

# The Internationalization Process and Marketing Activities

## *The Case of Brazilian Export Firms*



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Since the 1960s, many developing countries began a transition from import substitution to more outward-looking industrial strategies. The policy adopted by the Brazilian government during the period 1964–1985 emphasized an increase in the volume of exports with the objective of diversifying export markets and products. Competitiveness helped Brazil become a leading exporter of manufactured goods in Latin America, and this has also helped the country survive the debt crisis. This study addresses the process by which Brazilian firms internationalized their manufactured products. Data were collected from a large sample of firms belonging to the Association of Brazilian Exporters (AEB). Factor analysis was conducted for the purpose of summarizing the information with regard to export marketing dimensions. Included in the analysis were 24 variables encompassing marketing, production, and risk dimensions. Discriminant analysis was used in order to identify the marketing dimensions pertinent to each group at different levels of the internationalization process in export activities. A major conclusion that can be drawn is that export development in Brazilian firms was directed by currency issues and marketing capabilities. Furthermore, the study reveals some important insights into the success of export activities. It appears, that one important aspect of export competency is financial flexibility, i.e., the ability to handle export sales in different currencies. Secondly, assessing the country's external environment is equally important when determining success in export markets. *J BUSN RES* 1995. 32:175–181

A considerable amount of research conducted since the early 1960s has been devoted to understanding the export behavior and activities of the firm (for a review of the literature on exporting, see Bilkey, 1978; Campbell, 1984; Miesenbock, 1988). Although the studies included as part of this research have implied the importance of the association between marketing effort and export success, none has extensively examined marketing activities inherent to this accomplishment (Burton and Schlegelmilch, 1987; Cavusgil, 1976). A positive relationship between export commitment and a company's marketing orientation has been shown in studies addressing marketing and marketing policies of the export firm (Pinney, 1970; Kahn, 1975). A study by Burton and Schlegelmilch in 1987, for example, found that exporters place serious

importance on market knowledge and research. This is logical, considering that exporting is taking place in a dynamic and rapidly changing environment. Therefore, a firm's adaptability to market changes and other conditions is of major importance.

The internationalization process of the firm has been a major focus of research in international marketing. A great deal of this research has centered on the distinctive characteristics and stages of development of the exporting firm (Bilkey and Tesar, 1977; Cavusgil, 1984; Cavusgil and Nevin, 1981; Czinkota and Johnston, 1981; Johanson and Vahlne, 1977; Welch and Finn-Wiedersheim, 1980). Exporting is thus viewed as an evolutionary or learning procedure. Cavusgil (1984) attributes the sequential character of the internationalization process to the greater perceived risks associated with involvement in international business. Although managerial characteristics may be significant in explaining export entry, they offer little in regard to explaining export commitment (Reid, 1983).

Identified as a key to successful export development is the creation of an effective marketing plan (Kaynak and Kothari, 1984). Additionally, Welch and Wiedersheim (1980) recognized that continued marketing efforts are clearly necessary in order to maintain and expand exports.

A recent study by Ortiz-Buonafina (1991) built on previous research aimed at identifying distinctive characteristics of the various stages of the internationalization process. The study expanded on Cavusgil's (1984) model of the internationalization process. Cavusgil postulated that varying levels of internationalization can be distinguished in terms of measurable characteristics. The Ortiz-Buonafina study developed a comprehensive set of export marketing behavior variables associated with different stages of internationalization. Those key variables are: decisions influencing present export activities, risk perceptions, and marketing strategies (see Table 1).

Since the 1960s, many developing countries began a transition from import substitution to more outward-looking development strategies. This involved export support programs to diversify the composition of exports away from traditional products, placing increased emphasis on nontraditional exports. How firms responded to such programs appears to be an issue that the literature on export behavior has only recently begun to address (Christensen et al., 1987; Dominguez and Sequeira, 1993; Teitel and Thoumi, 1986).

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**Table 1.** Marketing Behavior Variables

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Variables
Decisions influencing present export activities
Competitive pressures
Growth and profits
Excess capacity
Seasonal variations
Familiarity with foreign country
Efficient production techniques
Efficient marketing techniques
Unique product/technology
Languages skills
Risk perceptions
Currency uncertainties
Financial uncertainties
External dependency
Political instability
Economic performance
Environmental assessment
Marketing strategies
Pricing strategies
Production modification
Promotional strategy
Credit policy
Initial risk evaluation
Current risk evaluation
Product market assessment
Price flexibility
Credit flexibility

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Our study begins from the premise that the internationalization of marketing activities is an important component of the export success of firms. It further assumes that the firm's marketing capabilities, even when operating under the umbrella of an export development plan, are crucial to the firm's ability to serve and develop export markets (Christensen et al., 1987).

The objectives of this study, then, are two-fold. The first is to contrast the marketing behavior of exporting firms at different levels of internationalization in a country with a strong export development process. This is done by means of Ortiz-Buonafina's (1991) inventory of export marketing activities. This inventory will be condensed into a smaller set of factors that best represent differences in export marketing behavior. The condensed marketing behavior dimensions (factors) would be used subsequently as predictor variables to determine their importance within a firm's given internationalization stage.

The second objective is to classify firms in two groups describing different levels of internationalization as follows:

*Unsolicited/Limited exporting:* the firm starts to export by responding to unsolicited orders, mostly selling surpluses and filling orders on an experimental basis and begins to introduce marketing procedures to respond to inquiries from abroad.

*Extensive marketing:* the firm commits resources to develop export markets and designs a marketing strategy to best serve and meet the needs of foreign customers.

## Methodology

### Sampling

Brazil was chosen as the test site. The sample was drawn from the complete listing of exporting firms listed in the *Directory of the Brazilian Export Association* (AEB). The next section sets forth the rationale for selecting Brazil as a test case. A prenotification letter was sent to the membership by the President of AEB, officially endorsing the study and requesting cooperation from the membership. Sixty-seven fully usable questionnaires were returned representing a 60% response rate. Although the sample was small, it includes a broad representation of different Brazilian industry groups. Similarly, the sample represents medium to large exporting firms. No follow-up was conducted due to the high rate of response received.

### Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire used was first developed by Ortiz-Buonafina (1991) to elicit American CEO opinions on the exporting firm's extent of involvement in export marketing activities. Focus group and individual interviews were conducted among selected executives to identify the major components of an export marketing inventory (see Table 1). A preliminary sample of 15 firms was drawn at random to pretest the questionnaire. CEOs were contacted to request their input in terms of questionnaire content, flow, and communicability.

For the purpose of this study, parallel translation to Portuguese and English was used in order to guarantee the quality of the translation. Correspondence was directed to Brazilian CEOs. Respondents were asked to indicate what had contributed to the initiation and continuation of the firm's export activities. Similarly, respondents were asked to indicate the importance of such environmental factors as currency uncertainties, financial policies, the country's external dependency, and balance of payment problems in assessing potential risks and losses in their normal export operations. Finally, respondents were asked to compare export and domestic practices in relation to their marketing policies (product, promotion, and pricing), risks involved, profit expectations, and financial flexibility. This last factor included quotations in foreign currency, payment in currencies other than their own, and use of credit and export drafts in trade financing. Respondents were also asked to choose a statement that best described the firm's stage in the internationalization process of export marketing activities (see Table 2). Respondent firms identifying their activities as levels 1, 2, or 3 were classified as engaged in unsolicited or limited marketing. Respondent firms identifying their activities as levels 4 or 5 were classified as firms engaged in extensive marketing. Responses to perceptual questions were framed as five-point Likert scales.

### Brazil: A Case Study

In early 1964, the economic crisis in Brazil had grown to acute levels. The country was experiencing real declines in per cap-

**Table 2.** Levels of Export Marketing Activities

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Level 1:	The firm sells to foreign buyers coming to the place of business and/or fills unsolicited orders from abroad.
Level 2:	The firm is mostly interested in receiving orders to sell surplus products overseas and lacks the resources to fill orders on an ongoing basis.
Level 3:	The firm fills unsolicited orders from abroad stemming from trade leads, referrals from customers and/or foreign buyers coming to the place of business on an ongoing basis.
Level 4:	The firm solicits overseas sales for existing products and is willing to make limited modifications in its product and marketing procedures to accommodate the requirements of foreign buyers.
Level 5:	The firm develops a worldwide export marketing strategies and systematically plans marketing development, new product development, and/or market expansion in existing and new overseas markets.

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ita income and was on the verge of hyperinflation and of defaulting on international debts (Skidmore, 1973). It was during this time that Brazil entered a period of stabilization and institutional reform that was referred to as the Brazilian "miracle." One important element of this reform was an aggressive export development strategy.

The policy adopted by the Brazilian government during the period 1964-1985 emphasized an increase in the volume of exports with the objective of diversifying export markets and products. To this end, it was necessary to reorient business leaders who up until this time had concentrated largely on the domestic market. The incentive system that prevailed included a fairly stable real exchange rate, a protected domestic market, and a complex system of export subsidies. The emphasis was placed on developing manufactured exports in order to diversify the export base, which at the time was dominated by agricultural goods and raw materials. The Brazilian government thus adopted a system of financial incentives for exporting that progressed through four distinct phases as described by Christensen et al. (1987):

*First phase (1964-1968):* Characterized by exemption from taxes and other charges granted to products earmarked for export in order to increase their competitiveness in world markets.

*Second phase (1969-1975):* A more aggressive stage where in addition to tax exemptions, exports were granted credits of equal to export value against taxes on domestic sales, low-interest loans, and guaranteed importer payments. Furthermore, the government encouraged the formation of trading companies, invested in infrastructure enhancements, and simplified the bureaucratic process of exporting. These policies resulted in a rapid increase in the number of firms engaged in exporting.

*Third phase (1976-1979):* During these years, the sums of all the export subsidies have been estimated at over 70% of the F.O.B. value of the total exports of manufactured goods, reaching a high of 87.3% in 1979. These generous export incentives granted to Brazilian firms resulted in protectionist reactions in some of the importing countries.

*Fourth phase (1980-):* The total value of incentives as a percentage of exports dropped almost in half in 1980, testing the exporters' commitment and capability. This drop was

caused mainly by a reduction in credits against domestic taxes, as well as a reduction in the value of credit subsidies.

The relative proximity to many different markets, especially the United States, has led Brazil to focus on exports as a way to solve its economic problems. Numerous export incentives, direct as well as indirect, have been instituted. For almost three decades, Brazil has encouraged its exports through many different incentives. This has allowed its exports to remain competitive in world markets. Competitiveness has helped Brazil to become a leading exporter of manufactured goods in Latin America, and this has also helped the country survive its debt crisis. Export incentives are very important to the economy of Brazil and efforts continue at promoting a continually improving environment for exports. In addition, Brazil's proximity to many Third World markets has helped it to broaden its export base.

Christensen et al. (1987) examined the characteristics of exporters under such an incentive regime. The Brazilian government, recognizing the importance of earning foreign exchange to make payments on international loans, made major efforts to encourage firms to export. Successful exporters were found to: (1) have better quality control departments, (2) be larger in size, (3) be more diversified, (4) be likely to rely less on government incentives, (5) produce standardized industrial durables, (6) delegate key marketing decisions, and (7) have less idle capacity than ex-exporters (Christensen et al., 1987).

In 1972, 85% of all Brazilian manufactured exports were concentrated in just four industries: transportation equipment, electrical machinery, nonelectrical machinery, and chemicals. These, of course, were key industries during the vertical, import substitution industrialization phase of growth—one led by transnational corporations (TNCs). In the context of the trend toward nontraditional industrial export promotion, these same industries were the leaders (Brazil, 1991).

The proportion of intracompany sales as a percentage of total exports of these products from Brazil is considerably high. TNC-led export promotion in key industries is thus largely dependent on the willingness of the TNC parent to buy or allocate production from its Brazilian subsidiary (Evans and Gereffi, 1981). This source of revenue becomes quite vulnerable in the event of a general slowdown in demand or of an oversupply. In building a substantial manufacturing capacity, Brazil could

not be content with satisfying domestic demand. The high proportion of intracompany sales is an indication of the specific marketing channels that are required, because the products exported are not homogeneous commodities that can be sold on the basis of price competition in difficult times. In addition, Brazilian manufactured exports, which grew at an average annual rate of over 50% per year from 1968 to 1973, are highly dependent upon rapidly growing economies elsewhere (Graham, 1982).

## Results

### Profile of Brazilian Exporters

Most of the responding firms were relatively large (77% of the firms responding to the survey employed over 250 employees). Approximately 73% had annual sales volume of more than \$10 million. A majority of firms (70%) had from 20 to 50 employees working specifically on export activities. Among the respondents 60% reported an average export order size of \$10,000.

The majority of respondents (91%) began exporting between 1976 and 1980. Half of this group had begun between 1966

and 1970. The main export markets were Western Europe (28%), closely followed by the United States (27%) and Central America (24%). Of the exporting group 56% used freight forwarders when they started exporting as opposed to 46% in current export activities. Furthermore, 17% started with an export manager as opposed to 39% in current export activities. Over two-thirds of the responding group (67%) indicated that they were considering maintaining or expanding their level of export activities.

In order to categorize firms according to their stage in the internationalization process, respondents were asked to choose the statement which best described the firm's stage in the internationalization process (unsolicited/limited or extensive exporting). The first group (unsolicited/limited exporting) represented 41.8% of the sample, and the second group (extensive exporting) represented 58.2% of the sample.

### Factor Analysis: Export Market Dimensions

Using the eigenvalue of one criterion, the principal component analysis (varimax rotation) yielded eight factors which accounted for 71.5% of the variance observed in the data. Table

**Table 3.** Varimax Rotated Factor Matrix

Variable	Factor								H <sup>2</sup>
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Decision influencing present export activities									
Competitive pressures	0.15	0.19	-0.08	0.75	0.18	0.09	0.05	-0.12	0.69
Growth and profits	0.18	0.36	-0.06	0.13	+0.12	0.51	0.02	0.24	0.51
Excess capacity	0.12	-0.01	-0.08	0.84	-0.07	0.04	+0.05	0.05	0.75
Seasonal variations	0.24	-0.11	-0.18	-0.03	0.06	-0.78	0.09	0.04	0.73
Familiarity with foreign country	0.17	0.80	0.05	-0.01	-0.08	-0.04	0.12	-0.14	0.72
Efficient production techniques	0.22	0.54	0.05	0.54	0.15	-0.08	0.22	0.30	0.80
Efficient marketing techniques	0.14	0.72	0.05	0.31	0.36	0.14	-0.04	0.12	0.80
Unique product technology	0.07	0.21	-0.14	0.44	0.49	-0.15	-0.09	0.40	0.70
Language skills	0.06	0.85	-0.11	0.07	0.01	0.13	-0.25	-0.04	0.82
Risk preceptions									
Currency uncertainties	0.79	0.10	0.21	-0.01	0.17	-0.11	0.07	0.11	0.74
Financial uncertainties	0.63	0.06	-0.06	0.24	0.27	0.05	0.11	-0.50	0.80
External dependency	0.85	0.11	0.04	0.13	-0.07	0.07	-0.03	-0.10	0.77
Economic performance	0.77	0.15	-0.16	0.23	-0.02	-0.04	0.04	0.11	0.71
Environmental assessment	0.73	0.04	-0.12	0.05	0.02	-0.01	-0.25	0.19	0.65
Marketing									
Pricing strategies	0.17	-0.10	0.19	0.07	0.00	0.27	0.05	0.79	0.77
Product modificaton	0.41	0.23	+0.05	-0.21	-0.01	0.03	0.39	0.33	0.53
Promotional strategy	0.09	-0.14	-0.41	0.06	0.10	0.43	0.46	0.04	0.61
Credit policy	0.07	-0.06	-0.18	-0.04	0.19	0.70	0.21	0.14	0.64
Initial risk evaluation	0.03	0.05	-0.02	-0.05	0.81	0.04	0.17	0.09	0.71
Current risk evaluation	0.06	-0.01	0.06	-0.14	0.88	0.06	-0.07	-0.18	0.84
Product market assessment	-0.08	0.18	0.27	0.10	0.16	0.29	0.49	0.01	0.47
Price flexibility	-0.04	-0.05	0.92	0.00	-0.03	0.02	0.13	0.07	0.88
Payment flexibility	0.02	0.01	0.89	-0.18	0.05	-0.05	0.16	0.08	0.86
Credit flexibility	-0.09	-0.15	0.22	-0.01	-0.02	-0.02	0.75	-0.01	0.64
Eigenvalue	4.9	2.5	2.3	1.9	1.8	1.4	1.2	1.0	
Percent of variance	20.5	10.6	9.6	8.0	7.8	5.7	5.1	4.2	
Cumulative percent	20.5	31.1	40.7	48.7	56.5	62.2	67.3	71.5	

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = 0.61617.

Bartlett test of sphericity = 674.38306; significance = 0.00000.

3 presents the varimax rotated factor solution. Each factor then was named according to the loading pattern of the variables. As a rule of thumb, variables with loadings of 0.30 and greater are interpreted. The greater the loading, the more the variable is a pure measure of the loading (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1989). The factors and labels are presented in Table 4.

### The Discriminant Function

Discriminant analysis was used to determine which factors or dimensions helped explain the differences in the two groups. A two-group discriminant analysis tested the general group difference between exporting firms identifying themselves as unsolicited/limited or extensive exporters. The independent variables used were the factor scores for each of the eight factors. These were entered one by one based on their discriminating power using stepwise discriminant analysis.

The results are represented in Table 4. Based on the overall (multivariate) test of group separation, it can be observed that the two groups did differ in terms of several export dimensions. The discriminant function was significant at the 0.0059 level and the canonical correlation (0.445) denotes the relative ability of the function to separate the two groups. Additionally, a 0.802 Wilk's Lambda, indicates that considerable discriminating power exists among the variables used (Nie, 1981).

The impact of each independent variable on the discriminant function can be seen by analyzing the standardized discriminant coefficients. Financial flexibility, the comparative advantage of the firm in export activities and systematic assessment of environmental factors appear to be the discriminating variables

that best distinguish the two groups. The significance test shows that financial flexibility was the most significant predictor of group membership. The other factors, in descending order of importance were: comparative advantage of the firm and environmental assessment. Thus, from the exporters' perspective, financial considerations represent the most distinguishing characteristics between limited and extensive export marketers.

The hit-ratio (percentage of correctly classified respondents) was used to determine the predictive validity of the function. Table 5 shows a result that a hit-ratio of 66.67% of firms correctly classified by the discriminant function. The a priori chance of classifying a respondent accurately is the following:

$$c = (p)^2 + (1 - p)^2$$

where

$c$  = the proportional chance criterion

$p$  = the proportion of firms in Group 1

$1 - p$  = the proportion of firms in Group 2

Therefore,

$$c = (0.46)^2 + (1 - 0.46)^2$$

$$c = 50.3\%$$

(see Table 6).

Generally accepted criterion stipulates that in order to be significant, the percent correctly classified should be at least 25% more than mere chance (or 63%). Thus, the discriminant model is regarded as significant since the classification function was at a significantly higher percentage (Hair et al., 1987).

**Table 4.** Factor Labels

Factor Label	Variable <sup>a</sup>	Loading
I. Systematic environmental assessment	The firm placed importance on: external dependency, currency uncertainties, economic performance, environmental assessment	0.85 0.79 0.77 0.73
II. Managerial competency	In present export activities, management placed importance on language skills, familiarity with foreign country	0.85 0.80
III. Financial flexibility	Firms were more likely to use other currency than their own in: pricing, financing terms	0.92 0.89
IV. Production/competitive considerations	In present export activities, firms identified the importance of: excess capacity, competitive pressures, efficient production techniques	0.84 0.75 0.54
V. Competitive advantage	In export activities, firms were influenced by: unique product/technology	0.49
VI. Internal company considerations	In export activities, firms were more likely to be influenced by: seasonal variations in sales desire for growth and profits	-0.78 0.51
VII. Marketing mix considerations	In present export activities firms gave more importance to international activities in: credit flexibility, product/market assessment, promotional strategies	0.75 0.49 0.46
VIII. Comparative advantage of the firm	In export activities, firms identified the importance of: pricing strategies	0.79

<sup>a</sup> The variables named are those which had their highest loading on each factor.

**Table 5.** Discriminant Analysis: Export Marketing Activities

Variable	Group Mean		Partial F-Ratio	Significance Level	Standardized Discriminant Coefficient	(r) <sup>a</sup>
	1	2				
Overall significance of function				0.0059		
Group centroids						
Function 1	-0.06	0.39				
Independent variables						
Financial flexibility	-0.43	0.31	8.3	0.0055	0.86	0.76
Comparative advantage of the firm	0.92	1.04	5.72	0.0550	0.52	0.4
Systematic environmental assessment	-0.08	0.21	4.62	0.0059	0.44	0.31

<sup>a</sup> Correlation between each independent variable and discriminant function.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Marketing orientation has been found to be a very important factor as 58% of the firms that responded are active exporters. Similarly, it can be seen that financial flexibility, comparative advantage of the firm, and systematic environmental assessment contribute significantly to the development of exports. One of the most important findings of the empirical study is that in order to stimulate export development, governments should give particular priority to the maintenance of stable currencies. Financial flexibility is also an important factor that impacts export development. This means firms should have access to credit and the supply of financing. Marketing capabilities—as evidenced by comparative advantage of the firm and the ability to identify export market opportunities from environmental factor—assessment appear to be important in predicting export market behavior.

Although the study was limited to exporting firms in Brazil, the results of this study have important policy implications for future research on the subject, as well as government and business policy-makers. The most important implication is that for exporters to embark upon an extensive export marketing campaign, they must have a strategic focus: this includes attention to strategic issues within the firm, as well as analysis of the competitive environment. In today's environment, this also means an understanding of global political and economic changes.

Typically, the thrust of exporting is to penetrate markets that

are well into a maturity stage, as evidenced by the Brazilian and South Korean examples. Seldom does a firm consider a latent market a viable one, unless the firm is relatively large and possesses a long history of exporting. Consequently, a firm must be able to position its products in a very competitive environment (Kotler, 1988). This research suggests that under these conditions, financial flexibility and marketing know-how, are important organizational capabilities that must be developed by an exporting firm seeking opportunities in world markets. The only constant in today's market is change. Therefore, exporters need to respond to changes (such as fragmentation and consolidation of markets). In a global economy, exporting is no longer a question of choice but rather one of necessity.

This study also has implications for governments seeking to promote non-traditional exports. Maintenance of stable currencies through prudent national monetary policies will enable firms to plan, thereby enabling them to develop the necessary strategic focus to which we have referred.

## Limitations of the Study

Recognizably, the conclusions of this study are specific to Brazil. Additional limitations are the assessment having been conducted at one specific period of time, during a particular stage of the Third World debt crisis; the absence of interindustry comparisons; and the impact of regional, state, and municipal incentives for export expansion. Similarly, the size of the sample makes this study exploratory at best. Nevertheless, the study's conclusion does transcend other areas of Latin America, and the lessons are applicable to other developing regions as well. Moreover, the internationalization process and marketing activities, within the context of export development plans as assessed in this study, have implications for the fledgling economic and political democracies of Eastern Europe, in particular.

## Future Research

Further research on the subject that could advance the knowledge of international marketing and public policy might center on: a time series analysis of Brazilian exports over a 10-year period to detect shifts and trends in the internationalization

**Table 6.** Classification Results

Actual Group	No. of Cases	Predicted Group Membership	
		1	2
Group 1			
limited	23	12	11
Marketing		52.00%	48.00%
Group 2			
extensive	37	9	28
Marketing		24.00%	76.00%

Percent of "grouped" cases correctly classified: 67%.

process and marketing strategies of firms; a cross-national study within the Latin American region focusing, perhaps, on three different export development models; a cross-national study of Eastern European countries as they implement export development plans that could center on interindustry and intraindustry assessments; and empirical and case studies that focus in-depth on each of the main independent variables—financial flexibility, comparative advantage of the firm, and systematic environmental assessment.

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