy were focused
36 on the domestic capacity, and research on the relationship between business strategy and export performance is
37 still limited (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994; Salavou & Halikias, 2009). The business strategy which is a firm's internal
38 element is a vital determining factor for the firm's success in exporting because it influences export performance
39 directly (Aaby & Slater, 1989). Notwithstanding most studies on strategy-performance relationship have also
40 been mainly focused on large or well established firms, and research on export related topics on SMEs has been
41 scanty (Al-Hyari et al., 2012; Okpara, 2010; Altintas et al., 2007; Anderson et al., 2004; Singh & Mahmood, 2013).
42 Thus, there is a suggestion that more research should be conducted to examine the role of business strategy and

3 B) MANUFACTURING STRATEGY AND EXPORT PERFORMANCE

43 its impact on export operation and export performance (Namiki, 1989; Boehe & Barin-Cruz, 2010). Hayes and
44 Wheelwright (1984) argued that for the strategy to be effective there must be synergy in important areas such
45 as competitive strategy and manufacturing strategy. Amoako-Gyampah and Acquaah (2008) and Raymond and
46 Croteau (2009) have also called for a more research on business strategy and export performance to be carried
47 out. Given that the business strategy is seen to be a critical determinant of success in many organizations,
48 greater understanding of the implementation of both competitive and manufacturing strategies in this context is
49 a highly desirable research direction.

50 Thus the purpose of this study is to determine if significant relationships exist between competitive strategy,
51 manufacturing strategy and export performance. It is also the aim of the study to identify which of the two
52 strategies is the most significant contributor to the export performance of SMEs.

53 2 a) Competitive Strategy and Export Performance

54 Porter ??1985) proposed that business strategy such as competitive strategy is strongly linked to profit
55 performance. Strategy execution is the key link between competitive strategy and firm performance (Ward
56 & Duray, 2000). Day (1994) who linked the competitive S advantage with performance argued that firms who
57 possess higher competitiveness will relatively gain higher business performances. A well-structured business firm
58 and product differentiation from its competitors in the industry generates firm's competitive advantage that leads
59 to higher business performances (Hitt et al., 2004). Firms that pursue competitive strategy tend to create unique
60 image in the mind of the customers by offering products that are inimitable by their competitors (Miller, 1988).
61 The ability of the firms to offer this strategy in their product in terms of reliability, durability, features and
62 aesthetics generates higher performance (Mintzberg, 1988; Dean & Evans, 1994; Amoako-Gympah & Acquaah,
63 2008). Therefore, competitive strategy generates a firm's competitive advantage over its competitors and results
64 in higher performance (Amoako-Gympah & Acquaah, 2008).

65 Based on the resource based view, the collection of a firm's internal resources and capabilities generates
66 competitive advantage that leads to superior performance (Porter, 1985). Competitive strategy and the resource
67 based view are two sides of the same coin (Wernerfelt, 1984). The firm poses unique internal resources and
68 capabilities which can become firm's competitive advantage against its competitors and enhance its business
69 performance and survivability (Barney, 2002; ??ay & Wensley, 1998; Penrose, 1959; Peteraf, 1993; Wernerfelt,
70 1984). Porter's proposition that competitive strategy creates competitive advantage for a firm and results
71 in superior business performances was also supported by many studies (Campbell-Hunt, 2000; Julien & Ramagalalhy,
72 2003; Mandy, 2010; Young, 2005). Therefore, it was posited that competitive strategy has a significant relationship
73 with export performance. Grounded on the argument above, the following hypothesis is proposed: H1: There is
74 a significant relationship between competitive strategy and export performance of SMEs.

75 3 b) Manufacturing Strategy and Export Performance

76 Past researchers have highlighted the importance of manufacturing strategy towards attaining higher performance
77 (Leong et al., 1990; Kim & Arnold, 1992; ??ard & Durray, 2000). Amoako-Gyampah and Acquaah (2008) argued
78 that there is a direct relationship between manufacturing strategy and firm's performance. Miltenburg (2008)
79 suggested that firms that apply manufacturing strategy are most likely to achieve higher return on sales and better
80 profit before tax to sales ration. Corporate performance is positively related to role of manufacturer managers
81 in strategic decision making (Swamidass & Newell, 1987). ??nderson et al.'s (1989) findings indicated that
82 production competence is a measurable function of production and related to firms competence. Quality assurance
83 and the firm's capabilities to deliver their products and services were also found to be significantly related to the
84 firm's performance (Williams et al., 1995). Advanced operating procedures and firm capabilities tend to build
85 efficient delivery process; low operation cost generates competitive advantage and increase firm performance (Day,
86 1994). Nevertheless, no significant differences were found between firms using mixed (efficiency and flexibility)
87 strategy and firms using a single strategy of efficiency or flexibility and their business performances (Ebbin &
88 Johnson, 2005). In addition firm's performance is not fully depending on manufacturing strategy; rather, it
89 also depends on manufacturing strategy configuration and strategic configuration interaction (Popovska & Boer,
90 2008).

91 Manufacturing strategy dimensions of cost, quality, flexibility, and delivery were also studied in relation to firm
92 performance and they are all found to be significantly related to the firm's financial performance (Butt, 2009).
93 However, Swamidass and Newell (1987) found that flexibility was more related to the firm's business performance,
94 while Amoako-Gyampah and Acquaah's (2008) study found that only quality appear to have a significant influence
95 on the firm performance. Similarly other researchers also found manufacturing dimension of quality to be an
96 important predictor of the firm performance (Flynn et al., 1994; ??illiam et al., 1995; ??ard & Durray, 2000). Chi
97 et al. (2009) indicated that the alignment between business environment characteristics, competitive priorities
98 and supply chain structure improve firm performance. However, cost leadership strategy must be combined with
99 manufacturing strategy capabilities in order for the cost reduction to be effective. Manufacturing capabilities
100 focused on flexibility are more suitable for differentiation strategy adaptation. Dr. Silveira and Sousa's (2010)
101 results indicated that capability learning and firm best practices are positively related to firm performances
102 (flexibility and dependency) while firm's internal fit is negatively related to flexibility improvements. Popovska

103 and Boer (2008) argued that firm's performance is not fully depending on manufacturing strategy; rather, it
104 could also depend on manufacturing strategy configuration and strategic configuration interaction. Based on the
105 above discussions, this research intends to examine the relationship between manufacturing strategy and firms
106 export performance. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated: H2: There is a significant relationship between
107 manufacturing strategy and export performance of SMEs.

108 **4 II.**

109 **5 Research Methodology a) Sample and data collection**

110 The sample for the study was drawn from the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) directory of
111 manufacturing SMEs. From the listing, only firms which fulfilled the following criteria; manufacturing firms
112 with an annual sales turnover of between RM250,000 and less than RM25 million, or manufacturing firms with
113 fulltime employees ranging from 5 to less than 150, and engaged in the exporting activity, were chosen. A total
114 of 779 SMEs made up the target population. Based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a sample size of 260 was
115 determined, and due to response rates of between 20 to 25 percent for a mail survey, the number of questionnaires
116 sent should be four or five times than the intended sample size. A questionnaire accompanied by a cover letter and
117 a postage-paid return envelope was mailed to the owner/manager of each firm. Owner/managers were targeted
118 in this study because they were involved in the overall running of the businesses, and their views often represent
119 the views of the entire firm. A total of 201 useable questionnaires were received, yielding a response of 25.8
120 percent.

121 There is also an issue of a non response bias in the data collection. Non response bias exists when there is
122 significant difference between the answers of those who responded and those who do not respond. To test for non
123 response bias, an extrapolation method as suggested by ??rmstrong and Everton (1977) was employed where the
124 early respondents were compared with the late respondents. No significant differences were found in the mean
125 responses for any of the constructs, suggesting no indication of non response bias in this study.

126 **6 b) Measures**

127 The instruments for this study were developed using established measures from previous studies. The competitive
128 strategy scales were adapted from previous study by Young (2005), and the items were measured on a seven-point
129 Likert scales where '1' represents very strongly disagree and '7' represents very strongly agree. The manufacturing
130 strategy of fifteen items was measured using scales adapted from Ward and Duray (2000). This measurement
131 was selected because it has been shown to possess valid psychometric measure properties. Self-report technique
132 was used to measure export performance, and subjective assessment was employed because it was expected that
133 owner/managers would be unwilling to disclose full financial data. This study measured export performance with
134 four items; sales volume, profitability, market share, and new markets, and the owner/managers were asked to
135 rate their export performance on a seven point rating scale. It has been found that the subjective measures of
136 performance are correlated with the objective measures of performance (Dess & Robinson, 1984).

137 **7 c) Reliability and validity**

138 Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the instruments reliability. Generally, 0.70 or higher is considered to be
139 agreed value for alpha's reliability (Hair et al., 2011) Factor analysis was conducted to verify the construct validity
140 of the variables. Before performing the analysis, the suitability of the data was assessed through two tests; Kaiser-
141 Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO values were
142 0.889, 0.958 and 0.755, and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at $p < 0.001$ (See Tables 2, 3 and 4).
143 The results support the factorability of the data. Varimax rotated principal component analysis has resulted in
144 single factor loading in each of the three constructs; competitive strategy, manufacturing strategy, and export
145 performance that explained 79.045 percent, 75.338 percent, and 58.118 percent of the variance, respectively. Only
146 factors with a loading value of 0.50 and above were considered, and therefore no items were

147 **8 III. indings and iscussions a) Hypotheses Test**

148 The first hypothesis (H1) stated that there is a significant relationship between competitive strategy and export
149 performance, while the second hypothesis (H2) stated that there is significant relationship between manufacturing
150 strategy and export performance. To test these hypotheses, multiple regression was used where the dependent
151 variable (export performance) was regressed simultaneously on the two independent variables; competitive
152 strategy and manufacturing strategy. Table ?? displays the result of the analysis which reveals the value of
153 R squared as 0.544 indicating that 54.4 percent of the dependent variable (export performance) was accounted
154 and explained by the two variables; competitive strategy and manufacturing strategy. The results also show
155 significant and positive relationships between competitive strategy and export performance, and manufacturing
156 strategy and export performance. Thus both hypotheses H1 and H2 are supported. It can be inferred that the
157 more the SME owner/managers adopt the competitive and manufacturing strategies in their firms, the higher
158 the export performance is yielded. In addition, the strength of the relationships as measured by ($? = 0.323$)
159 for competitive strategy and ($? = 0.560$) for manufacturing strategy shows that manufacturing strategy is also

11 CONCLUSION

160 a more crucial predictor of export performance. This result is consistent with previous studies and the general
161 notion that manufacturing strategy is associated with superior firm performance.

162 9 F D

163 10 Discussions

164 Most of empirical studies showed that firms that could successfully implement those generic strategies in their
165 business settings would outperform their competitors successfully. These studies also found that competitive
166 strategy and manufacturing strategy could enhance the firm's performance.

167 Competitive strategy is a part of firm's internal element and it is a vital determinant factor for the export
168 success, because this strategy influences export performance directly (Aaby & Slater, 1989). The findings of this
169 research concurs to many past studies that found competitive strategy contributes significantly towards improving
170 the firms export performance. According to the literature there are two types of competitive strategy which are
171 commonly found in the small and medium types firms, that is differentiation strategy and focus strategy. Firms
172 that pursue differentiation strategy tend to create unique image in the mind of customers by offering products
173 that are inimitable by their competitors. The ability of these firms to offer differentiation in their products in
174 terms of reliability, durability, features and aesthetics generates competitive advantage over their competitors
175 and results in higher performance. In addition, by adopting focus strategy such as targeting a niche market,
176 these firms have better chances of survival and growth rather than competing in a broad area to market their
177 products.

178 The link between manufacturing strategy and export performance of manufacturing SMEs was investigated
179 in this study. It was found that positive and significant relationship exists between manufacturing strategy and
180 export performance. Thus adopting manufacturing strategy in the firm would result in higher export performance.
181 However, the firm's ability to gain positive benefits from the manufacturing strategy will depend on the availability
182 of resources, such that firms with higher availability of resources will be able to make better use of the strategy
183 for achieving superior performance. This links well with resource-based view of the firm which postulates that
184 the presence of assets that are difficult to imitate are associated with the firm's competitive advantage (Barney,
185 1991). The finding of this research concurs with many past studies that manufacturing strategy contributes
186 significantly towards improving export performance.

187 The ability to regulate the manufacturing capacity instantaneously as part of the firms' flexibility ability in
188 manufacturing strategy will enable them to meet greater demand from their customers while maintaining lower
189 production cost and greater products quality. SMEs' flexibility to meet market demand will not only increase its
190 goodwill but also retain customer loyalty and increase its export performance. Similarly, firms that emphasize
191 on lead time reduction, set-up time reduction, are able to change priority on the job floor, able to change
192 machine assignment and maintain high flexibility qualities could increase their market share and sales growth.
193 Less wastage and theft on raw material would occur, as they would purchase their product inputs just in time
194 which reduces chances of obsolescence of stock or damage to their resources. These firms may also increase the
195 production capacity whilst utilizing their machinery efficiently. The ability to make on time delivery of product
196 and reliability will capture higher customers' satisfaction which in turn would increase greater market share and
197 sales growth. Those that are able to produce and deliver its products earlier than what was promised also retain
198 customer satisfaction and trust which builds customer loyalty which, in turn could increase export performance.
199 The firm's ability to delivery on time is an important determinant of a firm effectiveness in the eyes of a customer.
200 An organization should have high order rates, short order cycle time, upto-date shipping information and frequent
201 delivery time as all these elements could build firms capabilities; increased customer satisfaction leads to higher
202 market performance (Tracey et al., 1999). Therefore, firms that are able to increase their delivery value in the
203 customer's eyes would increase their export performance (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994). The firm's ability to achieve low
204 cost, high flexibility, dependability and quality is a form of manufacturing process that enables it to increase its
205 competitive advantage based on manufacturing strategy (Cleveland et al., 1989; Hayes & Wheelwright, 1984; Hill,
206 2000; Vickery et al., 1993). Thus, the manufacturing strategy is a competency and advantage that a firm builds
207 around its operation process that gives the firm a competitive advantage over the rivals.

208 V.

209 11 Conclusion

210 This research adds to the existing knowledge by providing empirical evidence of the contribution of both
211 competitive strategy and manufacturing strategy to export performance of SMEs in Malaysia. This research This
212 study is a novel attempt to investigate the variables of influence to export performance of SMEs in appropriate
213 strategies to achieve competitive advantage and enhance performance. These strategies act as an impetus that
214 affects firm's manufacturing capabilities and competitive advantage which consequently have effects on export
215 performance.

216 Thus SME provides owner/managers of SMEs with more information for making right decisions in selecting
217 also responds to calls for more exploration of the business strategy in an international context and its impact on
218 performance. In addition, this research Malaysia but it also contains several limitations. First the relatively low
219 sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings. The resultant sample cannot be accurately described

220 as a truly representative sample. Furthermore, the sample frame was based on a data set comprising only SMEs
 221 that were registered with the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM), and there are many SMEs which
 222 were not registered with the FMM. Therefore, it would be meaningful in the future to conduct research by
 223 surveying a wider range of SMEs. Second, the use of a single respondent for each firm may be subject to common
 224 method bias. Only owner/managers of the firms were chosen to collect the data for the study. Although the
 225 owner/manager may be the key person in the SME, one person's authority cannot represent the entire strategy
 226 of the firm. In addition, the perceptual opinions of the owner/manager may be biased because of subjective
 227 judgments of his or her own firm. Nevertheless, necessary steps were taken to minimize any biases that may
 228 have resulted, and future research might consider employing multiple informants. The third limitation was the
 229 cross-sectional nature of the study. Cross-sectional study may only provide data of a snap shot at one point of
 230 time and does not provide information on changes in the firm environment. Thus, future research should consider
 231 the use of a longitudinal investigation that would allow firms to be studied over time and provide further insights
 into the dynamic nature behind the findings. ^{1 2 3}

Reliability scores for variables		
Variable	No. of items	Alpha value
Manufacturing strategy	15	.97
Competitive strategy	13	.95
Export performance	4	.75

Figure 1:

12

Year
 Volume XIV Issue I Version I
 () A
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Figure 2: Table 1 :Table 2 :

3

Independent Variable	Standardized Beta	T	Sig. (p-value)	R 2
Competitive Strategy	0.323	10.931	0.000	0.544
Manufacturing Strategy	0.560	6.302		

Figure 3: Table 3 :

232

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11 CONCLUSION

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owner/managers should focus efforts on adopting competitive strategy and manufacturing strategy in order to realize the potential value of the international markets.

Year

Volume XIV Issue I Version I

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Figure 4: Table 4 :

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