

The Relationship between Export Performance and Competitive Advantage: A Study on Türkiye Companies

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Abstract: The constant evolution of technology and the new form of competition today challenge businesses and demonstrate the need to prioritize sustained gains over temporary successes. The experience and knowledge gained by businesses because of this focus can be broadly defined as a competitive advantage if they differentiate themselves from their competitors and contribute to a more successful export performance. Shifts in approaching international markets offer businesses the opportunity to develop their own competitive strategies. The most important of these strategies is to achieve export performance by focusing on competitive advantage capabilities. By achieving competitive advantage through resource-based capabilities, businesses can create greater value and enhance their export performance in the long term. In this context, this study encompasses an empirical assessment that aims to determine the effects of competitive advantage on achieving export performance in businesses operating in Türkiye. The study was conducted with 404 surveys collected from upper-middle-level managers and export department managers working in export businesses, and the results were evaluated. Correlation and descriptive modeling methods were used to evaluate the findings. According to the findings, there is a statistically significant and positive relationship between competitive advantage and export performance, a positive relationship between financial advantage and export performance, and a positive relationship between strategic advantage and export performance.

Keyword: Export Performance, Competitive Advantage, Resource-Based View, Export, Competitive

JEL Classification: F10, L10, L60

1. Introduction

When exporting, businesses must compete with international companies seeking to expand into foreign markets. A business's export performance isn't solely focused on customers and competitors within the industry. Export performance, which reflects a business's export prowess,

also depends on internal factors. Furthermore, since a business cannot quickly influence customers and other businesses in the industry when it seeks to improve its export performance, internal factors become more prominent. A business's export performance is significantly determined by the opportunities and internal assets it possesses. The ratio and efficient use of a business's tangible and intangible assets also positively impact export performance (Karacaoglu, 2015). Competitive advantage is defined as the superiority gained by competing businesses producing similar goods and services in a specific market or sector. Another definition is the crucial position a business achieves over other businesses in the sector through its resources and the effective use of these resources. The most important factor to keep in mind regarding competitive advantage is that competition encompasses not only existing competitors in the industry but also potential future entrants (Bracker, 1980). When viewed against established performance criteria, competitive advantage can demonstrate sustained performance over others within a specific timeframe (Huang, 2015). Sustained performance develops based on the degree of innovation and the creation of new value. By analyzing the actions of its competitors, a business strives to produce more sustainable and effective services. These activities are considered indicators of the business's capabilities that enable it to maintain its position in the industry and maintain its sustainability (Othman, 2015). According to Porter (1985), competitive advantage is defined as a positional advantage that emerges when a business offers its customers lower costs or differentiated products or services compared to its competitors. This competitive advantage, which cannot be easily replicated, is only possible if businesses meet the conditions of the source of the advantage, the amount of the sources of the advantage, and continuous innovation and improvement policies (Güleş and Özilhan, 2010). In this context, the increasingly competitive environment forces businesses to find ways and methods to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Today, the unique resources that create competitive advantage for businesses constitute their core competencies (Doğanay and Kırçova, 2016). The focus of the resource advantage theory, proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1995), is the identification of core competencies and resources and, accordingly, enabling businesses to achieve competitive advantage in the market.

In light of the foregoing, the aim of the current study is to examine how competitive advantage can influence export performance in exporting businesses and to examine the role of strategic advantage and financial advantage factors in achieving export performance goals in the Turkish context. To this end, this study is organized as follows: First, it outlines the theoretical background on which we base our arguments for developing hypotheses. This is followed by a methodology section that describes the data collection process and measures used to test the hypotheses, followed by a discussion of the empirical analysis and results. The article concludes with a discussion of the key findings and contributions.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

A firm's competitive advantage is linked to its export performance (Rua, 2018). The factors influencing export performance are identified as export resources and capabilities (Anil, 2016). Consequently, companies concentrate on identifying and improving their assets and skills for export effectiveness and enduring competitive advantage (Ismail, 2017). Sutanto and Sudarsono (2018) argue that the Resource-Based Approach is deemed the most suitable method for creating a management framework aimed at obtaining competitive advantage, pinpointing strategic resources, and improving export performance (Giantari, 2021). Certain research utilizing the Resource-Based Approach indicates that a company's resources and abilities are essential for gaining a competitive advantage and, as a result, improved export performance (Roostika, 2019). Zou et al. (2003) assert that capabilities that bolster a valuable market position can serve as a potential source of competitive advantage for firms.

Factors of competitive advantage consider the institutional frameworks that assist businesses in developing export-related resources and skills that lead to improved export performance (Ngo et al., 2016). To better comprehend the link between competitive advantage and export performance, we must analyze the position of businesses in relation to their competitors in a particular foreign market, in terms of a combination of cost, product, and service factors (Julien, 2003). Similarly, superior export performance is attained by acquiring and utilizing a competitive advantage over rivals in the export market (Morgan et al., 2004). Businesses gain a competitive edge when their products offer more value to customers than their rivals, which improves their export performance (Kaleka, 2002; Öz, 2020).

H1. There is a positive relationship between export performance and competitive advantage.

The Resource-Based Approach, which considers valuable resources to be the foundation of a businesses capacity to sustain its competitive advantage, is the focus of a large portion of the literature on export performance (Singh et al., 2024). The resource-based strategy highlights a businesses capacity for resource accumulation, integration, and distribution, explaining how resource heterogeneity might result in variations in export performance across firms. It is advised that businesses prioritize competitive advantage by constantly improving and utilizing their resources and skills in the dynamic environment that characterizes export markets (Chen, 2022). According to Lendel and Varmus (2011), the goals of competitive advantage determine the objectives that influence the strategies, methods, and routes used to develop and expand a company's creative capacity. Senior management is able to track rivals' actions, get client and market data, utilize business resources efficiently, and make productive investments in research

and development thanks to competitive advantage, which ultimately results in improved export performance. According to studies, these actions have a favorable effect on a company's export performance (Najafi, 2023). The expenses of creating new and unique products and packaging for export markets, building export channels, transportation, handling export-specific administrative tasks, and gathering data about export market demand are all included in the considerable effects that exporting has on exports (Manova et al., 2015). As a result, companies can better control export expenses, adapt to quick shifts in the global market, and get a competitive advantage with the help of improved capabilities and useful data (Guan & Ma, 2003).

H2. There is a positive relationship between export performance and strategic advantage.

In the export environment, cost advantage refers to the price of raw materials, the financial of items sold, the cost of each unit produced, and the selling price to consumers in international markets, to name a few. The quality superiority, packaging, design/style, and product/brand image of the exported product in the market are all related to its product advantage. Customer after-sales service, delivery speed and dependability, and product availability are all aspects of service advantage (Morgan et al., 2004). When a businesses has a combination of cost, product, and service advantages that set it apart from its rivals in a certain foreign market, it is said to have an export competitive advantage in this context (Louter et al., 1991). By providing customers with items that have higher value than those of its rivals, a businesses gains a competitive advantage over them. The strategy and competition literature recognizes two different categories of competitive advantage for companies: financial advantage (the businesses offers its products or services at a lower price than its competitors, primarily due to lower production, supply, and distribution costs) and differentiation advantage (customers perceive a consistent qualitative difference between the businesses and its competitors' offerings, favoring the businesses) (Porter, 1985; Day and Wensley, 1988).

H3. The positive relationship between export performance and financial advantage

3. Resarch Model

The connection between competitive advantage and its sub-dimensions strategic advantage and financial advantage as well as export performance was analyzed using a relational screening model in this study. The relational screening model is a quantitative research approach created to determine the level and direction of current links between variables (Karasar, 2011). Given this background, the theoretical framework that was created (Figure 1) considered export performance to be the dependent variable and competitive advantage to be the independent variable.

Additionally, the connection between export performance and competitive advantage was further examined by evaluating it in its two sub-dimensions: strategic and financial advantage.

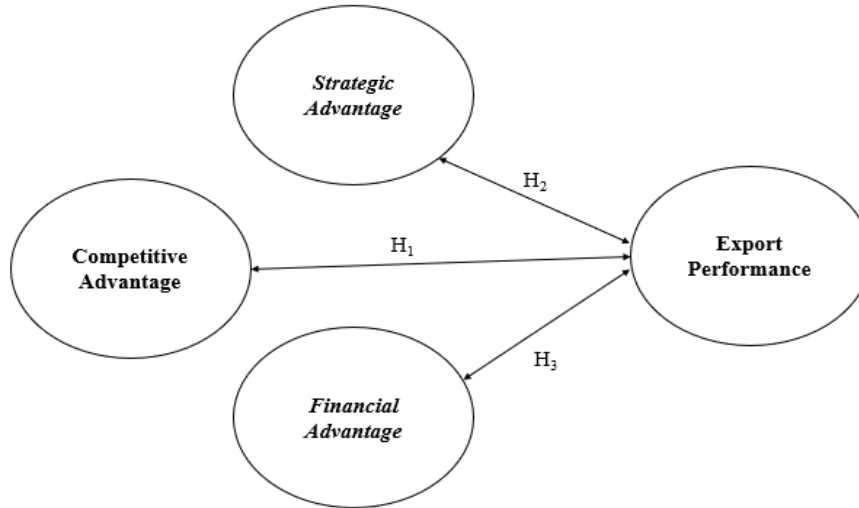


Figure 1 . Research Model

4. Methodology

This study was conducted within the context of exporting businesses in Türkiye. The study population consisted of businesses registered in Turkish exporter directories. The sample size consisted of 404 exporters. The sample was selected using simple random sampling from the Turkish Exporters' Association's online database. Data was collected through online and in-person surveys. The businesses level was used as the unit of analysis, and responses were collected from businesses owners/export managers/senior executives, as in many previous studies.

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competitive advantage literature and covers two basic dimensions, namely financial and strategic advantage (Schilke, 2014).

5. Data Analysis and Results

The information collected during the research was analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 27 software. For the scales, arithmetic means and standard deviations were determined, and the demographic profile of the study participants was initially described using frequency and percentage distributions using descriptive statistical approaches. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were used to evaluate the reliability of the scales (George & Mallery, 2010; Nunnally, 1978). Skewness and kurtosis values were used to determine whether the data were appropriate for parametric tests; if these values fell within ± 1.5 , the assumption of normal distribution was approved (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Pearson correlation analysis was used to ascertain the relationships between the variables and sub-dimensions, as per the study hypotheses. The degree and trend of the linear link between the variables was determined by this analysis. The hypotheses pertaining to the study's theoretical model were tested using the analyses done in this context. Descriptive statistical results regarding the demographic characteristics of the participants and the variables used in the study are presented; then, the analysis results for the relationships between the variables, based on the hypotheses developed, are explained in tables.

The findings regarding the demographic characteristics of the participating managers can be summarized as follows: 52% of the participants were determined to work in the international sales department, and 48% in the export department. The distribution of their titles revealed that 70% were mid-level managers, and 30% were senior managers. When age groups were examined, it was seen that the majority of the participants were between the ages of 45–54 (46.3%), followed by 23% from 25–34, 21% from 35–44, and 9.7% from 55 and older. An evaluation based on education levels revealed that 51.2% of the participants had a bachelor's degree, 36.4% had a master's degree, and 12.4% had a doctorate. The distribution of scores for competitive advantage, its sub-dimensions, and export performance variables was analyzed based on skewness and kurtosis coefficients. Skewness and kurtosis values within ± 1.5 are considered sufficient to meet the normal distribution assumption (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The skewness and kurtosis coefficients calculated in this study were found to fall within the specified range, and the data were assumed to be normally distributed (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Min.	Max.	\bar{X}	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
Competitive Advantage	2,00	4,83	3,45	,75	-0.49	-0.77	,76
Strategic Advantage	1,33	5,00	3,49	,92	-0.52	-0.72	,74
Financial Advantage	1,00	5,00	3,41	,90	-0.39	-0.65	,79
Export Performance	1,20	4,80	3,35	1,04	-0.99	-0.51	,93
<i>α: Cronbach's Alfa \bar{X}: Mean SD: Standard Deviation</i>							

Descriptive statistical results for the variables utilized in the study are shown in Table 1. All variables' arithmetic means (\bar{X}) fell between 3.35 and 3.49, suggesting that respondents had somewhat focused opinions on competition, strategy, financial advantages, and export performance. The responses were reasonably distributed around the mean, as seen by the standard deviation (SD) values between 0.75 and 1.04.

Skewness and kurtosis values were used to determine if the data followed a normal distribution. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), the parametric test assumptions were satisfied if the value fell within ± 1.5 . The data were normally distributed, as shown by the fact that all of the skewness and kurtosis coefficients fell within the allowed bounds. Furthermore, Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficients were used to assess the internal consistency of the scales used, and reliability levels greater than .70 were found for all variables (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The export performance variable had a particularly high reliability value of $\alpha = .93$. Given the data's normal distribution, the Pearson correlation analysis, a parametric test, was used to analyze the relationships between the variables (Table 2). These findings support the conclusion that the scales utilized are both reliable and appropriate for analysis. Correlation coefficients were interpreted using the categorization put out by Ural and Kılıç (2018). As a result, the relationship between 0.00 and 0.25 is deemed weak, between 0.26 and 0.50 is moderate, between 0.51 and 0.75 is strong, and between 0.76 and 1.00 is considered very strong. Both the direction of the connection and the extent of its impact may be understood using these parameters.

Table 2. The Relationship Between Competitive Advantage, Its Sub-Dimensions, and Export Performance

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Competitive Advantage	1	,83**	,82**	,38**
2. Strategic Advantage	,83**	1	,36**	,41**
3. Financial Advantage	,82**	,36**	1	,22**
4. Export Performance	,38**	,41**	,22**	1

** $p < 0.01$; $n = 404$

Pearson correlation analysis is used in Table 2 to explore the connections between export performance and competitive advantage and its sub-dimensions. The findings show a strong and favorable correlation between export performance and competitive advantage ($r = 0.38$; $p < 0.01$). This indicates that a company's export performance improves along with its level of competitive advantage. Strategic advantage, one of the sub-dimensions of competitive advantage, was found to have a moderately positive and significant association with export performance ($r = 0.41$; $p < 0.01$). This implies that export performance is improved by strategic capabilities that boost competitiveness in international markets. The correlation between export performance and financial advantage was found to be comparatively low ($r = 0.22$; $p < 0.01$). Nonetheless, the positive and statistically significant correlation between export success and financial stability suggests that financial stability is a contributing factor. Additionally, there were very strong positive correlations between competitive advantage and its sub-dimensions, financial advantage ($r = 0.82$) and strategic advantage ($r = 0.83$). This discovery supports the hypothesis that a combination of financial and strategic factors creates competitive advantage. In conclusion, it was determined that export performance is significantly and favorably impacted by competitive advantage and its sub-dimensions. As a result, the theories H1, H2, and H3 were accepted.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from this study indicate that competitive advantage is a key factor in enhancing export performance. However, as previously hypothesized, each dimension also has a distinct effect. While there is a positive relationship between strategic competitiveness and export performance, a significant relationship also exists between financial advantage and export performance. The results regarding the relationship between strategic advantage and export

performance confirm the results of previous studies (such as Rua, 2018; Keskin, 2021) found a strong relationship between these variables. From this result, it can be concluded that companies that possess and are willing to achieve strategic advantage can achieve the expected improvement in export performance. Furthermore, companies that gain strategic advantage experience a steady improvement in their export performance (Kumlu, 2014; Okpara, 2009), therefore focusing on strategic advantage as a sub-dimension of competitive advantage may lead to better results (Leonidou, 2015). According to the results of the strategic advantage dimension of competitive advantage ($r=0.31, p<0.01$), it is positively related to export performance, which is consistent with the existing literature. Some scholars have argued that gaining financial advantage significantly contributes to export performance (Ferreira, 2016; Liang, 2022; Tan, 2015). Accordingly, being a cost-oriented business that encourages and develops financial advantage to achieve export performance can lead to higher export performance. Regarding the results regarding the financial advantage dimension, this dimension highlights the importance of being competitive in the international market, gaining cost opportunities against competitors, and simultaneously maintaining market control. This result confirms previous findings of some authors who consider financial advantage a key factor in improving export performance (Ling-Yee, 2001; Jeong, 2023; Ruzekova, 2020; Keskin, 2021). Competitive advantage is not only a precursor to export performance but also a vital capability for businesses to sustain their export performance, especially in the highly competitive international environment. Considering the results of this study, businesses aiming for higher export performance, profitability, and growth in international markets can achieve competitive advantage in their export activities by focusing on strategic and financial advantages, securing a distinct position from their competitors, and thus sustaining their export performance success. This study is subject to several limitations that could be addressed in future research. First, the study's sample size is small due to limited access to managers, and the sample does not encompass all exporting firms in Türkiye. Future studies may consider using a broader sample within a specific sector and industry, or within a specific region, and may yield different findings. It would also be beneficial for future studies to examine other relevant constructs to test the relationships between entrepreneurial orientation and export performance.

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