

## **SHOULD BE A PROCESS THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF A FIRM? BORN GLOBALS AS AN EXCEPTION**

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### **Abstract**

This paper offers a definition of reality as a process of internationalization. The first part will be the definition of the concept by reviewing the contributions of the leading authors on the subject. The research will address the challenges faced by companies that are betting on a rapid internationalization. It will present the initial results obtained through semi-structured interviews with the chief exports or if the absence of this figure with the directors or managers of export, and shall be collected in the most relevant conclusions: market niches oriented , product adaptation to international customer, planned export strategy, design innovation and differentiation, moderate size and greater international experience.

JEL Codes

Keywords

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### **1. Introduction**

Most of the theoretical advances on internationalization were carried out by the Uppsala School (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977, Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975). For the Uppsala sequential model or Scandinavian School theory, companies increasingly extending its scope beyond its country of origin.

According to the Scandinavian approach, the business internationalization process is sequential and progressive as companies gain experience and knowledge: it begins with sporadic exports without investment in the target market, for its high level of uncertainty, there is a step towards international engagement, when the company exports through independent representatives or agents, creating a conduit of information between the company and the market, then commercial deployments are made abroad, such as the creation of subsidiaries, and the company earns in control and received information. Finally, production subsidiaries are set to control production sales in foreign markets.

Any contribution from the academic to the business practice has to pursue a strong specialization towards the sector studied. Therefore, the first premise will be that, although there is a general process of internationalization, we will always look for an adaptation to the peculiar case of SMEs.

Even further, there may be intrinsic peculiarities in foreign trade by sector and product to be analyzed. This way, some authors have treated this matter from this perspective, trying to particularize the specific cases (for example, in terms of sector, Cancelo (2001) studied industrial exports, whereas Mejia and Rendon (2005) studied the specific product, beer). Second, a new prevention emerges to clarify that we are referring to the process of internationalization from the perspective of the export, leaving out any other mechanism for foreign market penetration, as they can be:

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- Licenses
- Franchising
- Subcontracting
- Supply agreement
- Piggy-Back
- Foreign direct investment or FDI
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Companies “born-global” or “International new ventures”, which will be analyzed in a singular form subheading.

Buisán and Espinosa (2007) states that the most common forms of expansion in foreign markets for Spanish companies are mainly: the implementation by commercial subsidiary, representative office and other purely commercial. This author estimates a 47% of companies that follow some of the above forms, by 10.4% those who have only productive locations, and 42.6% who combine the commercial and production subsidiaries or have other forms of internationalization, as previously mentioned, out of the process of internationalization. Besides, the sequences in this process must be differentiated from the specific case of service companies, which according to Munoz Guarasa and Alcala Olid (2007) presents four modalities envisaged by GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services):

- International transactions without movements of suppliers or customers, via telematics.
- International transactions with customers moving towards the country of the supplier to get service there.
- International transactions where the supplier opens a branch in the customer's country to provide services there.
- International transactions with supplier's movements towards the customer's country for service delivery.

#### Stages of the internationalization

A review of the works that have reported the different steps in the process of internationalization, takes us to diverse rankings, which are presented in the next paragraphs.

Necessarily, in the consideration of internationalization as a process, the starting point in the Uppsala School must be taken. Thus, Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1975), and Johnson and Vahlne (1977), argue that there are four ways to enter foreign markets: a first stage in which exports are not regular, a second stage in which exports are made via agents or representatives, a third stage where a subsidiary is established abroad, and in the final stage of implementation, the production center is achieved abroad. Companies evolve their international behavior through gradual acquisition, accumulation, and use of knowledge of foreign markets, such as how to operate them as well as the increasing commitment to foreign markets (Melin, 1992).

Bilkey and Tassar (1977) divided the development of the internationalization process as follows:

1. The management is not interested in exporting and will never serve an order from abroad.

2. The management will serve an order from abroad, but will not conduct studies of indicators to see whether the implementation of a routine foreign sale would be viable.
3. The management studies the feasibility of exporting.
4. The company tries exporting to a "psychologically" friendly country.
5. The company lacks experience to export to that country and tries to adapt to the convenient situation.
6. The management studies the feasibility of exporting to other more distant countries.

Yip et al. (2000) estimated at four the internationalization process models: Johansson and Vahlne model, Root model, Miller model and Yip et al. model.

The first one is aforementioned and the stages of each of the other three models are:

- The model of Root (1987) involves internal and external factors in the decision-taking process, and it states that input modes are for export, by contractual agreement, or investment. The internationalization process of this author includes an assessment of market opportunities, the adaptation of the product offered, and the target market, setting objectives, input mode choice, and finally, the formulation of a marketing plan and its execution.

- Miller (1993) suggests a ten-step process: 1) evaluation of the preparation of a company for export, or to enter foreign markets by any other method of entry, 2) analysis of the company, 3) reset of the internal business plan, 4) evaluation of markets and competition, 5) development of a plan of foreign market entry; 6) the identification and selection of partners; 7) the selection of suppliers necessary services; 8) pursuant to regulations of the country; 9) the introduction in the market of products of the company; 10) the establishment of physical presence in foreign markets.

- Yip et al. (2000) suggest the so-called "Way Station Model" for the internationalization of SMEs. There are six steps: 1) the plan of strategy and motivation, 2) market research, 3) market selection, 4) input mode selection, 5) development of a plan for solving problems and 6) the post-entry strategy in foreign markets and the commitment of resources. It is on the fourth step where they state that the best known input models are exporting, licensing, franchising, marketing alliances, "joint ventures" and establishing its own subsidiaries, depending on the degree of control of the company in transnational operations. They also stress that there is no particular way of entry that is most appropriate and to ensure success. Considering the desired control by the company, resources, skill and the risk it is willing to be taken, there will be a more advisable input type for each occasion.

To Vichit (2003) there are three phases, depending on the stage: at a stage before the commitment, at the beginning of the export process, or at an advanced stage. The first includes companies that sell in domestic market and are not interested in foreign trade, companies that sell in the domestic market but are interested in foreign trade, and the companies that exported in the past but have not returned to make sales abroad. In the second stage, companies which do sporadic exports have the potential to increase its presence abroad, but they are not able to satisfy demands of these markets. At the third stage, companies have frequent exports and experience in these markets.

When other authors write about the internationalization process, they do it from the point of view of the types of company; in this way Canals (1994) describes the following as

types of international business: exporting company, the multinational, the global transnational. Or Durán Herrera (1998), when refers to the domestic company, the exporter, multinational manufacturers, carriers with international debt markets and global or worldwide.

There are more theories that are about the internationalization as process, most of them must be understood from the perspective that the phenomenon of "born globals" emerged in the nineties. However, the first work that opposes this perspective considers knowledge of internationalization as a process, were Millington and Bayliss (1990) found that increased awareness through international markets was the exception. They concluded that, when a company is not in its initial stage of internationalization, it acquires knowledge of the market that allows designing a strategy to analyze and overlook some stages of internalization. Nowadays, the Uppsala School is questioned because it is not able to provide a pattern to the behavior of some companies, especially those belonging to the service sector and high tech sector (Bell, 1995).

## **2. Methodology**

This section of the paper tries to figure out why some Andalusian companies can internationalize faster than others. The data were collected through interviews, supplemented with analysis of their websites, to get an integral model of the context of the company and its current reality.

Classical models about foreign trade have influenced domestic factors (Aaby and Slater, 1989) and external factors (Zou and Stan, 1998) as determinants of export intensity. Some authors emphasize the importance of demographic factors; the relational and other international marketing others. As a summary of the above expressed, we want to answer the following question: What is the configuration process of "born global" in the Andalusian furniture companies?

The data used were collected through 23 semi-structured interviews with the export manager or in the absence of this figure, with executives or people responsible of exports. All interviewees came from firms in the furniture industry located in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia. During the interviews, a survey was carried out in order to learn the conditions of each company, the characteristics of the businessman, and his opinion on this subject. Besides, the questionnaire was posted on a website to prevent situations in which the interviewee would be unable to reject an appointment for the interview, because these people due to the occupational hazard of the people object our sample, they could often be traveling and we would not be able to contact them. However, in the end, all the interviews were done in person, but we consider appropriate letting the survey on line at their disposal.

At the same time, another survey was thought to be done by email, but we soon realized that it had some obstacles for our potential interviewees. Quoting Dommeyer and Moriarty (2000: 48): "Everyone who respond to a survey attached to an email has to have the following characteristics: a high interest in responding, a hardware and software that allows you to download, read and load an external file, the knowledge of how performing steps for response and low afraid to computer viruses". Conscious that our potential interviewees did not fit into this description, we thought it best to do it "face to face", despite being a long and much less comfortable process, it would be a much more

interesting and rewarding experience, especially because the interviews were conducted in person. Martinez (2006: 139) explains: "The great relevance, potential and significance of dialogue as a method of knowledge of human beings, lies mainly in the nature and quality of the process in which it rests. As the meeting progresses, the structure of the personality of the interlocutor is taking shape in our minds; first impressions acquired through observation of their movements, follow the hearing from his voice, the nonverbal communication (which is direct, immediate, of great strength in the face to face interaction and often, prior to any conscious control) and the wide range of verbal contexts by which they can clarify the terms, discover ambiguities, define problems, guidance towards a perspective to show requirements and intentions, demonstrate the irrationality of a proposal, provide standards of judgment or remember the facts necessary. Verbal context also allows to the interlocutor motivate, raise their level of interest and cooperation, recognizing their achievements, prevent forgery, reduce formalisms, exaggerations and distortions, boost your memory, reduce confusion and help you explore, recognize and accept their own experiences unconscious. And in each of these possible interactions it is also possible to decide the breadth or narrowness with the problem that must be asked, if a question should be structured in whole or left open, and to what extent it is appropriate to suggest a solution or answer". Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and the issues raised were semi-structured<sup>1</sup>, in order to facilitate an environment of proximity and intimacy, the interviews were not recorded, but the answers were handwritten while the interviewee was replying. It was important to inform the interviewees of the purpose of their participation and we presented them the research. It was an approach from verbal interaction with space for fluid dialogues between both sides, giving space for additional aspects that emerged from the interview.

The real purpose of the collected data was the development of a thesis work; however, during the analysis of the data, we realized that among the interviewed companies there was a small group of "born global" and that it would be very interesting to carry an individualized study.

### **3. The specific case of the "born global"**

Some authors call this phenomenon "New International Ventures" (Oviatt and McDougall, 1994), other "Born Global firms" (Knight and Cavusgil, 1996; Knight, 1997, Madsen and Servais, 1997) and other "Instant Internationals firms" (Miles et al. 1999; Fillis, 2001). Since the nineties until now, there are a considerable number of SMEs known as "born global" or "International New Ventures", these companies have special characteristics that differentiate them from the traditional SMEs, mainly in their strategic approach, reach international markets their very foundation or in a short time from this. The necessary time for the internationalization is reduced and the required knowledge is more quickly obtained.

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<sup>1</sup> In some interview questions, the formulation used was the Likert scale. This scale is one of the most used methods to number and scale become beliefs, attitudes and opinions of participants (Dawes, 2008). Many authors who support the suitability of this technique are Devellis 2001, Torkzadeh and Van Dyke, 2001, Dawes 2008 . For many of them, this method is very convenient because it offers the advantage of simplicity, effectiveness and ease of understanding (Maurer and Andrews, 2000; Torkzadeh and Dyke, 2001). It has chosen a five point scale because it is easier for interviewees, for reliability and because it is used in the most studies in this field.

Oviatt and McDougall (1994: 49) define "New International Ventures" as follows: "We define International New Ventures as the business organization that, from the beginning, try to have significant competitive edges based on the use of resources and the sale of its products in multiple countries.

Knight and Cavusgil (1996: 11) conceptualize them as the "small technology-oriented companies operating in international markets since the early days of their establishment".

To conceive a company as "born global" it is necessary to take into account the time it took to make his first sale abroad; at this point there is no harmonized notion in the literature, there are different opinions about the representative period of a fast internationalization: in three years since its inception (Knight and Cavusgil, 1996) or six years (McDougall et al., 2003). It seems that the limit of six years is the most accepted in the texts (Apelund, et al., 2007).

The first difference between the "born globals" and the classic SMEs is that the former, being aware of the needs of the market, manufacture a particular product range (in the furniture market studied in this work, this data could be exemplified by different types of manufactured office furniture, specific bathroom furniture for children, etc.). With this *modus operandi*, greater competition is avoided and they try to focus on one particular sector in the market. Given the youth of these companies, they are of a reasonably small size of restricted funding, limited staff and tangible resources. In a niche market, these companies have a better ability to supply, being SMEs with limited resources, and they work best in small markets where clients want customized products. These types of niche markets are the ones that are emerging in some markets as the promoter of the "born globals". Dalgic and Leeuw (1994: 40) define the niche strategy as "a small market consisting of an individual consumer or a small group of consumers with similar characteristics or needs." They claimed that when a firm adopts a strategy based on a niche market, they make a close study about what consumers need and what the company must sell to satisfy them, thus becoming a strong competitor against the threat from abroad. Knight and Cavusgil (2004) note that due to their youth and small size, the "born global" international which get success are those which develop differentiated offers niche oriented towards transnational markets. Moen (2000) stated that SMEs are more aimed at niche strategies, especially in small countries. Aspelund et al. (2007) pointed that according to their lack of resources and the difficulty to establish subsidiaries, the "International New Ventures" are looking for market niches.

In light of the above, on the contrary to what it might be expected, these companies do not offer specific product information different than the normally offered in the domestic market. The same type and design is sold nationally and internationally. This is so, precisely, because of the earlier assertion that the "born globals" try to discover the most consistent niche market with their products. With this technique, they find customers worldwide with a common need which fit the offered product by the company "born global". Without a niche market, approach that would not be possible because if intended its products to any market, the company would have to continuously adapt as tastes and habits change with increasing speed. Something very difficult for SMEs and virtually impossible for SMEs in manufacturing sectors, as it turns the furniture industry. However, we must not confuse having an adaptation of the product to the international

market orientation, this adjustment is not discordant with another aspect of the "born globals", such as organize your products, resources and global structure.

Another difference is represented in the choice of entry strategy in foreign markets. The "born globals" prefer a strategy of investment in innovation and design. They know that their home market is the world market, and for this reason, they have to expand their market to the global target, reducing the risk. They know that internationalization is not a temporary activity or timely, even the solution to current environmental problems, such as the current crisis. If the internationalization process does not have a strategy planned in his baggage will not be effective. This connects with the fact that in the classic Andalusian SMEs furniture, which is not qualified as "born globals", the export department do their most in seeking distributors and agents. They know about the dependency to these intermediaries to sell abroad. Meanwhile, the export departments "born globals" under study, find as one of the more tedious activities tracking administrative orders and payments, as well as closing sales with international customers. The concerns of this department of born global companies show that they are in a more advanced stage of internationalization.

In fact, planning an effective internationalization strategy is at the expense of a few skilled workers available in this area. Knight and Cavusgil (1996) highlight the importance of entrepreneurs in the "born globals". Similarly, Belso (2003) emphasizes the importance of the attitude of managers to eliminate some stages of the process, and Toral (2009) emphasizes the role of the decisions of the managers at the start of the Scandinavian School model.

The last difference between the two types of firms is the market selection criteria. Internationalized SMEs, following a long process and completing each stage, usually consider this issue in the distance, how far is that market, selecting international markets according to their proximity. Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1975) introduce the term "psychological" distance to refer to the factors that make difficult the flow of information between the market and the company. Johanson and Vahlne (1977) stated that some of these factors are the differences in language, educational system, business or cultural habits and industrial development. The "psychological" distance is usually followed by cultural differences (Brewer, 2007), if a country has similar habits, the company will perceive it as easier to access in the market because it is a "familiar" territory (Dunning, 2003). But once again, the "born globals" have a more strategic view; they ignore the distance, and selection criteria are strategic markets: They have a high quality differentiated product, and they look for those consumers who can purchase their product. They try to find the person with the necessary profile to become a customer of the product they sell, setting in the background or giving less importance the place where the potential customer lives.

#### **4. Conclusions: Towards a greater number of "born globals"**

As it has already been stated, the "born globals" usually have limited resources due to their young age, also, they tend to have a limited production capacity and a unique view of the market as an entity, and they are aware that the customer is an international person, of any nationality. The "born globals" try to anticipate changes in the environment and consumption following a proactive behavior.

Today, these companies are not considered as rare ones, it is increasingly common to find managers with this desire. Indeed, the "born globals" are becoming another type of organization, not the exception. Brenes and Leon (2008) note that in the present global environment, represented by the globalization of economies, technologies of information and greater territorial accessibility, facilitate the emergence of fast internationalization companies.

There are several factors that are cited as enablers of the emergence of this type of company, Table 1 shows the results of the literature review of these determinants.

**Picture 1. Variables that favor the emergence of "born globals" companies.**

| Factors which promote<br>"born globals"                                    | Authors  |
|--|--|
| Greater international orientation  | Rennie (1993), Oviatt y McDougall (1995), McAuley (1999), Harveston et al. (2000), Moen (2002), Pla y Cobos (2002), Dimitratos y Plakoyiannaki (2003), Etemad (2004), Gabrielsson et al. (2004), Knight et al. (2004), Gabrielsson (2005), Kundu y Renko (2005), Mort y Weerawardena (2006). |
| Greater international experience, previously to the foundation of the firm | Oviatt y McDougall (1995), Bloodgood et al. (1996), McDougall y Oviatt (1996), Harveston et al. (2000), Etemad (2004), Rocha et al. (2004), Evangelista (2005), Gabrielsson (2005), Kundu y Renko (2005), Loane (2006)   |
| Greater foreign education  | Oviatt y McDougall (1994) y (1995), Bloodgood et al. (1996), Etemad (2004), Johnson (2004), Evangelista (2005), Knight y Caves (2005), Rialp et al., (2005)  |
| Deeper specialized knowledge   | McDougall et al. (1994), Oviatt y McDougall (1994) y (1995), Hellman (1996), Rasmussen et al. (2001), Dimitratos y Jones (2005), Evangelista (2005), Kundu y Renko (2005),   |
| Greater network  | Coviello y Munro (1995) y (1997), Johanson y Mattsson (1998), Andersson y Wictor (2003), Rocha et al. (2004), Arenius (2005), Dimitratos y Jones (2005), Evangelista (2005), Harris y Wheeler (2005), Rialp et al., (2005), Coviello (2006), Loane (2006)                                    |

Finally, there are also some disadvantages to confront by the "born globals" of all sectors in general, such as the challenge of competing in an international environment, and do it without the experience or resources that a company that previously has already achieved success in its home market can have. They will not only face the problem of being smaller and younger companies, but also those other drawbacks for being a foreign company, which appear when any firm enters a distinct from national market, entailing additional cost (Toral, 2009).



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