Characteristics of Business Owner's Strategic Networking: Are There Differences Between Exporters and Non-exporters?

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Abstract
While both macro and micro benefits of SMEs exporting activities are well confirmed in the literature, in most countries, exporting SMEs are few compared to non-exporters. Unfortunately, few studies in the field examine exporters and non-exporters behaviour together with regard to why non-exporters remain focused on the domestic market, even though, they may be of similar sizes, operate in the same geographical market and face the same market conditions with the exporters. This paper integrates the network theory and resource-based view of the firm (RBV) to explore the differences in exporters and non-exporters with regard to the characteristics of the business owners' networking. The study uses the qualitative multi-case study research approach based on 36 exporters and 33 non-exporters to examine the topic in Ghana, a new and very promising geographical context. Using the qualitative content analysis as the main analytical technique to code the perception of both groups, four main differences emerged. The results show that the capacity of the exporters with regard to owner-manager's networking size, content, structure and interactions are higher than the non-exporters. Based on the findings, the implications of the study on public policy and practice are suggested.

Keywords: Networking, export, SMEs, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

The significant contribution of the internationalization of SMEs in the socio-economic development of nations continue to receive research attention. Among the significant contributions of SMEs' internationalization include, but not limited to: employment generation (Paul *et al.*, 2017), economic development, employment and poverty mitigation (World Bank Group, 2015; Ribau, 2018), strategy for firm expansion and growth (Shi *et al.*, 2018), enhanced economic prosperity of nations (Sousa *et al.*, 2008; OECD, 2009; Abor & Quartey, 2010) and a propeller of firm growth and diversification of firms' operational risk (Kohr *et al.*, 2018). A number of factors account for why most SMEs are found in international markets. Researchers (e.g. Ongori & Migiro, 2010; Chelliah *et al.*, 2010) argue that the advancement in international communication and transportation technologies are among the key factors that drive SMEs' internationalization. IFC (2011) contends that the presence of large scale multinational firms (MNCs) in the domestic markets of most SMEs, compel SMEs to look beyond their local markets. For instance, Etemad (2004) argued that SMEs that refuse to look beyond the domestic market risk collapsing following the intensity of the on-going global competition.

SME exporters from Ghana are part of the global exporters, although it is established that SMEs' export business participation from Ghana is comparatively low (Wolf, 2007; Robson & Freel, 2008). Nevertheless in Ghana, SMEs' export activities form one of the significant economic drivers because the Ghanaian local market is argued to be too small to propel the growth of its firms. Consequently internationalization is recommended as a necessity for the development of Ghanaian economy and the Ghanaian firms (Wolf, 2007). In addition, about 92% of Ghanaian businesses are SMEs and contribute about 70% to the nation's GDP (Abor & Quartey, 2010) as a result major government policies are targeted at promoting SMEs' activities including export business. Furthermore, the heightened global competition against Ghanaian SMEs' in the local market, makes the SMEs vulnerable if they choose to remain resolute in the domestic market (Aryeetey & Ahene, 2004; Khanna & Palepu, 2006). Consequently, the development and the promotion of SMEs export is embraced as critical to the socio-economic prosperity of Ghana.

Although, several strategies for international market entry (e.g. contract manufacturing, foreign direct investments) exist, it is argued that SMEs in particular choose export business as the common route to the international market. The reason being that export business is known to require lower investment cost as compared to other advanced strategies such as the foreign direct investment. SMEs exporting activities offer both micro and macro benefits to nations. From the micro viewpoint, Van (2005) found out that exporting SMEs are more productive than non-exporters. Bigsten & Gebreeyesus (2008) established that exporting SMEs possess more resource capacity than those that do not export.

Various theories are offered to explain the export behavior of SMEs. Among these theories, four stand out, namely, the resource-based view of the firm (RBV), the stage theory of internationalization, the network theory and international entrepreneurship (Ruzzier *et al.*, 2006). Out of the four theoretical models, the RBV (McDougall *et al.*, 1994; Peng 2001; Westhead *et al.*, 2001; Rialp & Rialp, 2005) and the stage theory of internationalization are the most applied framework to explain SME internationalization and/or exporting activities (Ruzzier *et al.*, 2006; Rutihinda, 2008). However, in recent times, using the network theory to explain SMEs' export activities and/or internationalization is attracting the interest of researchers (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Musteen *et al.*, 2010; Guercini & Runfola, 2010; Yu, Gilbert, & Oviatt, 2011; Manolova *et al.*, 2010; Hohenthal *et al.*, 2015; Nyuur *et al.*, 2018; Tian *et al.*, 2018; Montoro-Sanchez *et al.*, 2018;). The reason is partly because the network theory complements the weaknesses in both the RBV and the stage theory in accounting for the internationalization behaviour of SMEs.

For instance, according to the stage theory, internationalization requires huge resource investment, including experiential knowledge. In line with the stage theory, such resources must be wholly owned by the focal exporting firm. Consequently, the stage theory fails to consider the resources that accrue to SMEs following from the business owners' networking which influences the time, pace and intensity of the exporting activity other than if it were acting alone. Implicitly, the network theory addresses the liability of resources faced by SMEs that desire to enter the export market. The network theory argues that by networking with associates, both formal and informal, (business and/or social) the resource capacity of the SMEs are enhanced to undertake exporting activities. Following these insights from the network theory, the small firm will not need to wait until it has built all the resources by its own effort before considering export business as assumed by the stage theory. Accordingly, by the business owners networking, the time of the foreign market entry can be shortened and the pace of the process may not be strictly gradual as claimed by the stage theory because the firm does not do it alone and/or grows unaccompanied. From the basic assumptions of the network theory, the internationalization stages predicted by the stage theory could be leapfrogged.

The RBV also fails to account for the support for internationalization derived from the business owners' networking and ascribes the capacity to export as a firm's own resource capacity. While both the RBV and the stage theory emphasize the magnitude of prior resource stocks before exporting, the RBV further stresses on the unique attributes of the resources (e.g. value, rarity, inimitability) in order to achieve export market success. In line with SMEs internationalization, the RBV assumes that the time to enter the export market and the pace of the export market development are determined solely by the extent of a firm's own resource capacity and how valuable, rare and imitable the resources are. Likewise the stage theory, the network theory overcomes these weaknesses and argues that export success cannot only be achieved by having one's own resources that are unique and rare, but being in a network, a firm's resource capacity can be enhanced. Studies have confirmed the predictive power of network theory on the internationalization of SMEs. For instance in Thailand, Udomkit & Schreier (2017) found that personal networking contributes significantly to the internationalization of SMEs. In Australia, Suseno and

Pinning (2017) found that networking ties (e.g. weak ties) have a significant impact on the internationalization of Australian law firms. Using a sample from Spain, Montoro-Sanchez *et al.* (2018), found that the increasing number of direct networking contacts positively impacts on establishing international relationships. In Croatia, Nyuur *et al.* (2018) found that domestic networking informality significantly moderates the association between the domestic networking of SMEs' centrality and their international innovation. Moreover, using a cross country dataset (i.e. Denmark, New Zealand and Sweden), Hohenthal *et al.* (2015), found that experiential networking knowledge impacts positively on the value of business relationships in the international markets. Using a sample from the Italian wine producers, Francioni *et al.* (2017) found that network relationships with family, friends, Italian expatriates and business partners influenced significantly on the internationlisation process of the case firms. Based on a Swedish sample, Lindstrand *et al.* (2017) found that social capital positively impacts on international opportunity exploration.

Although, studies concerning SMEs' export and network theory is relatively new (Ruzzier & Antoncic, 2006; Lee *et al.*, 2010), a number of dimensions are being explored. Among the specific themes that have received research attention include, but are not limited to: kinds of network and the degree of SMEs internationalization (Ruzzier & Antoncic, 2006); strategies for networking relationships and entrepreneurs' internationalization (Harris & Wheeler, 2005); strategies for social capital and SMEs' internationalization (Han, 2006); network relationship and SMEs' internationalization (Chetty and Wilson, 2003); network dynamics of early stage internationalization of international new ventures (Coviello, 2006); liability of newness, network alliance, resource and knowledge base of internationalized firms (Loane & Bell, 2006); social networks in the rapid internationalization process (Sasi & Arenius, 2008); networks, speed and performance of internationalized firms (Musteen *et al.*, 2010) and effect of alliance and the initiation of foreign business (Yu *et al.*, 2011).

Although, the manufacturing SMEs from Ghana are part of global exporters, yet up to date, no systematic research examines the extent to which the Ghanaian evidence compares and/or contrast with the extant studies. Consequently, extant findings are restrictive in geographic scope thereby creating a gap in the light of a full understanding of the present phenomenon. This study builds on an integration of the network theory and the RBV to explore the differences in exporters and non-exporters regarding the size, structure, interaction and the content of the business owners' networking. The paper makes two main contributions to the field. First, the study seeks to extend the social capital and SMEs internationalization research by examining the resource capacity of exporters and non-exporters. Second, by shedding light on the topic from a developing country viewpoint, the general understanding of the topic is enhanced among the research community. As Ghana is identified as one of the poorest export manufacturing country from sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, by exploring the networking benefits of its exporting SMEs makes it motivating to design collaborative public policies to encourage and integrate non-exporting firms to consider export business. Similar developing countries stand to draw inspiration from Ghana's example based on the findings of the study. To address the objectives of the study, the rest of the paper is sub-divided as follows. Section 2 looks at the theory that informs the study and the associated empirical literature. Section 3 focuses on data, methodology and results. Section 4 deals with discussion and conclusion of the results. Section 5 presents the implications of the paper.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION & EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

This study integrates the network and RBV theories to explore the topic. The specific constructs used from the two theoretical frameworks are discussed under each framework.

The Network Theory

The benefit of having a network ties among interconnected SMEs' exporters and/or internationalized firms is confirmed by scholars in the field (e.g. Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Coviello & Munro, 1997; Johanson & Vahlne, 2003; Coviello & Cox, 2006; Johanson, & Vahlne, 2009; Ojala, 2009; Johanson, J., & Vahlne, 2011). While most studies use the firm as the main unit of analysis, other researchers focus on the owner-manager (Ruzzier & Antoncic, 2007). One motivation of the latter line of research is that unlike large multinational enterprises (MNCs) whose decisions are influenced by different constituencies, SMEs' decisions are centered around the owner-manager. The SMEs' owner-manager is considered as the most critical variable in SMEs' research. The present study extends the latter line of research. In line with researchers (e.g. Allali, 2006; Ruzzier *et al.*, 2006; Lamb *et al.*, 2012) an owner-manager and/or a business owner is an entrepreneur who owns and manages a small firm simultaneously.

Business Owner's networking

Researchers distinguish the owner-manager's social networking from his or her social capital. The reason for this is that a person must first belong to a network of interconnected associates whether or not it is formal (contractual), informal (non-contractual), business (within the value chain allies [both top and down-stream, including business associations and regulators]) and informal (family, friends, colleagues). On one hand, the concept of networking is described as informal face-to-face interactions or membership of civil associations and affiliation (Adler & Kwon, 2002). According to Coviello and Cox (2006) network represents interconnected actors (e.g. owner-managers, organisations) that have a common interest that tie them together. To Lacobucci and Hopkins (1992) network is a pattern of relationships that ties actors together; to Han (2007) it is a tie and/or relationship between two or more individuals and/or organisations for mutual benefits. In all, a dominant theme that runs through the foregoing conceptualizations is that social and/or business networking (Chetty and Holm, 2000) consists of relationships and/or ties that connect a group of actors (e.g., owner-managers) together. On the other hand, social capital consists of the benefits (e.g. resources, including information) which actors in the networking relationships extract to enhance their businesses outcomes (Bourdieu, 1986; Coviello and Cox, 2006; Han, 2006). Altogether, these two themes (the interconnections and the benefits of the intercon nections) can be seen to be central to the business owners' networking.

Dimensions of the business owner's network

The network theory is applied in both entrepreneurship and SMEs' internationalization research field. In the literature, several dimensions of the network theory have been explored. In line with Brass *et al.* (2004), whilst earlier research concerning network focused on whether or not a firm belongs to a network just one tie or a network of actors with common interest (a binary variable), recent trends shift the focus from network as a discrete variable to exploring various dimensions of the business owner's networking. The implicit assumption is that different dimensions of business networking is associated with different business outcomes (e.g. survival, profitability, sustainability) (Han, 2006). Table 1 summarises the major dimensions of the business owner's networking explored in the literature.

Table 1: Dimension of business owner's networking

Dimensions	Definition	Type of dimension	Author (s) - no
Degree	Level of interaction	NC	3 dimensions (Freeman, 1979)
Closeness	Intimacy with ties	NC	
Betweeness	Capacity to bridge connections	NC	
Cohesion	Extent of solidarity	NC	4 dimensions (Knoke and Kuklinski, 1982)
Multiplicity	Heterogeneity of one's networking contacts	NC	
Centrality	Ability to access resources	NC	
Density	Intensity of realized network contacts	NC	
Intensity	Number of network contacts per period	NC	5 dimension (Chang, 2002)
Non-redundancy	The extent of weak relations among contacts	NC	
Betweeness	Distance between a focal firm and contact networks	NC	
Reciprocity	Degree of interdependence among network contacts	NC	
Multiplicity	Heterogeneity of one's networks	NC	
Content	Type of benefit extracted from network contacts	NC	3 dimension (Hoang and Antoncic, 2003)
Governance	Mechanism for coordinating network contacts	NC	
Structure	Directness of relationships and degree of formalisation	NC	
Structure	Nature of actors in the network, e.g. strong or weak	NC	3 dimensions (Han, 2006)
Size	Number of ties in an actor's network	NC	
Content	Resources to be extracted from the network	SC	

Interaction	Frequency of contacts	NC	3 dimensions (Ruzzier and Antoncic, (2007)
Size	Number of ties in the network	NC	
Structure	Nature of people in the network – business actors versus friends, family and colleagues	NC	
Interaction	Frequency of contacts	NC	3 dimensions (Neergaard *et al.*, 2005)
Content	Type of benefit extracted from contact networks	SC	
Structure	Directness of relationships and degree of formalization	NC	

Source: compiled synthesized from various literature; NC – networking capacity; SC – social capital

The major dimensions of social capital explored in the literature according to Table 1 can be summarized into two main dimensions. The first is the benefits that an actor accesses from the networking which can be termed as social capital (SC). These benefits are referred to as network content (Column 1, Table 1) (Neergaard, 2005). The second is networking capacity (NC) which consists of the skills, abilities and the competence of an actor in managing the networking of relationships. Examples of themes which explain the elements of the content of networking include, but not limited to governance and size (see colomn1, Table 1) (Hoang and Antoncic, 2003; Ruzzier and Antoncic, 2007). Between the social capital and the networking capacity, Table 1 shows that most researchers explore the networking capacity (NC) of business owners compared to exploring the social capital (SC) of the owners. In all, dominant characteristic of the studies explored in Table 1 is that with exception of Han (2006) as well as Ruzzier and Antoncic (2007) whose studies are based on SMEs internationalization, the other studies are entrepreneurship based. So this study builds on Han (2006) and Ruzzier and Antoncic (2007) to explore the content, size, structure and interaction of the business owners' networking. Using the studies from Han (2006) and Ruzzier and Antoncic (2007) four constructs namely networking interactions, networking structure, networking content and networking size emerged. These four constructs are used as the conceptual and the analytical framework for the study. These four constructs are explained as follows.

Networking Interaction

Following Neergaard *et al.* (2005) and Ruzzier and Antoncic (2007), this study uses interaction as the extent to which a business owner keeps in touch with the other actors in the networking and examines the frequency of the contact. This theme assumes that the frequent the interaction, the more benefits a business owner gains from the networking.

Networking Structure

Network structure is applied in this study as the formalization of the relationships with actors within a business owner's networking ties. This theme examines the extent to which the actors in a business owner's network are based on either formal or informal relationships. For example, networking ties with business association, chamber of commerce, government departments and suppliers are considered as formal while ties with family, friends and colleagues in this study are considered informal (Boojihawon, 2007; Ruzzier and Antoncic (2007).

Networking content

In line with Hoang and Antoncic (2003), Neergaard *et al.* (2005) networking content is operationalized as the benefits a business owner gains by being a member of a network of actors. Networking content is key to the business owners' networking ties because it serves as the indicator of attraction to prospective business owners. Among the content of networking ties include emotional support, companionship, business information, including market information and business advice (Neergaard *et al.*, 2005).

Networking size

In this study, networking size is operationalized as the number of ties in the business owner's network of relationships. The number of ties include the amount of formal (business association, inter-organisation) and informal ties (family members, colleagues) connected to a business owner (Hoang and Antoncic, 2003; Covellio and Cox, 2006; Ruzzier and Antoncic, 2007). Implicitly, the higher the amount of ties, the more the positive impact on a business outcomes (e.g. survival, profitability, growth).

The RBV Theory

Researchers (e.g Lages, Silva, Styles and Pereira, 2009; Chrisholm and Nielsen, 2009; Okpara, 2009; Ellis, 2010; Pollard and Jemicz, 2010) are re-examining the basic assumptions of the RBV. This is partly because of the counter assumption from the network theory that firms do not act alone or have to own every resource by themselves before they can undertake a business activity including exporting activity. Studies (e.g. Ellis, 2010; Pollard and Jemicz, 2010) agree that firms are embedded in social structure consisting of networks, ties, associations and relationships with other actors. To these researchers, the associations constitute a capital (social capital) which cannot be disassociated from a firm's resource bundle. In this study, RBV and network theory are integrated to examine the topic. Whilst both theories are co-examined, the weak version of the RBV is used instead of the pure version. Using the weak version of the RBV (which does not incorporate the core characteristics [value, rarity, inimitability], a firm consists of a stock of tangible and intangible resources, including the personality characteristics of the owner-manager which in part determines its export development process (Westhead *et al.*, 2001b; Hall and Cook, 2009) .

The link between the RBV, social capital and exporting activity is that the capability trait of a business owner to spot a potential social capital to facilitate his or her exporting activity is a core variable from the RBV (Ruzzier, *et al.*, 2006). Consequently, the RBV cannot be separated from any analysis that seeks to shed a full understanding of social capital of a firm's owner-manager. Therefore, building on similar studies in the field (e.g. Han, 2006; Coviello and Cox, 2006), this study integrates the RBV and the network theory to understand the topic. The integrated framework argues that with regard to the business owner's networking, it is the capability (RBV) of the business owner which enhances his or her chance to spot outside resources (social capital) to facilitate the time, pace and the intensity of an export business. Likewise, the four constructs identified from the network theory, the main construct taken from the RBV to inform this study is the business owner’s capability as shown in Figure 1. Figure 1, combines the constructs from the RBV and the network theories to inform the study. The meaning of Figure 1 is that the capability of the business owner which is derived from the RBV’s theory, is the variable which assists the business owner to spot networking opportunities. Consequently, when this capability is able to bring out social capital into the business owner’s business, the results are the multiplicity of business outcomes, which include export activities.

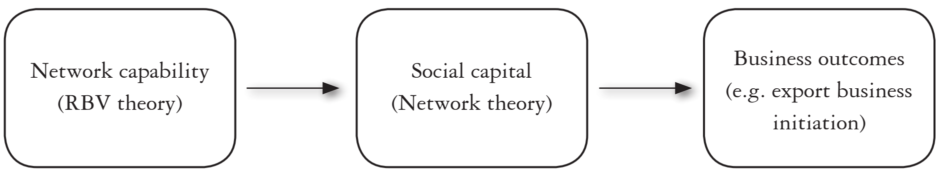

Figure 1: Analytical Framework

METHODOLOGY

Industry Selection & Research population

The population of the study consists of exporting and non-exporting manufacturing SMEs from the garment and textiles sub-sector of Ghana. A number of reasons accounted for the selection of the garment and textile sub-sector. The first reason is that according to Damoah (2011), the garment and textile sub-sector represent one of the least export participating sectors of the Ghanaian economy although it has attracted several export promotion interventions compared to other sub-sectors. Most important, the sub-sector is dominated by women, who constitute a priority within the Government of Ghana’s strategies for reducing poverty (Kuffour, 2008). Thirdly, following researchers (e.g. Hoang and Antoncic, 2003; Coviellio and Cox, 2006) focusing on a single sector minimises the problem of inter-industry variances.

Description, interpretation and explanation drive the analysis of the topic and so the case study research method is employed to allow the generation of rich data (Lee, 1999). Researchers (e.g. Halinen and Tornroos, 2005; Coviello, 2006, Coviello and Cox, 2006) on business networks recommend qualitative case study research in studies like this nature.

Sampling Frame

The sample frame used for this study is compiled from the Association of Ghana Industries (AGI), the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) and the Ministry of Trade

& Industry (MoTI). Having combined the three sample frames to one, 36 exporting and 33 non-exporting SMEs met the screening criteria which informed the selection of the firms chosen for this case study.

Criteria for Sample Selection

In line with McDougall *et al.* (2003) and Coviello and Cox (2006), the case firms which participated in the study were screened according to the following criteria. First, in line with the definition put forward by the World Bank in its study on the Ghana's manufacturing sub-sector, a firm must be either small, medium-sized or large. The World Bank study categorised SMEs according to the number of employees: 1) micro firms – those employing five or less; 2) small firms – those employing between 6 and 29; and 3) medium-sized firms – those employing between 30 and 99. In this study, the World Bank's definition of SMEs in Ghana is applied because it is the current definition being applied by most researchers (e.g., Adjasi, 2006; Aboagye, 2006; Abor & Harvey, 2008; Abor & Quartey, 2010; Damoah, 2011) working on Ghana and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). In this study, only the small and medium-sized firms were selected for both the exporters and non-exporters because according to Damoah (2011) the micro firms (1-5 employees) barely participate in export business in Ghana.

Second, a participating firm must be engaging only in the garment and textile sub-sector because it is the sector that informs the study and must be located in Accra (Ghana is all about Accra being the most industry concentrated located in Ghana [Abor *et al.*, 2008]). Third, whilst the exporting firm must have a minimum of two years of export experience, excluding domestic market experience, a non-exporting firm was required to have a minimum of 5 years of domestic operating experience. This criterion was motivated by Coviello & Munro (1997; Coviello and Cox, 2006), who maintained that the average length of domestic market operating experience for a small New Zealand before starting to export was three years. In extending this argument to Ghana, since New Zealand is a long way ahead of Ghana in terms of socio-economic development, it was decided that an average SME in Ghana should have at least 5 years of domestic operating experience before contemplating to start export business. Therefore, if after 5 years, a firm had not considered going into the export business and had not closed down, then it would be considered worthwhile in investigating why it had not considered such exporting when other similar firms had done so.

Fourth, a firm should be independent and indigenous, or a joint venture (partly foreign and partly local), but it should not be a subsidiary of a larger domestic or international firm, in order to avoid influence from the potential availability of resources on its export decision making.

It must be stated that the approach used in selecting firms for the study is also consistent with Eisenhardt (1989) who maintained that a random selection of cases in qualitative research is neither necessary nor preferable. Eisehardt argued that extreme examples are most appropriate when a study aims to extend and understand theory. So the cases were selected for theoretical reasons, coupled with the selection criteria (i.e. to explore the assumptions behind the conceptual framework in Figure 1). Each case firm was treated as an independent experiment that confirmed or refuted the themes that emerged from the data (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1997).

The data that were collected were based on inductive interview in line with Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (1989). Based on the analytical framework (Figure 1), characteristics of business owner's networking (i.e., network content, structure, size and interaction) were the main units of analysis that guided the interviews and the analysis. In this study the owner-managers, used as key informants were used as the primary and sole informants because of their involvement in the evolution, development and the management of small firms in line with other researchers (Evangelista, 2005; Coviello & Cox, 2006; Williams, 2008)

Data & Collection Instrument

The face-to-face interview was the main data collection instrument employed to understand the perspectives of owner-managers. In one case firm, (case firm 8), the marketing manager was interviewed because the owner was unable to make time for the interview, but the rest were all owner-managers. The interview guide used in the interview process imposed order and structure on the interview process. Following Coviello and Cox (2006) and as recommended by Pettigrew et al. (2001), words such as what, who, where, why and when were employed to guide the interview process in order to ascertain the depth and richness of data. The interview process took an average of 90 minutes for both exporters and non-exporters. Every interview was digitally recorded, and at the same time supplemented by handwritten notes. The handwritten notes supported the digital recording to ensure accuracy. While the digital recorder generated details of the interview conversations, it also enabled the researcher to handwrite the key themes that emerged in a relaxed manner. The field work of the study took place in 2009 and lasted for three (3) months, July to September, 2009.

Based on McAuley (1999), all the handwritten interviews were read and re-read at the close of each interview day. Where a lack of clarity was detected, the digital recording was replayed. Where clarity could not be achieved by such triangulation, the interviewee was contacted the next day for clarification. The rigour of the handwritten notes provided the researcher with a prior opportunity to understand the critical events that triggered the export initiation of the firms before the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed. The interview process took three months. Moreover, except for one interview, all the interviews were conducted in the English language. The owner-manageress (case study 23) who could not express herself in English spoke her mother tongue, 'Twi' (a common dialect spoken by about three quarters of the Ghanaian population). Her story was also recorded and written concurrently, and then translated or transcribed into English.

Analytical Techniques

In line with Coviello and Cox (2006) the characteristics of the business owner's networking were coded using the content analysis approach.

RESULTS, ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Description of case firms

The descriptive analysis of the firms in this case is based on researchers (e.g. Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2003; Bell *et al.*, 2004; Hutchinson *et al.*, 2005; Hutchinson *et al.*, 2006; Chetty & Agndal, 2007), who sampled many case studies in similar qualitative studies, summarised and combined the profile of the case firms. Similarly, Tables 2 and 3 summarise the profile of the exporting and the non-exporting firms. From Table 2, the mean exporting experience of the firms was 8 years varying from what Neupert *et al.* (2006) found (13 years) in Idaho (USA) and (10 years) in Vietnam. The average age of the exporting firms was 14, while that of the non-exporters was 10 years (Table 3). The average size of the workforce was 28 for exporters and 11 for the non-exporting firms (Table 3). This workforce size implies that garment and textile firms in Ghana are generally small and may partly explain why most firms in the sub-sector choose to concentrate on the domestic market. Of those that export, the average length of domestic operating experience before the commencement of export business was six years. This figure deviates from the average of three years, which Coviello & Munro (1997) and Coviello and Cox (2006) found among New Zealand's firms when they commenced export business. The disparity with regard to average domestic market experience before the time of commencing export business may be due to inequalities in socio-economic development between New Zealand and Ghana. Female owner-managers accounted for 72% (Table 2) and 70% (Table 3) of the exporting and the non-exporting firms respectively. The male owner-managers also represented 28% and 30 % for the exporting and the non-exporting firms respectively. Of the exporting firms the composition of the medium-sized firms were 33% whilst the non-exporters were 6%. Small firms dominate the non-exporting firms, consisting of 94% while they accounted for 67% of the exporting firms. None of the non-exporting firms had foreign ownership, but foreign ownership accounted for 3% of the exporting sample.

Table 2: Analysis of the Exporting Firms

Continuous Variable	Obs	Mean	Std	Min	Max
Domestic experience	36	6.611111	7.068149	2	35
Export Experience	36	8.416667	4.129165	2	18
Firm age	36	14.80556	14.80556	6	39
Firm size	36	28.88889	23.33211	6	98
Categorical Variable					
	Frequency	%			
Firm type					
Small Size	24	66.7			
Medium Size	12	33.3			

Gender		
Female	26	72.2
Male	10	28
Ownership type		
Foreign participation	1	2.8
Wholly local	35	97.2

Source: from the interview transcripts

Table 3: Analysis of Non Exporting Firm

Continuous Variable	Obs	Mean	Std	Min	Max
Domestic experience	33	10.18182	3.127045	5	16
Firm age	33	10.18182	3.127045	5	16
Firm size	33	11.39394	7.271259	6	34
Categorical Variable					
	Frequency	%			
Firm type					
Small Size	31	93.94			
Medium Size	2	6.06			
Gender					
Female	23	70.70			
Male	10	30.30			

Source: from the interview transcripts

Discussion

As the research focuses on the characteristics of the business owner's networking. In the first place, the perception of the exporters and non-exporters were first compared, interpreted and analysed. In line with Yin (1989) patterns were identified in each case firm and pattern-matched across cases. The analysis follows two-stage approach. At stage one, the perception of the exporters based on the analytical framework were first content analysed separately, followed by the non-exporters. At stage two, the perceptions of both groups are compared and content analysed to identify patterns, magnitude and the degree of the perceptions. In constructing network size, content, structure and interaction of the business owners' networking, a core criteria that informed the findings were that a business owner's networking whether formal or informal be seen to be used for the facilitation of his or her business. Based on these business owners whose family and friends were not being engaged to facilitate the development of their businesses were not counted among the categories of findings. The main findings are discussed below.

Networking size

From the case companies, coupled with the criteria that informed the coding, the main categories of networking ties mentioned by the case companies were: 1) trade associations (e.g. Ghana Chamber of Commerce, Association of Ghana Industries, Association of Women Entrepreneurs), 2) family members living abroad, 3) friends living abroad, including foreign nationals and 4) fellow local business men and women. First, the exporters confirmed the importance of networking and the importance of the amount of networking ties to their business outcomes. The findings indicate that in each of the ties, the exporters had more than the non-exporters. As to why the exporters possessed more ties compared to the non-exporters, the following were some of the direct quotes from the interviewees:

> *My brother {Mr. Interviewer}, you know {you see} in this country {in Ghana} it is not about systems of processes, but it is about people {in Ghana institutions do not work, so you have to know someone}. So if you are a businessman {businessman or woman} and you do not have people {do not know people} you cannot do business in Ghana. Even if your goods get to the ports, it will take some time to clear (Cases 7 and 20) (exporters)*

The quote above implies that one of the determinants of entrepreneurship success in Ghana is by deliberately having a network of actors for the purpose of the business survival and sustainability. In a sense, the owner-managers believe that the institutions created to facilitate entrepreneurship development in Ghana are inadequate and/or do not function. So an entrepreneur needs to be innovative and think outside the box by finding as many networks as possible. This finding confirms the importance of the personality characteristics of the owner-manager behind SMEs and so makes the consideration of the RBV in SMEs internationalisation research highly critical (Ruzzier *et al.*, 2006). The findings also support researchers who integrate the RBV and network to understand, social capital and SMEs internationalisation (Han, 2006; Coviello and Cox, 2006; Boojihawon, 2007).

With regard to the non-exporters, the primary motivation for being in business accounted for one of the reasons why they possess low network ties compared to the exporters. From the interview transcripts, it was obvious that most of the non-exporters formed their business to support their household income and so they were not challenged to grow the businesses which could have necessitated them to consider networking as a critical success factor to enter the export market. A direct quote from three female business owners confirm this.

> *Yes{responding to a question from the interviewer}, you know I am a housewife and I asked my husband to give me some money to set up this business just to keep me doing something { active}, that is the main reason why I set this business up, but we are okay as a family (Cases 12, 19, 25)*

The line of thinking from the preceding quote shows that between the exporters and the non-exporters, the motives of running their businesses differ. This finding confirms Fairlie and Robb (2009) regarding the fact that there are gender difference in business outcomes based on the motivations for going into business. The reason is that most of the case companies were women.

Network Structure

It was found that though not much variations existed between the exporters and the non-exporters based on the formal networking structure and/or contact. Implicitly, both groups possess ties with business associations, which a business owner has to formally register and pay dues, including formal duties and responsibilities; but differences were found between the two groups with regard to informal network structure. The non-exporters confirmed having family and friends, but unlike their counterparts exporters, the conversation with them indicated that while they have had family and friends, they never actively engaged them to develop their businesses. So as regards the networking structure, the exporters possess higher structure than the non-exporters. Compared to the non-exporters, the formal and informal structure of exporters networking support Coleman (1990), Ruzzier and Antoncic (2007) and Boojihawon (2007). Theoretically, the more capacity of the exporters support the stage theory (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). The fact that the exporters consciously searched for various types of networks (formal and informal) and actively engaged them to facilitate their businesses confirm the link between the RBV and the network theory integrated to explain the study.

Network Content

The interview transcripts show that both groups belong to various ties to benefit from business supports, including market information and financial assistance. It was found that the exporters possess more and/or contents in their ties than the non-exporters because unlike the non-exporters they actively engage both their formal and informal ties to develop the businesses. For instance, in addition to the resources mentioned above, most exporters mentioned deriving much emotional and companionship supports from their informal acquaintances. The quotes of some of the exporters in this theme are summarised as follows.

> *Sometimes it is when you share your business problems with your family and friends that is when you get new blood {new energy} to continue. My brother {my interviewer} it will surprise you the type of suggestions you will get if you involve your immediate family and friends in your business management (Case 4, 7, 9, 12, 14, 15).*

An interesting revelation here is that the exporters take the initiative to discuss their business issues with family and friends in order to get their support purposefully. Here it can be inferred that the motive of the business formation is crucial. As the exporters operate their business for long-term growth they take advantage of every networking opportunity available to them to advance the course of their businesses.

Networking interaction

This sub-theme considers the rate at which business owners keep contact with their ties because the degree of interaction determines to some extent the amount of resources to be gained from the networking. The implicit assumption is that if the networking contact is not managed by way of frequent interactions, it is more likely the actors will not receive the full benefits of the contacts. The ultimate outcome is that actors that frequently interact with their associates will have more resources than those that do not. This situation is the perfect case for the exporters. From the interview transcripts whilst significant members of both groups confirmed being members of business associations, the non-exporters were found not attending meetings, paying their dues, including participating in the functions of the associations. The quotes of some of the cases confirm this finding.

> *…. Because the government is not supporting our businesses {the businesses} it is the associations that play that role. In fact, you cannot expand internationally without being active in the associations {keeping membership with the associations}. It is the association that organises trade fair for us. When foreign investors come to Ghana, it is difficult for them to visit one business as an individual, but they will contact the association, and the association will organise interactive meetings with us. But all these if you do not go for meetings and visit the secretariat frequently, you will not hear and take advantage of the opportunities (Cases 33, 44, 45) (exporters).*

Overall from the findings from the interviews, it can be still be confirmed that the motives that drove the formation of businesses by the non-exporters (e.g. to support one's income and/or one's husband's income, especially the women) makes a significant difference. In fact, this point explains to a higher degree why the non-exporters rated low on all the dimensions employed to analyse the results of the study. It shows there is indeed gender differences in business outcomes (Fairlie and Robb, 2009). The finding indicates that unlike the non-exporters, the exporters maintain strong contact with their ties, both the associations and the informal ones. The importance of the frequency of interactions to the exporters support Ruzzier and Antoncic (2007). Again in keeping frequent contact, the network capability from the RBV is confirmed here.

CONCLUSION

The practices of the exporting firms confirmed the predictive power of the network theory and the export involvement of the SMEs. First of all, of all the dimensions used, the exporting firms scored higher network resource capacity than the non-exporters in terms of the networking size, content, structure and frequency of interaction. The findings of the Ghanaian exporters compare well with existing studies. For instance, using a Slovenia sample, Ruzzier and Antoncic (2007) found that the entrepreneur's networking structure is one of the most important elements of social capital. In that study, the authors found that both components of the business owner's network structure impact positively on their internationalization. Other researchers that found the importance of various dimensions of network and/or social capital and its positive impact on resource mobilization for internationalization include (Coviello, 2006; Chandra *et al.*, 2012) (e.g. network content). In another study based on a sample from New Zealand, Coviello and Cox (2006) found that network size appears crucial to international new venture. In that study, the authors found that with all the three case firms (Charlie, Tango Sierra) whilst the network size was crucial it increased as the firms grew along the international development trajectory (conception, commercialization and growth).

Above all, the assumption behind the analytical framework that informs the study matches strongly with the findings. The reason for this is because in each of the dimensions, the business owner's competence and/or networking capacity played a significant role in 1) whether or not to look for potential networking relationships and 2) how to manage the relationship to extract resources. The findings from the current study show that the relative importance of the network capacity of the business owner outweighs all the other variables (network content, size, structure and interaction) employed. The reason is that it is this competence that determines whether or not a potential networking opportunity is identified, accessed and maintained. Hence the organization of the variables in the analytical framework fit the empirical data collected to a stronger. The findings show that in Ghana the RBV dominates and drives the network theory to promote SMEs exporting activities. Implicitly to succeed in networking, the capability of the business owner is paramount in order to identify potential network ties, manage the ties and extract the required resources needed for business success. The outcome of the analytical framework shows that, an integration of the RBV and the network theory explain the business owner's networking supports researchers who advocate for similar integration (e.g. Han, 2006; Coviello and Cox, 2006).

Theoretical contribution

The findings complement and extend on extant literature on social capital and SMEs internationalisation research. The study makes two theoretical contributions to the literature. First, whilst social capital and SMEs' internationalisation research is flourishing, an analysis of the social capital resource capacity of exporters and non-exporters is ignored. The present findings therefore enhances our understanding regarding the resource capacity of exporting and non-exporting SMEs from social capital resource viewpoint. It shows the importance of the SMEs' internationalisation regarding the development and the promotion of SMEs in general. Second by exploring the topic from Ghana, the results have also enhanced our understanding from an understudied and a new geographical context.

Policy implications

First public policy must aim at focusing on building the managerial capacity of the business owners, both exporters and non-exporters. A key policy admonition based on the findings is that government export promotion programmes must emphasise collaboration as opposed to organic growth. It is recommended that collaborative initiatives with the non-exporters must serve as a key criteria for accessing export promotion. To enhance export participation of firms from the garment and textile sub-sector, public policy must upgrade most of the businesses of "housewives' to change their mind-sets to adopt more growth oriented business management approaches. Public policy must offer more support to men that enter the sub-sector because one view is that the dominance of females in the sub-sector account partly for its low export involvement.

Practical implications

On the firm level, both exporters and non-exporters must embrace networking as a key opportunity for resource mobilisation as the findings imply that SMEs can access knowledge and experiences with other actors without possessing them internally. Here the critical managerial responsibilities for the business owners is how to coordinate the interactions. As the network capacity became critical from the findings. Consequently, possession of networking capacity skill for both groups is an imperative in export development. In all, to do well in networking capabilities and to benefit fully from the networking of relationships, four critical skills are needed, namely leadership, communication, project management and negotiation. As it was indicated, because the institutional supports in Ghana are weak, these personality resource capacities must be constantly upgraded by both groups to build their network capacity sport export business opportunities. A strong motivation based on the findings from the exporters is that the non-exporters must not see their current internal barriers to their firms as the end of the story, but they must aggressively pursue networking for resource opportunities to achieve their various business outcomes including entering the export market and succeeding.

Implications for future

One suggestion is that future research could employ longitudinal studies to examine the extent to which existing ties are sustained. The next suggestion is to statistically test the relative difference of the variables employed.

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