Export market orientation and export performance in emerging markets: insights from the Peruvian agri-export sector

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Abstract

Purpose – The objective of this research is to analyse the joint impact of export proactivity and coordination capacity as mediators on the relationship between export market orientation (EMO) and export performance and the relational norms and export continuity as EMO's antecedents.
Design/methodology/approach – The study uses structural equation modelling for the analysis of 127 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) from the agri-export sector in Peru.
Findings – The research demonstrates the mediating role of export proactivity between EMO and export performance and the impact of relational norms as an antecedent of EMO as well as that of export continuity in export performance.
Research limitations/implications – The cross-sectional study design has certain limitations; thus, longitudinal research is necessary to analyse the evolution of the impact of these variables. Future research should also consider new variables, such as absorptive capacity and institutional distance, in relation to EMO and export performance in emerging markets.
Originality/value – This research paper provides a perspective that is an alternative to the traditional literature related to EMO since coordination capacity and export proactivity have been used as EMO's antecedents. However, in emerging countries, such as Peru, exports are based on comparative advantages. Under this context, it is necessary to analyse export proactivity and coordination capacity as mediators of the relationship between EMO and export performance and the relational norms and export continuity as EMO's antecedents.

Keywords Export market orientation, Mediating role, Coordination, Export proactivity, Export performance
Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Various investigations analyse export proactivity and coordination as antecedents of export market orientation (EMO) (Cadogan *et al.*, 2002; Navarro-García *et al.*, 2013), where proactivity is a very important motivational component of positive export performance, while reactive motivations are usually associated with lower performance (Leonidou *et al.*, 2007; Reaz *et al.*, 2020; Wood and Robertson, 1997).

Firms in emerging countries, however, usually behave reactively because domestic markets are generally small (Abd-el-Rahman, 1991; Bianchi *et al.*, 2017; Francis and Collins-Dodd, 2000; Freund and Pierola, 2010; Wood and Robertson, 1997), and they find commercial opportunities based on both the efforts of trade promotion organisations (TPOs) (Belloc, 2006; Czinkota, 1996; Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 1993; Wilkinson and Brouthers, 2006) as well as comparative advantages (Balassa, 1965; Gonzalez, 2011; World Trade Organization, 2012).

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These advantages create commercial relations between the exporter–importer, and the management of these two relationships generates serendipity (Denrell *et al.*, 2003; Dyer *et al.*, 2018) and export continuity (Lages *et al.*, 2008; Malca *et al.*, 2020a; Malca and Rubio, 2013), which promote the need to systematise and exploit the information and knowledge derived from their export operations. Therefore, they begin to develop EMO activities that consist of generating business intelligence, information dissemination, and designing and implementing responses to information (Cadogan *et al.*, 2002; Yan *et al.*, 2017).

Similarly, relations and export continuity gradually contribute to the generation of a greater knowledge of international markets (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Styles *et al.*, 2008), which firms need to systematise and expand in order to increase and fulfil their operations efficiently and effectively. In this way, this behaviour implies the beginning of the development of EMO activities in a reactive way (Navarro García *et al.*, 2012). Thus, the firm needs to develop both coordination capacity and export proactivity as mediators between EMO activities and export performance (Cadogan *et al.*, 2001; Francis and Collins-Dodd, 2000).

However, much of the EMO literature has focused on heterogeneous samples of exporting firms from the intra-industry trade of developed countries (İpek and Bıçakcıoğlu-Peynirci, 2020). For this reason, said behaviour would vary in a context other than emerging countries because their small and medium enterprises (SMEs) face different market conditions that require specialised resources and capacities to access international markets as well as the construction of a differentiated learning model (Bianchi *et al.*, 2017) that facilitates the development of a strategy different from that of developed countries (Khanal, 2018; Paul *et al.*, 2017).

In this context, it is necessary to generate empirical evidence from emerging countries with samples of homogeneous sectors, such as agri-exports. This is a very important sector for emerging countries in Asia and Latin America, which together exported 80% of the agricultural and livestock products of all developing economies between 2016 and 2017, even when they had difficulties with their supply chain and the transportation of foods (International Trade Center, 2020; Negi and Trivedi, 2021; PROMPERÚ, 2018). Peru is one of the countries that has had great performance and has different comparative advantages, such as climate diversity, geographical location for counter-seasonality, access to infrastructure and land with agricultural potential, which in part explain Peru's export growth (Freund and Pierola, 2010; Gunasekera *et al.*, 2017; Ricardo, 1975; Vásquez, 2015).

Peru managed to increase its agricultural exports by approximately 105% from the beginning of 2010 to the end of 2018 (International Trade Center, 2020). This increase in agri-exports is explained by two factors: the Agrarian Promotion Law enacted in October 2000 and the different trade agreements signed in the last two decades. This law introduced a series of benefits, such as the payment of 15% as an income tax concept (Castellares and Ghurra, 2020), which not only strengthened the agricultural sector but also contributed to the country with a 43% increase in formal labour in this sector in the period 2004–2018. It should be noted that the fact that the results are not so evident in the short term but are in the medium term is typical of the dynamics of the agri-export sector (Castellares and Ghurra, 2020). Likewise, the jobs generated have been decentralised since agricultural activity is present in different regions from which different characteristics, such as climate or type of soil, are used. Thus, it is understood that the Agrarian Promotion Law has been an important factor that has allowed the agri-export sector to take off. However, 84% of Peruvian firms have sporadic behaviour (Malca and Rubio, 2013), and 42 of them represent 50% of Peruvian agri-exports, revealing the difference between the firms that concentrate on this sector and the rest (ADEX Data Trade, 2018).

Similarly, the network of commercial trade agreements that Peru has allows it to reach 54 international markets that represent 41% of the world population as well as 81% of the

world's gross domestic product (MINCETUR, 2020). The countries with which there is a trade agreement represent 90.4% of Peruvian exports (MINCETUR, 2020). In this way, the main markets during the last five years for Peruvian agri-exports have been the USA, Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, China, Canada, Hong Kong, Belgium, Mexico, South Korea and France, which represented just over 87% in 2020 (ADEX Data Trade, 2020).

Likewise, for the year 2020, Peru stood out by occupying the first place worldwide in agri-exports of blueberries and quinoa, second place in fresh avocados, fresh asparagus, canned asparagus and fresh peeled Brazil nuts, third place in whole ginger, fourth place in fresh grapes, fresh mangoes, frozen vierias and fresh peas and fifth place in frozen fruit pulp (MINCETUR, 2020). In addition, it was observed that during 2020 the main products exported in the agricultural sector were fresh grapes, red cranberries, fresh or dried avocados, non-decaffeinates and non-roasted coffee, fresh or chilled asparagus, fresh or dried mangoes, Wilkings oranges, fresh bananas "Cavedish Valery", preparation for animal feed, whole or split raw cocoa beans, quinoa, uncooked or cooked mango, uncrushed ginger, canned asparagus and other edible fruits. These lists of products represent almost 70% of the exports in the sector in 2020 (ADEX Data Trade, 2020).

The impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) worldwide has meant a strong weakening of trade for both goods and services. However, in Peru, despite the global health crisis, and thanks to the decentralisation achieved by the Agrarian Promotion Law, there were 11 regions that were able to overcome adverse conditions, stand out and generate positive export growth. Among the regions that lead this group with the highest export value, we have Ica, La Libertad and Lambayeque. Likewise, in the regions of Junín, Cajamarca and Ucayali, the growth of ginger, tara powder and palm oil, respectively, was observed (MINCETUR, 2020).

2. Theoretical framework

The international evolution of exporting SMEs is a function of the market knowledge they develop, which generates a sporadic behaviour that gradually becomes continuous (Eriksson *et al.*, 2000; Johanson and Vahlne, 1977). Sporadic behaviour limits both the generation and exploitation of specialised knowledge as well as the management of commercial opportunities and increases the costs of access to information and perceived uncertainty (Cyert and March, 1992; Del Río and Varela, 2006; Navarro *et al.*, 2010) as well as psychological distance, which makes it even more difficult to understand the functioning of international markets and to capitalise on the relationships generated (Aykol and Leonidou, 2018; Johanson and Vahlne, 2009). In this sense, continuous exporting behaviour accumulates knowledge, reduces psychic distance, presents a higher level of productivity, responds more effectively to changes in international market and has a better export performance (Bernard and Jensen, 1999; Erramilli, 1991; Johanson and Vahlne, 1977; Katsikeas *et al.*, 1996).

In the same way, an adequate relationship between exporter–importer reinforces export continuity (Styles and Ambler, 2000). With this, more and better commercial information is obtained (Lages *et al.*, 2008; Porter, 1996) which, depending on the organisational capacities of the SME, will impact both the operational and strategic level (Leonidou *et al.*, 2011). The organisational interrelation that occurs continuously generates information exchange through training that the importer provides to its suppliers with the intention of strengthening their resources and capacities (Madlberger, 2009; Mesquita *et al.*, 2008; Malca *et al.*, 2020b). This develops a cooperative attitude between exporter–importer (Dant and Schul, 1992; Fletcher and Harris, 2012; Navarro García, 2000), which allows for greater and better assimilation of knowledge (Lages *et al.*, 2005; Rialp, 1999; Yli-Renko *et al.*, 2001) as well as greater flexibility to adapt to unforeseen events that may arise (Gundlach and Achrol,

1992). Consequently, both the export continuity of the SME as well as the management of relational norms generate information and knowledge that configure them as antecedents of EMO (Obadia *et al.*, 2017).

The market orientation concept was developed by Narver and Slater (1990) and Kohli and Jaworski (1990). It refers to the marketing activities carried out by a firm in the domestic market. Cadogan and Diamantopoulos (1995) adapted the concept to the international context. In this way, the EMO concept integrates three capabilities: (1) the generation of market intelligence focuses on identifying and analysing the conditions, trends and changes that are generated in markets (Cadogan *et al.*, 1999; Racela *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, it contributes to reducing uncertainty and the perceived risks of the market and in generating a higher value that facilitates the export development of the SME (Cadogan and Diamantopoulos, 1995; Chung, 2012); (2) the dissemination of information is carried out between the export area and other functional areas of the organisation through formal and informal channels (Cadogan *et al.*, 1999, 2012). Thus, it depends on the level of connectivity among the different areas of the organisational structure of the firm (Racela *et al.*, 2007); (3) market intelligence influences the response capacity, which is reflected in the design of marketing plans and the proper management of them in order to develop international markets (Cadogan *et al.*, 1999, 2008).

SMEs face various obstacles in the development of export activities (Malca and Rubio, 2015) that hinder the internationalisation process because many of these are pre-existing (Peng, 2016; Penrose, 1959). However, export activities allow them to acquire experience and knowledge, which can be objective or experiential, and is obtained as a result of trial and error. The systematisation of this generates EMO behaviour (Cadogan and Diamantopoulos, 1995). Thus, EMO, through its three activities, facilitates the strategic management of the firm and contributes to the export performance of the SME (Lin *et al.*, 2014; Malca and Bolaños, 2019; Murray *et al.*, 2011). For this reason, the identification of factors that favour or inhibit the development of EMO activities is crucial. Furthermore, Cadogan and Diamantopoulos (1995), based on Narver and Slater (1990) and Kohli and Jaworski (1990), developed the idea that coordination capacity, which consists of the interaction between the members of the export area (intrafunctional) and their relationship with the other areas of the firm (interfunctional), is an antecedent of EMO. Through these two types of coordination, firms generate learning processes for the management of organisational activities oriented toward the international market (Cadogan *et al.*, 2002).

However, the volatility of international markets and the variations between them and the local market (Buckley and Casson, 1976; Cadogan *et al.*, 2009) require the adaptation of a proactive export profile, which is defined as the search for new opportunities to generate commercial relationships (Francis and Collins-Dodd, 2000; Suzman and Wortzel, 1984). This is done in such a way that firms take the initiative to approach customers, considering the volatility of export markets (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996; Venkatraman, 1989), which implies a greater commitment of resources (Navarro García *et al.*, 2012). For this, it is necessary to generate constant flows of information that contribute to greater export performance (Cadogan and Diamantopoulos, 1995; Francis and Collins-Dodd, 2000; Johanson and Vahlne, 2009).

Thus, export performance is the result of a firm's activities in the export market (Chen *et al.*, 2016; Zou and Stan, 1998), and it is multidimensional (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994). Furthermore, objective, subjective and compound scales are used for its measurement. However, considering that the use of objective variables presents certain limitations, such as the non-comparability between industries or different product lines and divergences in accounting practices between firms (Hult *et al.*, 2008; Katsikeas *et al.*, 1996), export performance is measured mainly through subjective variables. These can be seen properly in Figure 1.

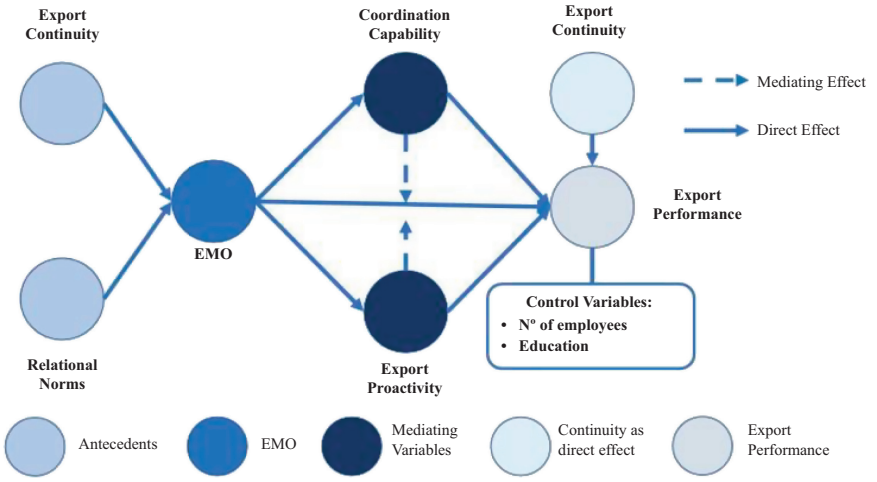

Figure 1.
Conceptual model of the relationship between EMO, coordination capacity, export proactivity, export continuity, relational norms and export performance

2.1 The role of export continuity in EMO

As a result of comparative advantages, export promotion policies and serendipity, SMEs interact continuously with international markets, which gradually generates information and knowledge (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009; Lages *et al.*, 2008; Malca *et al.*, 2020a). The accumulation of these allows a firm to develop more activities, which implies a greater commitment of resources (Cadogan *et al.*, 2002; Eriksson *et al.*, 2000; Johanson and Vahlne, 1990). However, the dynamic and complex nature of markets requires a firm to organise and systematise the information (Boso *et al.*, 2016; Cadogan *et al.*, 2009), making this a main input in the generation of commercial intelligence, which is disseminated among the different areas of the firm and strategically manages its export activity (Cadogan *et al.*, 2001; Leonidou *et al.*, 2011; Porter, 1996; Zander and Kogut, 1995; Filatotchev *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, we propose the following:

H1. The export continuity of SMEs has a positive impact on EMO activities.

2.2 The role of relational norms in EMO

Relational norms allow the exporter–importer to reduce the uncertainty of international markets, such as the possibility for opportunistic behaviour (Bello *et al.*, 2003; Leonidou *et al.*, 2017), in such a way that these will facilitate an adequate relationship between both parties (Leonidou *et al.*, 2014). Likewise, these standards facilitate greater knowledge from the importer to the exporter and vice versa. By interacting repeatedly, they not only generate a better relationship but facilitate the exchange of information and the joint acquisition of knowledge (Fletcher and Harris, 2012; Lages *et al.*, 2008; Mesquita *et al.*, 2008). In this way, the EMO capacities of the exporting SME are strengthened (Malca *et al.*, 2020b). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. Relational norms have a positive effect on EMO.

2.3 The role of EMO in coordination capability

As a consequence of the export continuity of the firm as well as relationship management, EMO capabilities are process commercial intelligence gradually (Cadogan *et al.*, 2001; Johanson and Vahlne, 1977; Lages *et al.*, 2005). This is particularly complex and dynamic for

export markets (Cadogan *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, it requires higher levels of coordination between the different operational areas of a company, such as production, logistics and sales (Cadogan *et al.*, 2002; Sousa and Lengler, 2011). This coordination integrates the areas and contributes to the generation of greater value and care for customers (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990). In this way, the higher level of EMO activities will strengthen organisational capacities (Chi and Sun, 2013). Likewise, it will demand high coordination with the respective areas of the importing company, generating a greater dynamic flow at the intra- and inter-organisational levels of the firm, resulting in a better export performance (Cadogan and Diamantopoulos, 1995; Sousa and Lengler, 2011; Zander and Kogut, 1995).

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3.1. EMO has a positive impact on coordination capability.

H3.2. Coordination capability has a positive effect on export performance.

2.4 EMO, export proactivity and export performance

As a result of the export continuity of the company as well as relationship management, EMO capabilities will generate greater commercial intelligence which should be used by SMEs to develop a closer relationship with their importers and distributors and to consolidate their relationships with them (Cadogan *et al.*, 2009; Navarro García *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the SME will adopt a proactive behaviour and search for greater opportunities (Francis and Collins-Dodd, 2000, 2004). Similarly, proactivity makes it possible to anticipate inconveniences that hinder or damage the export activity of the SME, positively affecting its export performance (Katsikeas *et al.*, 1996; Lumpkin and Dess, 1996; Pieray, 1981). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4.1. EMO has a positive effect on export proactivity.

H4.2. Export proactivity has a positive effect on export performance.

2.5 The role of EMO in export performance

The benefits of a higher level of commercial intelligence generated by EMO capabilities will have a direct impact on export performance (Cadogan *et al.*, 2003; Navarro-García *et al.*, 2013, 2014) since EMO facilitates identifying the needs of importers and contributes to satisfying them (Cadogan and Diamantopoulos, 1995). Therefore, EMO will have an impact on the export performance of SMEs (Cadogan and Diamantopoulos, 1995; Lin *et al.*, 2014; Malca and Bolaños, 2019; Murray *et al.*, 2011). Based on the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5. EMO has a positive effect on export performance.

2.6 The mediating role of the coordination capability and export proactivity between EMO and export performance

The coordination capacity will require high coordination both within the export area and with the rest of the functional areas of the exporting firm (Cadogan and Diamantopoulos, 1995). Likewise, relationship management will involve high coordination with the organisational structure of the importing company (Dyer and Singh, 1998; Mesquita *et al.*, 2008). This will contribute to the relationship between EMO and export performance.

On the other hand, export proactivity implies adequate management and a relationship with importers (Francis and Collins-Dodd, 2000; Navarro García *et al.*, 2012). This also allows the firm to identify the problems and needs of importers in order to satisfy them. In this way,

proactivity helps to improve the relationship between EMO and export performance (Cadogan and Diamantopoulos, 1995; Navarro García *et al.*, 2012; Shane, 2000).

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6.1. The coordination capability has a mediating role in the relationship between EMO and export performance.

H6.2. Export proactivity has a mediating role in the relationship between EMO and export performance.

2.7 The role of export continuity in export performance

Export continuity allows the development of experiences that facilitate and increase the export knowledge of the SME (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977; Lages *et al.*, 2008). Based on this, the company generates routines that allow systematising and taking advantage of the continuity of the company in the markets (Levitt and March, 1988). This generates a loop that will allow better decision-making (Cyert and March, 1992; Lages *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, export continuity will have an impact on current export performance (Malca *et al.*, 2020a). For this reason, as the company continues to export and gain experience, its export performance will improve. Therefore, the following is proposed:

H7. Export continuity has a positive effect on export performance.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research focus

The study used a quantitative, causal and cross-sectional approach to evaluate the relationship between constructs. The information for the development of the investigation was obtained through primary sources (Chen *et al.*, 2016).

Regarding the unit of analysis, it was composed of small and medium-sized exporting companies from Peru. The criterion of the European Commission (2005) was applied in order to use standards similar to previous studies in the literature. Additionally, since the pattern of the Peruvian labour market is characterised by a high number of seasonal personnel and the presence of labour-intensive industries, the amount of total income was prioritised as the main criterion to categorise companies for the sample (Peña-Vinces *et al.*, 2017).

In emerging countries, such as Peru, the export activity of SMEs is differentiated by the sector where it originates. Therefore, a study of these SMEs should be carried out through stratified sampling by each export sector in order to control the differences between the strata or sectors (Lohr, 2019). A study using an unrestricted sample to make a general evaluation of export companies could lead to generating possible biases due to the influence of the dominant export sector. For this reason, the analysis focused only on exporting SMEs in the agricultural sector. This was done to achieve greater reliability in the results and thus to avoid biases produced by the differences with other sectors or strata (Lohr, 2019).

Regarding exporting firms that were part of the sample, these were obtained through the directory of the Commission for the Promotion of Peru for Export and Tourism—PROMPERU. During data collection, the questionnaire was pretested and evaluated by representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism—MINCETUR—and the Regional Direction of Foreign Trade and Tourism—DIRCETUR. It was verified through the database of the National Superintendence of Tax Administration that these companies effectively carried out export activities. We collected responses from the cheif executive officer (CEO) or the export manager to measure the constructs (Cavusgil and Elvey-Kirk, 1998).

3.2 Research instruments

The research used latent variables, which is why composite variables (constructs) have been developed for their measurement through their attributes (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2016). Thus, the measurements were made using scales that have been successfully applied in literature. To measure relational norms, constructs developed by Lages *et al.* (2005) were applied. For EMO and export coordination, we employed scales present in Cadogan *et al.* (2001). Likewise, for export proactivity, we adapted the scale developed by Navarro-García *et al.* (2012). Concerning export performance, we applied scales presented in Lages *et al.* (2008). These scales are composed of (1) the achievement of export objectives, (2) general satisfaction with export activity and (3) export intensity. For the evaluation of export continuity, we adopted indexes presented in Malca and Rubio (2013). Finally, the number of employees and education level were used as control variables, as suggested by Peña-Vinces *et al.* (2017).

3.3 Data analysis strategy

Given that data regarding EMO and export performance comes from the same informant, *ex ante* strategies were developed to avoid the existence of common method bias. Also, statistical tests were used to determine the presence of such ex post biases (Chang *et al.*, 2010; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, due to the use of latent variables, we evaluated the reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the scales used (Cronbach, 1951; Cronbach and Meehl, 1955; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Finally, given the interrelation between the study variables, structural equation models (PLS-SEM) were used to test the proposed hypotheses (Chen *et al.*, 2016; Zou and Stan, 1998) because this technique focuses on the explanation of the variance in the endogenous variables (Hair *et al.*, 2017; Jöreskog and Wold, 1982). The statistical programme used in this study for the modelling of structural equations was SmartPLS 3.2.7 (Hair and Sarstedt, 2019; Ringle *et al.*, 2015; Sarstedt and Hwang, 2020). It is worth noting the hierarchical change from using second-order to only first-order constructs for EMO and relational norms (Becker *et al.*, 2012). However, in the export performance construct, second-order constructs were used to analyse the impact on the hierarchy of measurable scales (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

3.4 Sample analysis

This research group sent 420 questionnaires via email and used a sampling framework of 1,500 companies that exported for at least three consecutive years. This data collection technique provides wide geographical coverage and is economical. Nonetheless, its main disadvantage is its low response rate (Harzing, 1997, 2000). To overcome this deficiency, personal and telephone interviews were conducted with export managers to get answers to the questionnaires, resulting in 127 companies surveyed. This number was obtained through the formula indicated by Lehman (1993) which calculated that a minimum sample size of 123 companies was needed. So, the sample size used is greater than the minimum required to reach a 95% confidence level in the study. Since two methods of data collection were used, the study tested the differences in characteristics at the company level and measurement scale scores using the *t*-test and the Mann–Whitney *U* test as a non-parametric analogue method. Neither test revealed statistically significant differences between the two methods, so no evidence of bias could be found in the responses attributable to the data collection methods. The information of the surveyed companies is summarised in Table 1.

4. Results

4.1 Scale validity and consistency reliability

The measurement of internal consistency was made thanks to the composite reliability. The results provided a higher value for all measured constructs, where 0.7 was the minimum

	%		%
No. of employees		*Age*	
<10	42.5	<30	15.1
[10–50]	33.1	[30–40]	32.5
[50–100]	10.2	[40–50]	31
[100–500]	11.8	[50–60]	15.1
>500	2.4	[60–70]	5.5
		>70	0.8
Export intensity (exports/total sales)		*Education*	
<20	4.5	Postgraduate	15
[20–40]	5.9	Certified	4.7
[40–60]	7.5	Univ. Finished	49.6
[60–80]	9	Technical career	17
> 0	73.1	Univ. Unfinished	11
Export FOB value (USD mill.)		Secondary school completed	8
<1	33.3	Secondary school not completed	3
[1–10]	50.8	*No. of years exporting*	
[10–50]	13	<5	23.2
> 50	2.9	[5–10]	30.4
		[10–15]	24.7
		>15	21.7

Table 1. Characteristics of the exporting companies' sample

acceptance criterion. Likewise, Cronbach's alpha was greater than 0.7 in all cases except for the proactivity construct, which is satisfactory at the level of consistency reliability (Cronbach, 1951).

The convergent validity of the constructs was tested through the outer loadings of the indicators and thanks to the average variance extracted (AVE). Concerning outer loadings, all indicators exceeded the criterion of 0.7 except those referring to export intensity in export performance and to information dissemination within the EMO construct. However, in the first indicators, these are within the range of 0.4–0.7, which makes it necessary to evaluate their presence in the model to verify if they affect the AVE positively when they are removed. In counterpart, in the second indicators, these had to be removed because they presented values below the acceptable range. Based on the aforementioned, the AVE analysis gives a result higher than 0.5 for the Fornell–Larcker criterion in almost all the constructs (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994) since EMO presents an AVE below the established one. Due to this, the exclusion of the indicators belonging to the export intensity construct was not necessary, while indicators related to information dissemination in the EMO construct had to be removed in order to reveal the improvement of the AVE in this construct. These results are summarised in Table 2.

Based on the previous indications, the same model was processed, removing the indicators of information dissemination. The results in Table 3 show the improvement in the AVE of the EMO construct as it increased from 0.41 to 0.66. Therefore, the model excluded the information dissemination as part of the EMO construct.

The discriminant validity was verified through three criteria: Fornell–Larcker, cross-loading and Heterotrait-Monotrait (Hair *et al.*, 2018). Regarding the first criterion, the results of the table show that the square root of the AVE is higher than the correlation between these constructs, except for the ones linked to export performance because they are second order. In the cross-loading criterion, all the constructs show high values related to their indicators. In the Heterotrait-Monotrait criterion, the correlations in most cases were less than 0.85 or 0.90, the latter being debatable. However, some constructs showed correlations higher than this

Construct/Dimension/Indicator	*Factor loading*	*Sig*	*Composite reliability*	*AVE*	*Cronbach's Alpha*
Export Continuity (Simple construct)			1	1	
EMO (First-order reflective construct)			0.86	0.41	0.86
E1_1	0.83	<0.001			
E1_2	0.81	<0.001			
E1_3	0.88	<0.001			
E1_4	0.82	<0.001			
E1_5	0.84	<0.001			
E2_1	0.10	>0.05			
E2_2	0.15	>0.05			
E2_3	0.07	>0.05			
E2_4	0.003	>0.05			
E2_5	0.07	>0.05			
E3_1	0.76	<0.001			
E3_2	0.79	<0.001			
E3_3	0.78	<0.001			
Coordination Capability (First-order reflective construct)			0.95	0.83	0.93
E4_1	0.89	<0.001			
E4_2	0.94	<0.001			
E4_3	0.93	<0.001			
E4_4	0.89	<0.001			
Export Proactivity (First-order reflective construct)			0.86	0.76	0.68
E5_1	0.88	<0.001			
E5_2	0.86	<0.001			
Relational Norms (First-order reflective construct)			0.94	0.65	0.92
F1_1	0.76	<0.001			
F1_2	0.79	<0.001			
F2_1	0.79	<0.001			
F2_2	0.75	<0.001			
F2_3	0.76	<0.001			
F3_1	0.89	<0.001			
F3_2	0.84	<0.001			
F3_3	0.84	<0.001			
Export Performance (Second-order reflective construct)			0.97	0.73	0.97
Export Performance Achievement			0.98	0.90	0.97
H1_1	0.96	<0.001			
H1_2	0.97	<0.001			
H1_3	0.94	<0.001			
H1_4	0.94	<0.001			
H1_5	0.93	<0.001			
Export Performance Satisfaction			0.98	0.89	0.97
H2_1	0.95	<0.001			
H2_2	0.97	<0.001			
H2_3	0.96	<0.001			
H2_4	0.91	<0.001			
H2_5	0.93	<0.001			
Export Intensity			0.97	0.91	0.95
H3_1	0.97	<0.001			
H3_2	0.95	<0.001			
H3_3	0.94	<0.001			

Table 2.
Assessment of the measurement model

maximum allowed value because they are part of second-order constructs or are part of the same first-order construct. In the case of export proactivity, this is within the limit of 0.85, so it could still be considered acceptable.

4.2 Results of the structural model

Table 4 summarises the relationship between accepted and rejected hypotheses, and it is represented in Figure 2 with a summary of the accepted relationships between constructs. Moreover, the adjusted R-squared values of the endogenous variables are detailed as well as the control variables. These results were obtained through 5,000 subsamples in the bootstrapping application.

5. Discussion

5.1 Managerial implications

The purpose of this research was to explain the export performance of Peruvian SMEs through an empirical model that jointly analyses the effects of export continuity and relational norms as antecedents of EMO and the mediating role of export proactivity and capacity coordination between EMO and export performance. As seen in the paper, Peruvian SMEs are characterised by the export of commodities, which usually have little or no added value. In addition, they focus on markets with little cultural distance.

The non-significant impact of export continuity in EMO as well as the null correlation of the dissemination component of EMO show that Peruvian SMEs are not capitalising on experiential knowledge or adequately managing the commercial information generated from commercial relationships (Yaseen *et al.*, 2018). Usually, this means that Peruvian SMEs waste the opportunity for continuous and joint learning with their importers, which would generate

Table 3. Comparison of reliability between models including and removing information dissemination from the EMO construct

	Including indicators from dissemination of information	Removing indicators from dissemination of information
AVE	0.41	0.66
Composite reliability	0.86	0.94
Cronbach's alpha	0.86	0.93

Table 4. Relationships between proposed hypotheses

Hypothesis No	Hypothesis relationship	β	Sig	Compliance with the hypothesis?
H1	Export continuity → EMO	0.039	0.608	No
H2	Relational norms → EMO	0.550	0.000	Yes
H3.1	EMO → Coordination capability	0.722	0.000	Yes
H3.2	EMO → Export proactivity	0.680	0.000	Yes
H4.1	Coordination capability → Export performance	0.179	0.039	Yes
H4.2	Export proactivity → Export performance	0.414	0.000	Yes
H5	EMO → Export performance	−0.024	0.854	No
H6.1	EMO × coordination capability → Export performance	0.129	0.048	Yes
H6.2	EMO × Export proactivity → Export performance	0.279	0.000	Yes
H7	Export continuity → Export performance	0.290	0.000	Yes

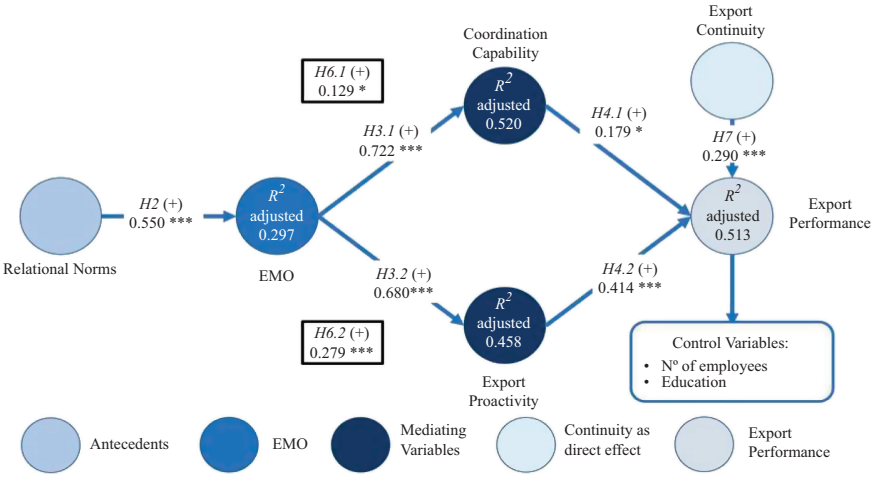

Figure 2.
Empirical model

Note(s): *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; n.s.: non-significant
Source(s): Own elaboration

a proactive attitude towards the markets. With this, Peruvian SMEs would seek business opportunities based on a greater knowledge of the foreign markets.

On the other hand, the model indicates that relational norms as antecedents of EMO have a direct effect and high correlation with the business intelligence generation and responsiveness components of EMO. Similarly, it shows the mediation of coordination and export proactivity between EMO and export performance. The foregoing indicates that Peruvian SMEs have competitive capacities that are not being adequately systematised or used by the organisation (Navarro-García *et al.*, 2016). This shows that there is a need to improve communication flows between the different functional areas of the firm as well as to strengthen organisational capacities, routines and processes (Becker, 2004; Grant, 2004) in order to capture experience and improve export management.

5.2 Implications for institutions

The results from the developed model clearly show that trade promotion organisations (TPO) must design promotion programmes that focus on the development and strengthening of organisational capacities. In this way, Peruvian SMEs will be able to systematise their experiences and analyse and share information from interorganisational relationships and serendipity (Czinkota, 1994, 1996; Lages and Montgomery, 2005; Malca *et al.*, 2020a).

Likewise, given the high mediating capacity of export proactivity, TPOs should encourage Peruvian SMEs to participate in activities related to commercial mobility since it has been shown that these have a direct impact on export performance, and they strengthen EMO capacities and generate commercial relationships (Diamantopoulos *et al.*, 1993; Malca *et al.*, 2020a) which contribute to developing a proactive behaviour. Similarly, by having contact with new clients, SMEs could develop their coordination capacity and involve all functional areas of the firm.

6. Limitations and further research

The results obtained present limitations regarding the cross-sectional study design. Therefore, future research must consider the evolution of the impact of these variables through longitudinal research.

Similarly, although the study focuses on the adoption of EMO behaviour in SMEs, it would be appropriate for subsequent research to consider the absorptive capacity of their organisational structures and to evaluate the management of the generated knowledge. This capacity is important given that it has a knowledge-based approach since SMEs need adequate human capital to acquire, store and process the obtained information (Cohen and Levinthal, 2008; Karing'u *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, absorption capacity favours dynamic capabilities, considering that the nature of export markets is dynamic and volatile (Gray *et al.*, 1999). Therefore, they are necessary for future research since SMEs obtain competitive advantages by renewing and exploiting their acquired knowledge (Apriliyanti and Alon, 2017; Teece *et al.*, 1997).

However, the feedback effect of coordination capacity and export proactivity should be studied since, given the learning process (Hadcroft and Jarratt, 2007), it will eventually cease to act as a mediator and will become an antecedent of EMO, changing from an operational approach to a strategic one (Khanal, 2018; Negi and Trivedi, 2021).

Additionally, future studies should follow this line of research in other emerging countries to obtain further empirical evidence (İpek and Bıçakcıoğlu-Peynirci, 2020). They should focus on the firm's organisational structure to examine whether SMEs have organisational capabilities or not and to analyse if they appropriately systematise the information generated by serendipity and its impact on the firm's export strategies and performance.

Likewise, there is a need for future research to study the effects of constructs regarding the relational approach of the company in conjunction with EMO, focussing on both parts of the exporter–importer dyad. Studying this relationship will provide evidence for both the relative size of the dyad as well as its power. In sum, it will contribute to understanding how the information exchange between both parties takes place (İpek and Bıçakcıoğlu-Peynirci, 2020; Skarmeas *et al.*, 2016).

Finally, given the inconsistent findings in previous studies, research should focus on the institutional approach in order to understand the role that this variable plays between EMO and export performance (He *et al.*, 2018; Hessels and Terjesen, 2010). Its importance also relies on the institutional environment of the export market as well as its quality. Nevertheless, the impact of institutional factors as antecedents of EMO behaviour should also be studied (İpek and Bıçakcıoğlu-Peynirci, 2020).

7. Conclusions

In summary, it can be affirmed that the developed model contributes to the strategic decision-making of exporting SMEs by finding that relational norms, such as the mediation of coordination capacity and export proactivity, generate competitive capacities that are the basis for SMEs to adopt proactive behaviour. This is particularly important for agri-exporting SMEs, which usually depend on the seasonality of production. They need to move from a production approach to a market-based one (EMO), which allows them to grow and manage its commercial relationships. Likewise, the fact that export continuity only impacts export performance clearly indicates that it is necessary to strengthen the organisational capacities of SMEs in order to capitalise on experiential knowledge and improve EMO management.

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