

THE ANTECEDENTS OF EXPORT MARKET ORIENTATION: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF TURKISH MANUFACTURING FIRMS^{1,2}



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to investigate the factors influencing the behavior of Turkish manufacturing firms towards export market orientation. In this regard, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 export sales managers and the obtained data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. According to the findings of the analysis, the factors that may influence firms' export market orientation practices are classified under seven themes which include organizational structure, firm characteristics, firm capabilities, export sales manager characteristics, top management characteristics, inter-firm factors, and environmental factors. The study provides important conclusions regarding which firm capabilities should be developed to increase the level of market orientation in export activities, and which characteristics and competencies of export managers and top-level executives should be emphasized. Additionally, it highlights the importance of developing trust-based cooperative relations with importers to obtain export market knowledge and provide effective responses.

Keywords: Export market orientation, export marketing, qualitative research

JEL Code:M39, M16, M31

Scope: International trade and logistics

Type: Research

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¹ It has been declared that the relevant study follows ethical guidelines.

² This study is based on the doctoral dissertation of Zeynep DERELİ, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Sanem ALKİBAY.

İHRACAT PAZAR YÖNELİMİNİN ÖNCÜLLERİ: TÜRK İMALAT FİRMALARI ÜZERİNE KEŞİFSEL BİR ÇALIŞMA



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ÖZ | Bu çalışmada, Türk imalat işletmelerinin ihracat pazar yönelimli davranışlarda bulunmalarını etkileyebilecek faktörlerin araştırılması amaçlanmıştır. Bu kapsamda, ihracat satış yöneticisi unvanında çalışmakta olan 18 kişi ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiş, elde edilen veriler içerik analizine tabi tutulmuştur. Analiz sonucunda, işletmelerin ihracat pazar yönelimi uygulamalarını etkileyebilecek faktörler; organizasyonel yapı, işletme özellikleri, işletme yetenekleri, ihracat satış yöneticisi özellikleri, üst düzey yönetici özellikleri, işletmeler arası faktörler ve çevresel faktörlerden oluşan yedi tema altında sınıflandırılmıştır. Çalışma tespit edilen bulgulardan hareketle, ihracat faaliyetlerinde pazar yönelimi düzeyini artırmak için hangi işletme yeteneklerinin geliştirilmesi ve ihracat müdürleri ile üst düzey yöneticilerin hangi özellik ve yetkinliklerinin ön plana çıkarılması gerektiğine yönelik önemli çıkarımlar sunmaktadır. Ayrıca, ithalatçılar ile güven ve işbirliğine dayalı ilişkiler geliştirilmesinin, ihracat pazar bilgisinin elde edilmesi ve etkili cevapların verilmesindeki önemine dikkat çekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İhracat pazar yönelimi,
ihracat pazarlaması, nitel araştırma
JEL Kodları: M39, M16, M31

Alan: Uluslararası ticaret ve lojistik
Türü: Araştırma

1. INTRODUCTION

Export orientation of the firms running inside national borders not only enhances sales and profitability, but also allows them to capitalize on opportunities in global markets and acquire competitive advantage. However, exporting to different countries with diverse economic and cultural characteristics poses several challenges for businesses. These challenges include potential uncertainties, constantly changing customer demands, and dynamic marketplaces. The ability of firms to overcome these challenges and achieve exceptional export performance depend on their ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions and respond to customer demands as quickly and accurately as possible.

In today's business landscape, exporting plays a crucial role for the survival and growth of manufacturing firms (Pascucci, Bartoloni & Gregori, 2016). Increased overseas trade, globalization of products and services, and rapid internationalization of companies have all contributed to a greater emphasis on the importance of export performance. The success of a firm is influenced by its export ability, and it is critical to understand how to improve this ability. International marketing literature suggests "being market oriented" as a route to export success (Rose & Shoham, 2002). Market orientation, generally refers to a firm's ability to acquire and utilize market intelligence related to customer demands and competitors, and to use it to respond to changes in the market (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990), is a critical marketing capability and strategic resource that provides firms a competitive edge and improves their successes (Pascucci et al., 2016).

It is important to acknowledge that an exceptional performance achieved inside a local setting cannot be effortlessly transferred to a foreign market environment (Murray, Gao, Kotabe & Zhou, 2007). It is not a foregone conclusion that a firm's market orientation will be the same in its home and export markets because export information management processes are usually far less developed and sophisticated than those for the domestic market (Cadogan, Paul, Salminen, Puumalainen & Sundqvist, 2001). Examining the concept's nature in an international setting, Cadogan and Diamantopoulos (1995) investigated the usefulness of the market orientation measurement instruments already in use for export markets. By combining the theories of market orientation presented by Narver and Slater (1990) and Jaworski and Kohli (1993), they put these concepts into practice in the context of export markets. Subsequently, Cadogan et al. (1999) developed scales to measure export market orientation behavior of firms and conceptualized dimensions including export intelligence generation, export intelligence distribution, and export intelligence responsiveness.

Previous research on export market orientation has revealed several factors that influence companies in adopting market-oriented behaviors. These factors include organizational structure (e.g., centralization and formalization), export market-oriented reward and training systems, export experience, export behavior, firm capabilities and past export performance (Cadogan et al., 2001; Cadogan, Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2002; Cadogan, Cui, Morgan & Story, 2006; Chi & Sun, 2013). Nevertheless, there are limited studies on top management characteristics, inter-firm factors and environmental factors that could potentially influence the development of export market-oriented behavior. The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that contribute to the development of market-oriented behaviors, which have not been identified in existing literature. In order to conduct this exploratory research, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with eighteen export sales managers from manufacturing companies that are listed in the “Top 1000 Exporters 2022” list published by the Türkiye Exporters Assembly.

The results of the study provide valuable insights on the specific firm capabilities that need to be developed, along with the qualities and skills of export sales managers and senior managers that should be given priority to enhance the level of market orientation in export activities. Additionally, the importance of fostering trust and cooperation with export customers has been highlighted as a key factor in enhancing export market orientation level of firms

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of market orientation has its roots in modern marketing concept (Cadogan, 2003). Modern marketing concept is based on the principle that firms should identify customer needs more effectively than their competitors in order to achieve sustainable success (Day 1994; Kotler 2002; Kırca, Jayachandran & Bearden, 2005). The modern marketing concept, which was first developed and conceptualized in the 1950s and 1960s, emphasizes that a firm should adopt a total and continuous customer focus, that all marketing activities should be conducted in a coordinated manner, and that the firm target should be long-term profit rather than sales figures (Cadogan, 2003, p. 4).

According to another definition, the modern marketing concept is a business management philosophy based on the company-wide acceptance of customer orientation and profitability as a necessity, as well as the recognition of the critical role of marketing in communicating market needs to all corporate departments (McNamara, 1972, p. 51). Based to the relevant definitions, it can be said that marketing concept has three primary dimensions: customer orientation,

dissemination of market information among departments and profitability (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990).

The term "market orientation" was developed to address the question of how to fulfill the requirements of the modern marketing concept and to eliminate any uncertainties regarding its implementation (Akbar & Ahmadov, 2017). Market orientation is often characterized by researchers as being the practical equivalent of the marketing concept (McCarthy & Perreault, 1984; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990). It is based on the two essential characteristics of the marketing concept: "customer-orientation" and "dissemination of market information among departments" (Ekber & Ahmadov, 2017). Profitability, the third component of the approach, is not viewed as a requirement because it is regarded as a result of being market oriented (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990).

The majority of the research on market orientation theory and its implications relies mainly on two seminal studies released in 1990 by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990). These two publications expanded upon prior study on the "marketing concept" (Narver, Slater & Tietje, 1998) and established the two primary viewpoints in the literature on market orientation (Griffiths & Grover, 1998). Kohli and Jaworski (1990) developed the behavioral approach, whereas Narver and Slater (1990) developed the cultural perspective (Narver & Slater, 1990; Slater & Narver, 1994a, 1994b, 1995). According to Narver and Slater (1990), market orientation is an organizational culture that places the highest priority on the profitable achievement and maintenance of superior customer value, taking into account the interests of other key stakeholders, and establishes behavioral norms for generating and responding to market information throughout the organization. Narver and Slater (1990) suggest that market orientation should consider not only customers but also competitors and environmental factors such as technology and government regulations that influence customer needs and wants. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) proposed another market orientation doctrine: the behavioral approach. According to this approach, market orientation represents a set of activities that reflect the degree to which an organization has adopted the philosophy of the marketing concept. Kohli and Jaworski (1990) classified these activities into three categories based on substantial field research with senior managers. These include generating market information, disseminating information across business functions and responding to this information. These actions are deemed necessary for a company to produce superior products and services that suit the expectations of its customers (Atuahene-Gima, 1996).

The concept of "export market orientation" emerged as a result of the fact that market orientation measurement for international markets is influenced by a

variety of factors such as law, logistics, political and economic systems, competition, and culture, as well as the fact that export information channels are less developed and complicated than information channels in the local market (Cadogan et al., 2002). Cadogan and Diamantopoulos (1995) explored the usefulness of existing market orientation measurement instruments for export markets, with a focus on understanding the notion in an international context. By combining behavioral (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990) and cultural (Narver & Slater, 1990) approaches to market orientation, the authors have redefined market orientation in an international context (Akyol & Akehurst, 2003). They developed a multi-item scale that can be used to measure export market orientation, which includes three behavioral components (a) the generation of market intelligence related to the firm's exporting operations, (b) the dissemination of this information to appropriate decision makers, and (c) the development and implementation of responses directed towards export customers, competitors, and other extraneous export market factors which impact the firm's ability to provide superior value for export customers (Cadogan et al., 2001; Pascucci et al., 2016). Cadogan, Sundqvist, Puumalainen and Salminen (2012, pp. 1421-1422) provide the following definition for the dimensions of export market orientation:

- *Export market intelligence generation* refers to activities that gather information about all export value chain elements, such as customers, competitors, suppliers, and distributors. These activities also involve acquiring information on market changes that may have an impact on the firm's ability to provide higher value to current and prospective export customers. Export market information generation should not be limited to members of the export function, but should take into account that all employees in the firm have the potential to generate market information for export operations.
- *Export market intelligence dissemination* involves delivering the generated information to export decision makers and other employees of the firm who may gain benefit from the information that is provided. Information can be disseminated both internally within the export marketing function and between export personnel and employees from other business functions.
- *Responsiveness* component refers to the use of market information generated and disseminated inside the organization to create and implement export marketing strategies and tactical maneuvers. The efforts to respond to market information are centered on firms' export markets (export customers, competitors, and other characteristics of the export environment), and do not include responses to local markets.

Additionally, it is crucial to acknowledge that the responsiveness component focuses on the ability to respond to both current expressed desires of export customers as well as latent needs and desires.

In this study, we focus on the concept of export market orientation introduced by Cadogan and Diamantopoulos (1995) and aimed to understand the factors that influence Turkish firms' adoption of market-oriented behaviors in their export activities.

3. METHODS

This section presents the semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with export sales managers from the companies participating in the study, as well as the conclusions of the content analysis conducted using Straus and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory coding paradigm.

3.1. Sample

In the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with the managers in charge of export sales at the manufacturing companies listed in Annex-1. The "purposive theoretical sampling method" was employed for sample selection. Purposive sampling techniques, also known as non-probability sampling or qualitative sampling, involve selecting specific units or circumstances "not randomly, but based on a specific purpose" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 713).

Theoretical sampling, which is considered one of the deliberate sampling methods (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2014), requires researchers to go locations, individuals, and circumstances that would supply information on the concepts they want to learn more about. Unlike traditional sampling approaches, researchers begin the analysis immediately after collecting the initial data; the analysis leads to concepts, which produce new questions. The questions encourage the collection of further data, allowing the researcher to understand more about these concepts. This cyclical process continues until the research reaches saturation, or when all of the major categories are fully developed, diverse, and integrated (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p. 147).

The qualitative study's sample comprises of eighteen participants who work as export sales managers in firms listed in the Türkiye Exporters Assembly's "Top 1000 Exporters 2021 " list. To collect the needed information, the sample was chosen on the basis that the firms were producers-exporters and the participating export managers had at least 5 years of export sales experience (Annex 1). To ensure data diversity, no sectoral distinctions were made while selecting participating firms, and the goal was to study variances in market orientation practices across producers specializing in different product groups. In accordance with the theoretical sampling, data collection and analysis continued

simultaneously and new interviews were conducted as more information was needed. In the end, interviews with a total of 18 export managers were completed and the data collection process was finalized.

3.2. Ethical Permission for the Study

All the regulations outlined in the "Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions" were followed in this study. None of the acts listed in the second section of the Directive, "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics," were conducted.

Name of the ethical review board = Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University
Institute of Graduate Programs Ethics Committee

Date of ethical assessment decision=26.07.2022

Certificate of Ethics Assessment Number= E.113365

3.3. Data Collection Method and Process

Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews. An in-depth interview is a direct, personal interview in which an interviewer probes a single respondent to elicit his or her underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings regarding a certain issue (Malhotra, 2007, p. 158). In-depth interviews are required when people's behaviors, feelings, or perceptions of the environment around them cannot be observed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In contrast to other forms of interviews, in a semi-structured in-depth interview, once the questions on the list have been answered, participants are free to contribute anything that they believe is relevant to the conversation. Researchers can also ask extra questions to clarify points or delve deeper into a topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2014, p.59).

Managers who volunteered to participate in the study were sent an "informed consent form" and authorization from the Ethics Committee via email. In the relevant e-mail, the participants were briefly informed about the study's subject and scope. The location and timing of the interviews were decided based on the availability of the participant managers, and the interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were taped with the participants' consent and then transcribed for analysis. The transcripts of the audio recordings totaled 215 pages, with each interview taking an average of 5 hours to transcribe and edit.

The interview procedure used in the study includes sixteen questions. While the first six questions are about generating export market information, questions 7-10 are about disseminating market information, and the latter five are about the dimension of responsiveness. The opinions of three academicians with backgrounds in qualitative research and export marketing were solicited for the relevancy, language, and order of the interview questions, and the required arrangements were made. Following the formulation of the questions, a pilot

interview was conducted with an experienced export sales manager who was not included in the sample group. Following this pilot interview, it emerged that asking questions in the interview protocol related to the dimensions of export market orientation and informing the participants about each component would be more helpful in helping them grasp the subject and the questions.

3.4. Data Analysis

Each interview was transcribed once it was recorded, and the audio transcripts were read numerous times before being evaluated. Data were analyzed using Stauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory coding paradigm. Grounded theory, also known as theory building, is both a research strategy and a method of analyzing data (Ilgar & Ilgar, 2013). Interviews are typically the primary form of collecting data in this research design. As a requirement of theoretical sampling, data are collected and analyzed simultaneously (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher then selects how and from whom to obtain the next set of data. The approach involves revisiting existing participants, conducting interviews with additional individuals until theoretical saturation is achieved, and then returning to the theory to fill in the gaps and elaborate on how the theory works (Creswell, 2013, p.85).

"Open coding" is the first stage of analysis in the grounded theory coding paradigm developed by Stauss and Corbin (1998). The researcher codes the data in every feasible way during the open coding phase, which involves openly coding the data line by line and comparing the events in the data with one another (Holton, 2007). Following this coding, the researcher returns to the data and applies the axial coding procedure to construct categories around the open coding category that they have identified as the fundamental phenomenon. At this point, the researcher groups codes, joins similar ones, and gathers them into fundamental analytical groups (Creswell, 2013, p.86). The third stage in grounded theory analysis is selective coding. The reason for using the term selective for this stage is that the researcher determines a feature as the main category and focuses on it. When this choice is made, theoretical analysis and theory development are limited to the data related to this primary category (Ilgar & Ilgar, 2013, p.218).

MAXQDA 2022 was used for the coding and analysis of qualitative data (VERBI Software, 2021). Following open, axial, and selective coding procedures, the study identified seventeen categories with a combined frequency of 330. Then, after considering these seventeen categories and their connections, seven themes (higher-level categories) were established. Table-1 presents the categories and themes that emerged from the qualitative research.

Table 1: Categories and Themes Identified as a Result of Qualitative Analysis

Coding Samples	Fr.	Categories	Themes
Adopting customer satisfaction as a mission by all departments; Sharing both positive and negative customer feedback with other departments; Employees' willingness to share information; Social events for employees	23	Interdepartmental Coordination	Organizational Factors
Granting price-setting autonomy to export sales managers; Authorization of the export managers for the fulfilment of customer requests	5	Centralization	
A large number of personnel; Many stops in the flow of information	4	Firm Size	Firm Characteristics
Exporting to a large number of markets; A substantial number of customers in export markets	5	Export Experience	
Being a sector leader in the world market; Being part of a large conglomerate; Having internationally recognized brands; Being a well-established firm that has been in operation for years	13	Firm Reputation	
Quality of after-sales service; Knowledge and experience of the technical support team (R&D, P&D, After Sales Technical Support); Speed and efficiency of the export sales support team (logistics, foreign exchange, legislation/regulation, etc.)	20	Organizational Capabilities	Firm Capabilities
Product quality; High production capacity; Short lead time; High production technology; Wide product range	23		
Adaptive selling ability; Export sales experience; Product knowledge; Foreign language proficiency	15	Professional Competence	Export Sales Manager Characteristics
Relationship building ability; Continuous interaction with customers; Strong persuasion skills; Ability to understand customer requests correctly	17	Communication Competency	
Being interested in the cultures of the exporting countries; Possessing cultural knowledge; Showing behavioral flexibility based on cultural values and norms.	9	Cultural Competency	
Being open-minded; Being open to communication with subordinates; Sharing authority; Not being despotic and rigid; Being team-oriented	34	Effective Leader Characteristics	Senior Manager Characteristics
Industry experience; Having been working in the firm for a long time; Knowing customers well	7	Experience	
Prioritizing exports; Quick decision-making; Effective use of business networks; Willingness to share information; Encouraging staff to share information; Providing appropriate funding for export marketing activities.	27	Other Senior Manager Characteristics	

Table 1:(Continued)

Coding Samples	Fr.	Categories	Themes
Observing mutual interests; Developing a close relationship; Acting as a friend; Being in constant interaction; Scheduling mutual regular visits; Mutual flexibility in relationship	40	The Exporter-Importer Relationship	Inter-Firm Factors
Providing market information from the customer; Providing information about competitors from customers; Sharing mutually beneficial information; Providing information for new product development from customers; Providing information from customers regarding potential customers	23	Information Exchange	
Maintaining mutual trust; Being honest and forthcoming with the customer	14	Trust	
Economic developments in the local market; Political crises with other countries; National export-promotion programs	15	Home Country Environmental Factors	Environmental Factors
The export market's socioeconomic conditions; Competition intensity; Geographic distance/time differences; Regulation/legislation changes	36	Host Country Environmental Factors	

4. FINDINGS

In this section of the study, the analysis results from in-depth interviews will be reviewed. Based on the high-level categories (themes) presented in Table-1, the qualitative study findings will be presented under seven major headings: organizational factors, firm characteristics, firm capabilities, export sales manager characteristics, senior manager characteristics, inter-firm relations, and environmental factors.

4.1. Organizational Factors

Interdepartmental coordination and centralization are two categories under the organizational factors theme developed as a result of in-depth interviews. Interdepartmental coordination, also known as export coordination, refers to an organizational culture that prioritizes the collaboration and support among employees, while minimizing dysfunctional conflict and promoting shared work-related goals (Cadogan et al., 2001, p.264). This category includes coding such as adopting customer satisfaction as a mission by all departments, including staff from other departments in routine department meetings, sharing positive and negative customer feedback with other departments, employees' willingness to share information, and organizing social activities for employees.

Export marketing literature supports that export coordination has a

positive impact on a firm's development of export market-oriented behaviors (Cadogan et al., 2001; Cadogan et al., 2002; Cadogan et al., 2006). In firms with strong export coordination, export success is shared by the export unit and other departments as a common goal (Diamantopoulos and Cadogan, 1996; Cadogan et al., 2001). Participant 8 and Participant 4 support this viewpoint with the following statements, which highlight the significance of all departments prioritizing customer satisfaction and exchanging customer feedback with other departments:

"It is not just the salesperson's or customer representative's responsibility to ensure customer satisfaction. We are, after all, an internal client as well. I am also a customer of the production or planning department. So long as you communicate the customer feedback to the right people within these departments, it will be possible to comprehend the seriousness of the work and the exact expectations." (Participant 8)

"The sales team prepares a report after each customer visits. We distribute this report to other departments. We are trying to share with other units the points that are acceptable to distribute within the firm so that sales (department) are not the only ones who feel the problem. If there is satisfaction or something that makes us proud, this is not only the success of the salesperson. Everyone involved in the success should be aware that they also contributed. To that aim, we try to share as much feedback as possible." (Participant 4)

"Centralization" was found as another category within the organizational factors subject. The concept of centralization refers to where the decision-making authority is in the organization. A highly centralized export decision-making mechanism indicates a top management structure in which export department employees have little decision-making authority whereas a decentralized decision-making mechanism occurs when export market decisions are delegated to export department employees (Belich & Dubinsky, 1995; Cadogan et al., 2006). Participant 13 and Participant 8 described the issues caused by their limited decision-making ability when reacting to customer expectations as follows:

"We attempt to react to customer queries as fast as possible. However, I cannot say it is particularly fast. Price is the primary consideration for most customers. We, as the export sales team, are unable to provide direct prices, so we may not be able to respond quickly... So, we have a

certain limit. The same is true for customer relations and pricing. We are unable to deviate from this limit or take any action without senior management's approval." (Participant 13)

4.2. Firm Characteristics

Firm characteristics theme includes the categories of firm size, firm reputation, and export experience. Firm size, defined as the total number of employees, may hinder an organization's ability to collect, interpret, and use information from external markets (Navarro, Acedo, Robson, Ruzo & Armario 2010). According to Armario, Ruiz and Armario (2008), small export firms do not have access to potential sources of export information. However, Navarro et al. (2010) discovered that firm size had no impact on the level of export market orientation. During the in-depth interviews, two participants (18 and 14) mentioned that the size of a firm can have an adverse effect, particularly when it comes to the dissemination of export information:

"Even though we strive to process and disseminate the information in the right way, having too many employees can cause confusion. Put another way, there are disturbances in the proper and rapid transfer of information when there are too many people involved. Actually, as we grow, we start to run into issues. For instance, the R&D section employs roughly fifty individuals. Information cannot be communicated to everyone there and this creates problems." (Participant 14)

The study also identified the category of firm reputation, which falls under the heading of firm characteristics, as one of the variables that may influence export market orientation. To date, there is no evidence in the export market-oriented literature supporting the existence of such a link. Participant 18 mentioned that their company's global recognition and positive image assist them in obtaining export market information.

"Our brand recognition and company image provide us the opportunity to attract customers. Put another way, we lead our industry globally. For this reason, information comes to us continuously..."

Export experience is another category within the theme of firm characteristics. As the firm gains more experience in exporting, its knowledge and ability to access various sources of export information will also improve (Cadogan et al., 2001). The relevant literature supports the notion that export

experience has a favorable effect on the level of export market orientation (Cadogan et al., 2001; Cadogan et al., 2006). Participant 15 supported this viewpoint by making the following statements:

“As we expand into other markets, we will be able to attract more customers. We presently export to over 103 countries. More customers equal more market information... We have deep knowledge of each region. For example, things are starting to open up in Ukraine. We can access this information because we export.”

4.3. Firm Capabilities

Organizational capabilities were identified as the primary firm capabilities that can effectively foster the development of export market-oriented behaviors. These capabilities are classified into two subgroups: operational and production-related capabilities. Organizational capabilities are described as the ability to use the tangible or intangible resources to complete a task or activity in order to improve a firm's performance (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Grant, 1991; Teece et al., 1997).

Operational and production-related capabilities are among the "first level capabilities" in Collis' (1994) classification of organizational capabilities, indicating the firm's ability to conduct its core functional operations. Similarly, Day (1994) refers to these competencies connected to essential firm activities such as fiscal management, production, human resource management, and logistics as "inside-out capabilities". Participants highlighted the operational processes that function in the background of sales team activities and frequently emphasized their importance in ensuring customer satisfaction:

"Our job is technical, and we have a technical staff supporting us. I recently visited a customer in Austria. The customer complimented us for immediately resolving a technical issue. The competence and prompt response of my friend on the technical team who fixed the problem allowed us to receive face-to-face thanks at that meeting... This is one of the most crucial aspects of our customer relationships. Because we are doing a technically demanding task, chemical and industrial engineers should be involved..." (Participant 12)

Participants also mentioned the production-related advantages of their firms and stated that production capabilities have a positive impact on export market orientation as follows:

"We produce much better than our competitors. We know this product from a to z. This is the basis for our customers to prefer us regardless of the price and for their satisfaction..." (Participant 9)

"The reason why our company is currently preferred is that we have product stock. We are different from our competitors in this respect. While they accept an order and estimate a lead time of two to three months, we can deliver it right away if we have stock. This actually positions us first because most clients do not want to wait, and they want to receive their purchases as soon as possible. (Participant 13)

4.4. Export Sales Manager Characteristics

In the interviews conducted as part of the qualitative study, participant managers said that the characteristics of managers in charge of export sales may have a positive effect on firms' export market orientation. The principal duties of export sales managers include crucial assignments like informing current and prospective export customers about products, building long-term customer relationships, acquiring export information, and disseminating it throughout the organization (Albaum et al., 2005). Effective and proficient export sales managers could possess superior technical expertise, adjust their sales strategies to suit overseas clients' demands, make more effective sales presentations, and offer outstanding sale support to overseas customers (Theodosiou & Katsikea, 2007).

The categories of professional competence, communication competence, and cultural competence fall under the heading of export sales manager characteristics. The coding under the professional competence category include technical product knowledge, experience with export sales and sales operations, adaptive selling skills and foreign language competency. According to Participants 1 and 9, having adaptive selling skills, which refers to adopting different selling approaches for different export customers, has a positive impact on responding effectively to customers' wants and needs.

"I think the sales person's approach to the customer will be effective. If the customer is a technical person, I strive to earn his respect by highlighting my technical background. If the person has a big ego, I can win his respect by being more modest and praising." (Participant 1)

With the following remarks, Participant 10 highlighted the significance of the export sales manager's technical product knowledge for export success.

"You went to sell the product to the customer. The customer asked you a question regarding the products, and if you cannot answer it, your entire image in the eyes of the customer is gone. I mean, it makes no difference whether your company is the largest in the world or you are the greatest seller." (Participant 10)

The second category under the export sales manager characteristics theme is "communication competencies". In the interviews, the participants emphasized that their communication skills come to the forefront in terms of responding effectively to customer wants and needs. They also emphasized the importance of listening carefully to identify and understand the needs of export customers, convincing customers that their problems and concerns are understood, constantly interacting with customers and developing close bilateral relationships.

"I'm in one-on-one contact with the customer. How well I understand what customers need and want, as well as what is important to them, makes a significant impact." (Participant 17)

"People in Europe who are in my position are much stricter. I mean, they are difficult to reach outside of business hours, and they never answer the phone on holidays. If there is a certain practice on something, it does not change. They do not have any flexibility. What we represent to our customers is that we are constantly available, flexible, and eager to assist them in any way possible. Yes, this can set us apart from others... (Participant, 8)

The category of "cultural competencies" includes coding such as being interested in the cultures of the exporting countries; possessing in-depth cultural knowledge; showing behavioral flexibility based on cultural values and norms. These characteristics align with the concept of cultural intelligence that Earley and Ang (2003) proposed to the literature. Cultural intelligence, defined as "an individual's ability to successfully adapt to new environments associated with a cross-cultural context" (Ang et al., 2015), is a crucial factor in the performance of export sales managers who regularly engage with customers from different cultural backgrounds. In their study, Magnusson, Westjohn, Semenov, Randrianasolo and Zdravkovic (2013) discovered that export managers who possess a high level of metacognitive cultural intelligence exhibit greater success in adjusting the marketing mix, resulting in improved export performance.

Participant 14 stated that understanding the culture of the exporting

country and having cultural knowledge is beneficial in acquiring market information and intelligence in the following ways:

“It is critical to understand the culture of the country to which you are exporting. People in European culture, for example, do not consider information exchange to be ethical and are stricter about it. In Chinese culture, sharing intelligence is evaluated within ethical norms and principles. It is not unethical for them to disclose the company's confidential information or a competitor's pricing information. Because this is how they discover intelligence. In order to have access to information, it is critical to understand the culture of the country to whom you are selling. A person who knows the culture can more easily perceive who has the information and how to obtain it.” (Participant 14)

Participant 9 emphasized the need of sales managers tailoring their behaviors according to the cultural characteristics of the export customers.

“Nigeria has a history of colonialism, and many people have developed inferiority complexes due to racism.” For example, if you have even the slightest disagreement with a Nigerian customer, they may perceive that you are looking down on them. You can immediately see their sensitivity here. Naturally, when I talk to a Nigerian, I speak in a low-key manner that conveys my respect.”

4.5. Senior Manager Characteristics

Following the analysis of qualitative data, "senior manager characteristics" was identified as one of the study's primary themes of the study. The theme includes three categories: effective leader characteristics, experience, and other senior manager characteristics.

4.5.1. Experience

The "Upper echelon theory" developed by Hambrick and Mason (1984) focuses on the relationship between demographic characteristics such as tenure, education, and international experience of top management team members and business outcomes. The theory has been reflected in the export marketing literature with studies that reveal the positive effects of top management team characteristics on the internationalization of firms (Li, 2018; Mohr & Batsakis, 2019; Rivas, 2010) and export performance (Acar, 2016; Kotorri & Krasniqi, 2018). The participants indicated that senior managers' tenure and industry expertise have a positive impact on the firm's level of export market orientation.

"I believe it is very beneficial if the manager you are reporting to is an industry insider and has extensive knowledge of the industry." They can help with where or who to contact for information about competitor companies and the market in general. Their expertise and experience can be advantageous to you." (Participant 3)

"He's been with the company for a long time, so he knows the customer very well... He is adept at anticipating the needs of customers and understanding the potential motivations behind their current requests. He is quite familiar with the company. He knows the limits of what we can and cannot do. This allows us respond faster and gather information better." (Participant 14)

4.5.2. Effective leadership characteristics

Most of the participants stated that senior managers' effective leadership characteristics have a positive effect on gathering, disseminating, and responding to information about the export market. The coding under the category of effective leader characteristics provides evidence that senior managers who are open-minded, open to communication with subordinates, authority-sharing, not despotic and rigid, and team-oriented are more inclined to develop market-oriented behaviors and motivate their employees in this direction. With the following remarks, Participants 18 and 4 highlighted the advantages of senior managers' "open-mindedness":

"For instance, the CEO of our company, who is also our employer, is a very open-minded individual. He makes it easier for us to get information by demonstrating his generosity. He does not ask, "What are you going to do with this information?" He creates the right conditions for you to get information without challenging your need for it." (Participant 18)

"We work together with our senior managers and share the same working space. Their world view and commercial vision is broad. They are open-minded people that you can easily go and start a process by saying "I have something like this in mind, can we do this" or "I need to access this information"..." (Participant, 4)

According to Rensis Likert's classification, senior managers with "participative leadership style" are those who have a high level of trust in their subordinates and actively involve them in decision-making. Participative leaders value their subordinates' suggestions and endeavor to adopt them.

Communication and information flow between subordinates and superiors is a bidirectional. According to Likert, the most successful managers exhibit participative leadership attributes and organizations that adopt this type of management approach achieve high productivity (Gonos & Gallo, 2013).

Most participants highlighted the significance of participative leader traits and expressed that managers who are open to communicating with subordinates and willing to delegate authority have a beneficial impact, particularly in the generation and distribution of export market information within the organization.

“Sharing knowledge is facilitated when our senior managers exhibit flexibility rather than excessive sharpness. Everyone will be more willing to share the information they learn if they all feel safer and more at ease. Otherwise, they may not be sure of the accuracy and applicability of the information they have obtained. They would not want to disclose it because they do not trust their firm or themselves. Consequently, the information will not be shared with the appropriate agencies or individuals in an uncomfortable setting. This is because someone who is preoccupied with protecting their current position will not operate with ease and advance their department or the firm further.” (Participant 5)

“I felt that our senior managers created a barrier, a wall between them and their staff. They always created a barrier between us and the bosses. For example, what they do is more important than what we do. I think the fact that the senior manager is closer to the boss and more distant to the staff harms the sharing of information.” (Participant 6)

“Maybe we would not be able to operate flexibly if we were afraid of the boss or were intimidated by seniors. We are now stronger because they have given us a framework, defined an area of freedom, and given us the chance to expand it—especially when it comes to meeting customer needs.” (Participant, 12)

According to participant 2, senior managers' focus on teamwork would have the following beneficial consequences on market orientation:

“Even if the success is yours, if you can make it seem like it is the team's success when you speak in front of an audience, in a community, or even just inside your own team, then the team will start working hard on your

behalf. Then, they care about the customers' satisfaction and impart their knowledge. Because they believe, "My manager thinks about me, and I shouldn't disappoint him." They can now internalize the success of their manager and organization as their own mission." (Participant 2)

4.5.3. Other Senior Manager Characteristics

“Other senior manager characteristics” category includes the following codes: senior managers placing a high value on exports; prompt decision-making; using business networks effectively; willingness to share information; encouraging employees to share information; and providing sufficient financing for export marketing activities. Participant 11 highlighted the benefits of senior management encouraging and guiding staff to share knowledge:

“The perspective of people within the company should not be “I should keep the information.” I believe that top management should periodically remind employees that they should share information rather than keep it to themselves.”

According to participant 18, senior managers' managerial ties in other organizations and state institutions are especially useful in gathering market information and intelligence:

“Senior managers may receive some vital information through their political or business contacts. This information can include contact information, market knowledge, or potential market developments. For example, if there is a negative circumstance or an opportunity in one of our export markets, management will notify us.”

Participant 11 claimed that senior managers' swift decision-making is effective in responding quickly to customer demands, as follows:

“The delay in decision-making within the company affects our ability to respond quickly. When environmental conditions change, such as a price increase in natural gas, pricing must adjust proportionately; however, if management's response to this choice is too late, you will be unable to reply to the client on time or at all.”

Many participants emphasized the importance of “providing adequate financing for export marketing activities,” which falls under the scope of other

senior management traits. Participants 10 and 16 stated that having an adequate budget for export marketing operations improves their market orientation.

“At the beginning of each year, the board of directors approves the trips or events we plan. Every year we prepare a marketing plan and a budget accordingly. For example, we budget our plans by stating that “we will travel to 10 countries, we will spend this much on marketing and this much on advertising.” Our management does not hinder our goals and mostly approve them. This returns to the company in the form of customer satisfaction and increased performance. (Participant 10)

4.6. Inter-Firm Relations

The concept of "inter-firm factors" includes aspects of the exporter's interaction with its overseas clients in three categories: flexibility and solidarity in the exporter-importer relationship, information sharing, and trust. Only a few studies on the export market orientation literature (Chang & Fang, 2015; Lin, Huang & Peng, 2014) have looked at inter-firm factors as antecedents to the concept. But as the interviewees repeatedly mentioned, building strong, trusting connections with export clients can help both in getting market intelligence from them and in designing useful responses.

In order for a firm to improve its level of market orientation, it is important to adopt a business-to-business strategy and leverage external relationships to deliver superior value to the market (Hunt & Lambe, 2000). In the interviews, participants emphasized the importance of developing close relationships with export customers and sharing information. They also indicated that being flexible in responding to customer demands is essential to ensure effective responses and customer satisfaction. Information sharing, flexibility and solidarity between firms, which were emphasized by participants in the interviews, constitute the dimensions of relational exchange norms (Heide & John, 1992). In their research, Zhang, Çavuşgil and Roath (2003) discovered that manufacturers' competitiveness in the export market is improved by the adoption of relational exchange norms designed to improve the overall well-being of the relationship.

Participants 1 and 14 stated that they were able to obtain intelligence on competitors as well as information on the market itself from their customers in export markets, underlining that this was achieved through close relationships.

“My dealer or distributor in that market is our primary source of information. A customer that I visit gives me all the details about the

market. I can find out the brand, technical details, and even the original manufacturer of the last filters that were used. In addition, I can learn more about the traits and personalities of the purchasing teams of the companies I work with.” (Participant 1)

“f there is any information or benefit that the customer can gain, their support is very different. For example, one of our competitors gave price offers to a customer with which we have a very good relationship. Owing to our positive working relationship and his own self-interest, our customer provided the prices of his competitors with us. In the same way, we can pick up tips from our customers when our rivals introduce new products.” (Participant 14)

According to the participants, cooperation and solidarity with export customers was especially useful in meeting their requests and guaranteeing their satisfaction. They made the following claims:

“When my distributor or dealer visits Turkey, I treat him well and take him out to dinner. He invites me to his home when I visit; all of these actions help us build strong bilateral ties. Because of our connection, he can tolerate me a lot if we ever run into issues in the future. In some product categories, one of our distributors may occasionally buy goods from other companies. In the event of a more beneficial bilateral relationship, he may declare, “I will purchase from you instead of him.” Despite the fact that buying from us is not advantageous, our bilateral relationships allow us to be preferred.” (Participant 1)

Market-oriented organizations are driven primarily by customer focus, which entails determining the needs of customers and satisfying those needs in a way that maximizes customer value (Narver & Slater, 1990). According to participants 1 and 7, focusing on customers' profitability and taking actions in that direction improves the ability to provide insightful responses.

“Bilateral relations, in a sense, allow both parties to gain from one another and from our customers. Actually, there is a shared interest. We begin to take each other's issues, worries, and business interests into consideration while acting. When we meet our customers' needs in a timely and efficient manner, they begin to have more faith in our abilities. It is similar to two different firms functioning as a single firm, as if they

were partners in commerce.” (Participant 1)

“The bilateral relationships we develop with customers enable us to benefit from each other. There is mutual interest. We act in consideration of each other's problems and concerns and commercial interests. We strive to solve our customer's demands quickly and smoothly, and they become more flexible about what we can do. It is like two separate companies acting as a single company, like being business partners...” (Participant, 1)

“Our aim is to increase the sales of our customers. We support our customers a lot in this regard. By developing a new product that may have sales potential in our customer's market, we can both improve our own product range and increase our customer's sales. Our main goal is to sell industrial and value-added products. In other words, to maximize the price per kilogram and increase our mutual profitability.” (Participant, 7)

In business-to-business partnerships, flexibility refers to the mutual willingness of the parties to adapt to changing circumstances (Heide & John, 1992). When exporters and importers have mutual flexibility in their relationships, they can be more tolerant of challenges that arise, paving the way for long-term stable relationships. Participants 4 and 16 responded to the question "What are the factors that are effective in providing fast and accurate responses to export customers?" by stating that they were flexible in meeting last-minute customer requests, pushed their capabilities to the limit, and made sure not to give the customer a negative answer.

“I would say we are adaptable. We rarely say 'no' to customers. For example, I have been meeting with a company in Nigeria for three months. Under normal conditions, Nigeria is a challenging region for textiles. Since there is less cutting, production, etc., it is not profitable to sell to Nigerian companies. We still want to win the customer and work for it.” (Participant 16)

“We are a company that makes boutique manufacturing. One day, a request may come from the companies we have been working with regularly for years saying "I want to change my packaging style as of this date because I have revised the storage system". At that point, we meet

directly with the production and if the requested pallet is within our standard, we inform the customer that "of course we can do it". We can act in line with the needs of our customers. We can adapt when they ask for changes." (Participant, 4)

The last category under the theme of business-to-business factors, "trust", is defined as a shared belief that there is no self-interest between the parties involved (Uzzi, 1997, p.43). The inherent uncertainties of international markets and operating in multiple markets with different dynamics make it crucial for companies to have reliable foreign partners. While trust promotes cooperation and collaboration, it also boosts market intelligence sharing by improving communication between organizations, and makes it possible to respond quickly to customer needs with the information obtained (Dyer & Singh, 1998; Lin et al., 2014). Participants 4 and 16 support this view with the following statements:

"One of our goals is to be very close to our customers. As a result, it is critical that the information we share is completely transparent. This ensures the reliability of the information gathered from customers. Because of our trust and bond, when we go to a meeting with a customer, we can learn about what is going on in the market, what is unusual or what has been experienced in the short term. Information sharing can be more informal." (Participant 4)

"We collect information exclusively for the customer. The customer's satisfaction is our main priority. Customers may have highly particular product preferences. We may not have these items, or may have the equivalent. When you inform a customer honestly that you do not have the product, they are satisfied since "you are not wasting my time". Honesty always triumphs over distracting and misleading techniques like "we will find one, we will provide one, etc." (Participant 16)

4.7. Environmental Factors

In the literature, there are studies on the environmental factors that influence firms to develop export market-oriented behaviors (Cadogan et al., 2006; Ellis, 2007). The interviews conducted in the study confirmed the significant influence of external factors that help and hinder the implementation of export market orientation. The theme "environmental factors" includes the categories of "environmental factors in the home country" and "environmental factors in the host country".

4.7.1. Environmental factors in the home country

National export-promotion programs are described as government-provided assistance to help firms develop and advance their export activities (Lages & Montgomery, 2005). These include financial and non-financial incentives, such as participation in international trade fairs, tax breaks or exemptions for exports, manager training, and promotion of firms in the global market (Mostafiz, Sambasivan & Goh, 2021). Participants reported that fair participation supports are particularly beneficial in getting export market information and obtaining intelligence on competitors.

"We feel comfortable about attending fairs because we receive government support. We collect a lot of data because we meet between 100 and 150 people at each fair. We process this information and use it to better serve our customers." (Participant 1)

"Fairs are essential for all export sales teams. In my opinion, it is the most valuable source of information because it allows people to communicate, grow their network, and obtain market knowledge straight from people... We received fair support thanks to the Turquality Program. Fair funding increased our willingness to engage in fairs due to the cost advantage." (Participant 2)

Economic conditions of the country in which the companies operate may negatively affect market orientation practices. As stated by Participant 10, structural problems such as inflation and exchange rate fluctuations may prevent fast and effective responses to customers.

"Türkiye's economic conditions, including inflation, make doing business tough. When the natural gas price spike arrives, management says, "Natural gas has gone up; raise the prices." We must pass on the cost increases to our customers. Naturally, this puts customers in a difficult situation and creates insecurity among them." (Participant 10)

4.7.2. Environmental factors in the host country

Participants described how environmental factors unique to export markets, such as socioeconomic status, competition intensity, geographical distance/time disparities, and legislative changes, influence their market-oriented behaviors in the following words:

“I believe time difference is a significant issue. It is more difficult to communicate with customers in Eastern and Western countries. We have to meet late at night, which affects our ability to respond rapidly to their demands.” (Participant, 15)

“In some countries, there can be problems with regulations. For example, Europe in particular has taken steps to reduce its carbon impact by 2050. Countries are gradually attempting to integrate their own legislation into the system. According to this, the products we offer must contain 30% recycled content. To meet customer requests, your production infrastructure must be adaptable to this shift.” (Participant 12)

5. CONCLUSION

A key challenge for exporters is determining how to get critical customer feedback, diverse target market data, and the knowledge required to make strategic decisions in order to reach satisfying levels of performance (Lin et al., 2014). To address these export market problems, organizations must stay current with changing environmental elements such as changing client wants and preferences, rivals' strategic actions, and legal regulations in the export market (Acosta, Crespo & Agudo, 2018).

Export market orientation involves gathering information and intelligence on export markets across the organization, disseminating it among departments, and responding quickly and accurately to the information gathered. It is critical for firms to achieve successful export performance levels in international markets and create superior customer value (Pascucci et al., 2016). Ensuring export customer satisfaction helps to develop long-term stable partnerships between exporter and importer companies, as well as to maintain export success. Based on the concept's importance in export performance, the study seeks to investigate the antecedent variables that motivate exporting firms to participate in market-oriented behaviors that have yet to be found in the literature. In order to determine the causes of export market orientation, in-depth interviews were performed with the managers in charge of export sales at 18 firms that have achieved successful export results. The data from these interviews were subjected to content analysis, which yielded 84 codes, 17 categories, and 7 high-level categories (themes). The following themes were identified: organizational factors, firm characteristics, firm capabilities, export sales manager characteristics, senior manager characteristics, inter-firm relations, and environmental factors.

The categories of centralization and interdepartmental cooperation are included in the study under the heading of organizational factors. Participants reported that an organizational culture that fosters effective communication between units, encourages cooperation, and shares common goals and objectives has a beneficial impact on the development of export market-oriented behaviors. It has been suggested that establishing customer satisfaction as a core value, sharing both positive and negative customer feedback with other departments, setting up regular, collaborative meetings involving staff from other departments, and fostering employee relationships through social events will all have a positive impact on export coordination and, consequently, the sharing of information within the company. Centralization is another group of organizational factors that describes who in a corporation has the power to make decisions and how much power is given to subordinates. According to managers involved in the research, sales agents lacking authority may not be able to react quickly enough to customers' needs and requests, which could lead to a loss of business.

Firm size, firm reputation and export experience are identified as "firm characteristics" that may affect firm's export market orientation. The study's participants assessed firm size as an antecedent of export market orientation. It has been suggested increasing the number of employees in the firm may have a negative impact on the dissemination of export market information. Furthermore, participants mentioned that having a well-known brand and being a globally renowned company can help with export market information generation. Export experience is another category under the theme of business characteristics. Participants emphasized that exporting to a large number of markets and having a large number of customers in these markets can positively affect the generation of market information and also designing the responses through knowledge and experience gained.

Organizational capabilities were primarily highlighted in the study as firm competencies that may promote export market orientation. The effectiveness of the after-sales support procedures that allow for prompt and correct responses to customer needs was highlighted, along with the expertise of the technical team assisting the sales unit and the significance of promptly resolving customer quality complaints. Production advantages were also discussed by the participants, who noted that product quality, large production capacities, short lead times, and high production technologies all positively affect a firm's export market orientation level.

Participants in the study stated that managers in charge of export sales should use different sales approaches for different export customers (adaptive selling ability), have technical product knowledge, experience in export sales and

sales operations processes, and foreign language proficiency to provide effective responses. Participants also stated that communication skills are essential for providing effective responses, emphasizing the importance of carefully listening to determine the needs of export customers, correctly understanding the problems, convincing customers that their concerns are understood, constantly interacting with customers, and communicating well. Finally, the consequences of sales managers' cultural abilities were also discussed. It was argued that export sales managers' interest in the cultures of exporting countries, cultural knowledge, ability to adapt their behaviors in cross-cultural interactions with export customers, and ability to act according to diverse cultural values and norms all have a positive impact on both gathering market information and responding effectively to that information.

The qualities of senior managers are one of the study's key themes. Participants reported that senior managers' traits, such as tenure, years of expertise in the industry, the ability to make quick judgments, and a focus on exports, have a good impact on developing market-oriented behaviors. According to the study, the presence of senior managers who are open to communication with their subordinates, who are willing to delegate and share authority, or who exhibit participative leader characteristics, has a positive effect on the level of market orientation of their firms. In addition to these characteristics, it was emphasized that senior managers should contribute to the process of gathering export market information through business networks, and that managers' willingness to share information and encourage other employees to do the same would have a positive impact on market orientation.

Within the inter-firm factors theme, the focus is on the relationship between the exporter and its customers abroad. Accordingly, it is stated that firms rely on their customers to gather information about the export market. Information and intelligence on both competitors and export market dynamics are mostly obtained from customers with whom close relationships are established. Participants indicated that working in cooperation and solidarity with export customers was highly effective in developing long-term relationships. They stated that prioritizing the interests of customers as their own interests increased solidarity among them and made customers more tolerant of problems that may arise. It was also expressed that establishing trustworthy relationships with customers has a positive effect on cooperation and collaboration. Additionally, they claimed that communication is strengthened, and the sharing of market intelligence is increased when people trust each other's honesty. In this way, they stated that they were able to respond quickly and accurately with the information obtained.

This study also supports the existence of institutional and environmental factors that both help and hinder firms from engaging in export market-oriented practices. A number of respondents noted that export promotion programs facilitate the generation of market information. It was specifically noted that international fair support is useful for learning about the export industry and acquiring competitive intelligence. According to the participants, economic conditions like inflation and fluctuations in the market in which exporters operate have a negative impact on exporters' ability to effectively meet customer demands. Similarly, they argued that the intensity of competition, changes in regulations and legislation in the export market, and geographical distance between the two countries also have negative effects.

It is expected that this study will make a significant contribution to the export market orientation literature. Although there are conflicting results in the existing literature on the effect of firm size on export market orientation (Navarro et al., 2010; Armario, Ruiz & Armario, 2008), current study found evidence of the negative effects of a large number of employees on the dissemination of market information within the firm. Similarly, there is evidence that business reputation can be effective in gathering market information. Furthermore, some characteristics of export sales managers (Oliver & Anderson, 1994; Cravens, Ingram, LaForge & Young, 1993; Theodosiou & Katsikea, 2007) are found to have a positive impact on export market orientation. These were identified as adaptive selling skills, high level of technical product knowledge, experience in export sales and post-sales procedures, communication skills and cultural competencies. The findings of the study also revealed that having effective leader characteristics such as open-mindedness, team-orientation and participative leadership (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman & Gupta, 2004) increases market orientation. Finally, the study determined the facilitating influence of export promotion programs on firms' development of market-oriented behavior in overseas markets.

The study has important managerial implications in terms of revealing the characteristics of senior managers and export sales managers that can have a positive impact on the development of market-oriented behaviors. In order to encourage market-oriented behaviors, senior managers should be open to communication with subordinates, encourage them to share information and adopt a participative leadership style. For export sales managers, it is recommended to focus on improving their communication abilities and adaptive selling techniques, as well as actively participating in activities that can boost their performance in cross-cultural interactions. Moreover, fostering trusting and cooperative partnerships with importers can enhance their access to export market

information and enable them to respond customer need and wants successfully.

This study has a number of limitations, most of which are related to the research context. First, this research was conducted with exporting manufacturing companies. Although we tried to select participating companies from different sectors, there were some sectors that could not be covered. Second, the qualitative nature of the study prevented statistical validation of our findings. The findings are only indicative and may not be generalizable to all exporting companies. Furthermore, this study was cross-sectional, so another potential research direction is to investigate how export market orientation changes over time as firms' export experience increases. The study also offers important implications for future research. Empirical evaluation of the issues that are considered as the antecedents of the concept in the study and examined in detail in the findings section will be useful in terms of both confirming the antecedents discovered and contributing to the literature.

6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

7. FINANCIAL SUPPORT

This study got no specific funding from any agency

8. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

SA, ZD: Idea.

SA, ZD: Design.

SA: Supervision.

ZD: Gathering and/or processing of resources.

SA, ZD: Analysis and/or interpretation.

ZD: Literature review.

ZD: Author of the article.

SA: Critical review

9. ETHICS COMMITTEE STATEMENT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY COPYRIGHTS

The study followed the ethics committee's guidelines, and all essential permissions were obtained in compliance with the intellectual property and copyright rules.

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ANNEX-1: Participating Companies and Export Sales Managers

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPATING MANAGERS				INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPATING COMPANIES			
PARTICIPANT CODE	Title	Gender	Export Sales Experience	Sector	Number of Employees	Company Age	Place of Operation
Participant 1	Export Sales Executive	Male	10	Compressed Air Systems	1000+	37	Ankara
Participant 2	Export Sales Executive	Male	12	Various Food and Beverage Products	8500	185	İstanbul
Participant 3	Export Sales Executive	Male	8	Lock Systems	1500	70	İstanbul
Participant 4	Export Sales Manager	Female	15	Flat Rolled Aluminum Products	250	17	Ankara
Participant 5	Export Sales Representative	Male	10	Oil Seeds and Oil products	350	50	İzmir
Participant 6	Export Sales Executive	Female	18	Fabric and Home Textile Products	4250	65	İstanbul
Participant 7	Regional Export Sales Executive	Male	11	Nuts Products	1000+	44	İstanbul
Participant 8	Regional Export Sales Executive	Female	20	Air Conditioning Products	41928	90	Tekirdağ
Participant 9	Regional Export Sales Manager	Male	21	Vehicle Batteries	8000	47	Ankara
Participant 10	Regional Export Sales Manager	Male	18	Vehicle Batteries	8000	47	Ankara
Participant 11	Export Sales Executive	Female	17	Ceramic Products	1000-1499	27	İstanbul
Participant 12	Export Sales Executive	Male	12	Plastic Packaging Products	501-1000	41	Manisa
Participant 13	Regional Export Sales Executive	Male	11	Vehicle Tire	4000	47	Ankara
Participant 14	Export Sales Representative	Male	7	Cooling Products	1000+	108	Manisa
Participant 15	Regional Export Sales Manager	Male	5	Sponge Products	496	21	Kayseri
Participant 16	Export Sales Executive	Male	7	Yarn and Home Textile Products	1200	27	Gaziantep
Participant 17	Export Sales Manager	Male	6	Steel Pipe Products	703	37	Ankara
Participant 18	Export Manager	Male	14	Pasta Products	560	57	Gaziantep