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Innovation And Marketing Capabilities for Export Performance – An Investigation of Export Promotion Programs as A Moderator in The Indian Context

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Abstract

This study attempts to explain the direct impacts of innovation capabilities (INN) and the effect of marketing capabilities (MAR) as an intervening variable on the export performance (EXP) of Indian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The study also examines how export promotion programmes (EPP) affect the links between INN and EXP as a moderator. The study examines 112 questionnaire-based surveys of owners and directors from Indian engineering manufacturing SMEs subjected to a Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach using SMART PLS 4. The results showed that INN did not directly influence EXP. This study discovered that MAR fully mediated the connection between INN and EXP. Also, when EPPs were used more frequently, the impact of INN on EXP was enhanced. By identifying MAR as a potential mediator in the relationship between INN and EXP, this study attempted to provide novel empirical evidence on the factors influencing SMEs' EXP. It also aimed to offer insightful information for practitioners and academics. A promising avenue for further theorising the link between INN and EXP is examining the explanatory power of EPP, an institutional factor, in developing nation environments.

Keywords Export performance, India, SMEs, Innovation capabilities, Marketing capabilities, Engineering industry.

Statements and Declarations

The authors have no competing interests to declare relevant to this article’s content.

1. Introduction

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) need to grow in this era of globalisation. Without expansion, SMEs have a substantially diminished chance of surviving (e.g., Freeman et al., 1983). Due to internationalisation, business prospects outside the home market are expanding (Lu & Beamish, 2001). Exporting marks the start of the internationalisation process (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Paul et al., 2017a; Paul & Mas, 2020). Literature on SMEs' internationalisation and EXP is widely available (Guan & Ma, 2003a; Lohrke et al., 1999; Oura et al., 2016; Ribau et al., 2018; Zucchella & Siano, 2014). For SMEs, innovation and globalisation are essential (Golovko & Valentini, 2011). Internationalisation and competitiveness depend increasingly on innovation (Gorodnichenko et al., 2008). Innovation has always been crucial for assessing a firm's long-term existence (Ancona & Caldwell, 1987), evaluating its EXP (Higgins, 1996), and upholding its degree of international competitiveness (Porter, 1990). Although recent studies have indicated that various capabilities are required to provide value, retain a competitive advantage, and increase profitability (Fang & Zou, 2009; Song et al., 2008). A significant factor affecting a firm's ability to export is its innovation capability (Azar & Ciabuschi, 2017; Chadha, 2009; Filipescu et al., 2013; Guan & Ma, 2003b; Lages, Silva, & Styles, 2009a; Oura et al., 2016; Rodil et al., 2016; Singh, 2009). Prior studies (Basile, 2001; Cassiman & Golovko, 2011; Girma et al., 2008) indicate that innovation may enhance EXP, but they also show that the impacts of innovation can vary greatly. Given the rapidly increasing complexity of the environment in which SMEs operate, research must also be done to identify significant combinations of capabilities that will yield better EXP and enhance academic and industry knowledge (García et al., 2012a). Different marketing capabilities are the primary determinants that affect financial and export marketing performance, according to Morgan et al. (2012). Additionally, research from the past reveals that institutional assistance, namely export promotion programmes (EPP), has a significant impact on how INN and EXP are related (Li & Atuahene-Gima, 2001b; Tian et al., 2019).

The present study, which builds on the resource-based view (RBV), claims that factors like MAR and INN increase SME international success. The research needs to support the precise influence of INN on MAR in the context of SMEs' EXP. Additionally, this article claims that from an institutional-based perspective (IBV), the widespread impact of EPP on SMEs provides a key context for comprehending the important role of INN in determining EXP.

The study will elaborate on this argument and fill a gap in the literature by introducing INN and MAR as predictors of EXP among manufacturing SMEs in India, an emerging market. We also look at a hitherto neglected aspect of the literature: the possible moderating effect of EPP in strengthening the connection between INN and EXP.

The rest of the study is divided into the following sections. Section two describes the theoretical framework and research hypotheses regarding the relationship between INN, MAR, and EXP. Section three focuses on the specifics of the methodology. Section four reviews and analyses the findings, and section five discusses the theoretical and managerial implications. Section six expands on the conclusions, limitations, and future research prospects.

2. Theoretical framework and research hypotheses

2.1. Innovation capabilities and Export performance

The resource-based view (RBV) is one of the most extensively used theories in the export marketing literature, describing the relevance of a firm's resources and capabilities in creating core competencies to generate a competitive advantage in overseas markets (Barney, 1991; Hitt et al., 2016; Wernerfelt,

1984). According to RBV, every firm has valuable, rare, unique, and non-substitutable resources. These intangible assets help firms gain a long-term competitive advantage (Carmeli, 2004; Carmeli & Tishler, 2004; Clulow et al., 2007; Hall, 1992). According to Schumpeter, 1934, a firm's constant innovation is a source of long-term success. It may help firms make considerable profits by launching innovative products until a rival imitative or substitute product enters the market (Mathews, 2002). According to RBV, an organisation's INN can be seen as unique resource that can be strategically used to improve firm performance (Hurley & Hult, 1998) and increase a firm's chances of success in the global marketplace (Buckley & Casson, 1991; Camisón & Villar-López, 2014a; Dhanaraj & Beamish, 2003; Hotho & Champion, 2011; Kallio et al., 2012; Lepak et al., 2007; Yam et al., 2004; Zou & Stan, 1998). The RBV has served as an advantageous theoretical lens for researching the benefits of INN (Menguc & Auh, 2006; Terziovski, 2010). The ability of a firm to innovate is usually correlated with its ability to expand internationally (Barney, 1991; Ganotakis & Love, 2011; García et al., 2012b; Lejpras, 2019; Oura et al., 2016). This implies that firms may leverage their INN to seize opportunities in global marketplaces (Paul et al., 2017b; Wu et al., 2020). Some firms require INN to get a competitive edge and perform better abroad (Gunday et al., 2011). INN is essential for defining business strategy (Gunday et al., 2011). INN is also crucial for establishing firm's competitive advantage. (Fernández-Mesa & Alegre, 2015; Guan & Ma, 2003c; Pla-Barber & Alegre, 2007; Zahra et al., 2006). Through INN, firms may respond to shifting conditions and deal with environmental instability (Damanpour et al., 2009; Damanpour & Evan, 1984).

Researchers have found that INN significantly contribute to the success of exporting enterprises in global business (Calantone et al., 2006a; Lages, Silva, Styles, et al., 2009). According to Contractor, (2007), firms with greater capacity for innovation have grown and diversified successfully.

Diverse viewpoints on INN have given rise to multifaceted concepts and inconsistent constructs. For instance, INNs were described as "the assets associated with internal and acquired experiences of the firm" by Guan & Ma, (2003c). INN was defined by Lawson & Samson, (2001) as "the ability to continuously turn knowledge and inventive ideas into new products and processes for the benefit of the firm". According to Saunila, (2016), internal capabilities are the organisation's capacity to innovate continuously and provide value for the company and its stakeholders. A company's ability to offer and create novel ideas for the market, which results in competitive advantages and a short- or long-term increase in profit, is known as its INN (Nisula & Kianto, 2013). Innovation is the introduction and implementation of new knowledge and ideas into organisations (Rhee et al., 2010), which are present in the organisation's strategies, structure, and system (Gloet & Samson, 2013) to continuously contribute to the development of path-breaking ideas, particularly in the changing business environment (Slater et al., 2010).

The literature has established a direct link between INN and EXP. This relationship has been extensively studied and empirically demonstrated (D'Angelo, 2012; Hortinha et al., 2011; Lages, Silva, & Styles, 2009b; Roper & Love, 2002). Walker & Brown, (2004) has demonstrated that innovation can enhance business performance in their review of empirical studies conducted between 1984 and 2003. According to several studies (Azar & Ciabuschi, 2017; Azar & Drogendijk, 2016a; Guan & Ma, 2003c; Javernick-Will, 2009; Ribau et al., 2018; van de Ven & Polley, 1992), companies can improve their EXP by learning from innovation initiatives. Past research suggests a strong significant relationship between INN and EXP, according to prior studies (Anderton, 1999a, 1999b; Arnold & Hussinger, 2005; Arthur Solberg & Olsson, 2010; Azar & Ciabuschi, 2017; Bleaney & Wakelin, 2002; Costa et al., 2015; DiPietro & Anoruo, 2006; Golovko & Valentini, 2011; Gourlay & Seaton, 2004a, 2004b; Guan & Ma, 2003c; Harris et al., 2009; Hitt et al., 1997; Kirbach & Schmiedeberg, 2008; Lachenmaier & Wößmann,

2006a, 2006b; E. Lefebvre & Lefebvre, 2002; Leonidou et al., 2007; López Rodríguez & García Rodríguez, 2005; Love & Roper, 2015; Monreal-Pérez et al., 2012; Oly Ndubisi & Agarwal, 2014; Sterlacchini, 2001a, 2001b; Wakelin, 1998). Joo et al., 2018) demonstrated how the firm's EXP improved due to its technological INN. According to Greenhalgh et al. (1994), technological innovation activities improve trade performance. However, several research (Becchetti & Rossi, 2000; Celec et al., 2014; Landesmann & Pfaffermayr, 1997; É. Lefebvre et al., 1998; Schlegelmilch & Crook, 1988; M. J. Silva & Leitto, 2007; Verspagen & Wakelin, 1997) found that innovation levels had no impact on EXP. Freel & Robson, (2004) found that product innovation and increases in sales or productivity are not positively correlated. The studies above evaluating the relationship between INN and EXP still show fragmented and inconsistent results (Azari et al., 2017; Costa et al., 2015; Fernández-Mesa & Alegre, 2015; Guan & Ma, 2003c; Lee et al., 2016; G. M. Silva et al., 2017). According to Cruz-Cázares et al. (2013), these disagreements in the literature arise due to the various methods used to measure innovation in the relevant works.

Surprisingly, exporting literature pays little attention to INN (Yalcinkaya et al., 2007), given that it is essential for the survival, expansion and success of businesses (e.g., (N. A. Morgan et al., 2004). According to some researchers Rosenbusch et al. (2011), the relationship between a firm's capacity for innovation and performance may be more nuanced than previously considered. Pla-Barber & Alegre, (2007) contend that further study is necessary to fully understand the internal factors that influence EXP, notably INN. According to Brouwer & Kleinknecht, (1996), large businesses are more inventive than small businesses. According to Rosenbusch et al. (2011), SMEs must be innovative to compete with major corporations. Although INN have been highlighted in the literature as a key factor in a company's international success, there is very little empirical support for this claim in the context of SMEs (Lisboa et al., 2011; Oura et al., 2016). Therefore, we proposed the following:

H1: INN positively affect EXP.

2.2. Innovation capabilities and Marketing capabilities

According to Camisón & Villar-López, (2014b), innovation can provide rare, non-substitutable, unique and valuable assets and capabilities that distinguish a product or process and improve performance. Innovation is also linked to marketing and organisational capabilities (Gunday et al., 2011), and for businesses to successfully internationalise, many of these capabilities must be combined (Guan & Ma, 2003c; Oura et al., 2016). Investments in technological innovations improve organisational knowledge and learning abilities in terms of export markets, which influence the firm's capacity to create competitive advantages to compete overseas (Eriksson et al., 2000; Guan & Ma, 2003c; Oura et al., 2016; Ripolles Meliá et al., 2010). According to Lau et al. (2010), "MAR" refers to a firm's ability to market and sell its products based on the knowledge of its competitors and the consumers' current and future demands. For a new product to hit the targeted customers, the firm must constantly connect with the export markets to promote new products, understand consumers' demands, and receive customer feedback. Marketing is a crucial innovation activity (OECD, 1997). According to some authors, INN is positively correlated with the acquisition and scanning of market information (Tidd et al., 2001), successful marketing campaigns (Cooper, 1984), and wide-ranging distribution networks (Maidique & Zirger, 1984). Additionally, MAR was related to the rate of technical innovation (Souitaris, 2002). INN is crucial for MAR and greatly adds to exporting firms' international economic success (Calantone et al., 2006a; Lages, Silva, & Styles, 2009a). Innovative SMEs are more likely to fund R&D, new concepts, products, and services. This focus on new development will encourage firms to recognise and assess market needs and to use resources to address those demands (i.e., marketing capability).

Therefore, SMEs' level of innovation will increase their marketing capacity (Jin, Chung, et al., 2018). Assuming that innovative products and process in the organisation strengthen their MAR and the importance of INN for MAR is generally not considered (Babelytė-Labanauskė & Nedzinskas, 2017), and the link between the two remains inappropriately explored (Alves et al., 2017). Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H2: INN positively affect MAR.

2.3. Marketing capabilities and Export performance

The resource-based approach (Barney, 1991) contends that each organisation derives its competitive advantage from its resources or assets, which may be used to create unique internal capabilities. This explains differences in each organisation's performance (Murray et al., 2011). The superior business performance of exporters has been linked to their specialised internal resources and capabilities (Newbert, 2007; Robson et al., 2012). Different MAR are the primary determinants determining financial and export marketing performance, according to (N. A. Morgan et al., 2012). The literature (Brouthers et al., 2015; N. Morgan et al., 2009; Navarro-García et al., 2016; Zou et al., 2003a) validates the influence of a firm's MAR and other marketing-related elements on performance in various settings. Experts in the sector have observed an increase in curiosity about how MAR affect EXP (N. A. Morgan et al., 2012; Murray et al., 2011). According to Krasnikov and Jayachandran (2008), MAR reveal the firm's capacity to comprehend and predict customer requirements more precisely than competitors. MAR are vital for firms operating in highly competitive situations (Wilden and Gudergan 2014). Tan and Sousa (2015, p. 95) meta-analysis showed that MAR are powerful tools that directly impact EXP. According to the literature, there is a positive and significant association between MAR and EXP (Jin, Chung, et al., 2018; Jin & Cho, 2018a; Konwar et al., 2017; Mahmoud et al., 2020; Pham et al., 2017).

Vorhies & Morgan,(2005) found that MAR had a greater influence on EXP than R&D and operations capabilities. Martin & Javalgi, (2016) discovered a substantial association between MAR and performance, in contrast to the relationship between performance and entrepreneurial orientation. In their cross-national research of exporters from the UK and China, N. A. Morgan et al. (2003) found a strong and positive association between marketing implementation ability and EXP. Zou et al. (2003b) looked at the indirect link between MAR and EXP through the marketing mix dimensions. Numerous research has provided empirical support for the idea that MAR and EXP are positively correlated (Griffith et al., 2010; Theodosiou et al., 2012).

However, despite growing academic interest in the topic, more needs to be revealed in the setting of a developing economy. Due to a lack of expertise and financial constraints, SMEs have long been concerned about entering new markets and executing marketing activities in new locations to improve EXP. As a result, we suggest the following hypotheses for SMEs:

H3: MAR positively affect EXP

2.4. The mediating role of Marketing capabilities

The literature discusses diverse firm capabilities, including technical, marketing, operational, and organisational (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004; Kotabe et al., 2002; Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008; N. Morgan et al., 2009). Among them, the studies contend that a firm's performance is more strongly influenced by its MAR (Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2008; Nath et al., 2010). Beyond mere skills, MAR is established profoundly in the routines and practises of SMEs throughout time. Competitors, therefore, struggle to duplicate them (Teece et al., 1997), for example). SMEs with low resources may not have

the necessary marketing expertise. Still, if MAR is incorporated into their company's strategy, they will effectively utilise their little resources to maximise their profits, outperforming their competitors in performance.

According to Nath et al. (2010), O'Cass & Sok (2014); Sirmon et al. (2007), and other sources, firm-specific resources are a major contributor to generating superior business performance, which includes MAR. Based on RBV, the current study argues that resources like MAR combined with INN enhance SMEs global success. Some studies have identified innovation as a crucial component of MAR that significantly increases the success of exporting firms on the global market, despite the paucity of research on the precise impact of INN on MAR in the context of SMEs' performance (Calantone et al., 2006a; Jin, Jung, et al., 2018; Lages, Silva, & Styles, 2009b). The mediating function of MAR has been empirically shown in many conceptual frameworks in previous research. For instance, J. Lu et al. (2010) found empirical evidence supporting the mediating role of capabilities between resources (managerial ties) and international success using a sample of Chinese entrepreneurial enterprises. Griffith et al. (2010) looked at the role of capabilities in mediating the relationship between intangible capital and the firm's performance of Japanese and American importers. However, there hasn't been much research done in the literature on the relationships between INN, MAR, and SMEs EXP. Therefore, we assumed that:

H4: MAR positively mediate INN and EXP

2.5. The moderating role of Export promotion programs

The institutional-based view (IBV) claims that government support in the form of export promotion programmes assists businesses, particularly SMEs, in reducing adverse market impacts (Shu et al., 2019; XIN & PEARCE, 1996) and effectively managing export operations (Stephan et al., 2015). Export promotion can help firms thrive in a highly competitive environment (Malca et al., 2020; Mota et al., 2021). Government export promotion programmes are available to all organisations, regardless of size, although SMEs are more likely to need them because of their limited capabilities and resources (Albaum, 1983; Katsikeas et al., 1996; Katsikeas & Morgan, 1994). International marketing scholars have extensively investigated the effects of export promotion programmes on EXP. However, other researchers has examined the relationship between EPPs and EXP using methodological approaches. For example, the majority of studies have looked on the direct and indirect effects of national EPPs. Furthermore, other studies have concentrated on using EPP as a moderator or mediator variable. According to studies by (Ahmed et al., 2006; Alvarez, 2004; Ayob et al., 2015; Gençtürk & Kotabe, 2011; Haddoud et al., 2017; Njinyah, 2018; Sharma et al., 2018) , the use of EPPs affects firm's EXP. The use of EPPs was also shown to be highly connected to managers' perceptions of exports and the firm's export knowledge, which indirectly influence EXP (e.g. Shamsuddoha & Yunus Ali, 2006). According to Naik & Reddy, (2012), market development-related EPPs have a major impact on the internationalisation of Indian SMEs. Only in locations with high degrees of marketisation did Yi et al. (2013) find empirical evidence to indicate the role of institutional support as a mediator in the relationship between INN and EXP. Furthermore, Tian et al. (2019) concluded that a firm's relationships with the government substantially impact innovation. The government has a greater influence on new initiatives that boost exporting activities (Peng & Heath, 1996).

Li & Atuahene-Gima, (2001a) found that institutional support from the government significantly influences how well a firm's product innovation strategy performs. According to Joo et al. (2018),

government assistance positively affects exporting enterprises' capacity for technical and environmental innovation. We contend that EPP mitigate the link between INN and EXP because government involvement pushes businesses to improve their capacity for innovation. As a result, the following hypothesis can be substantiated.

H5: The association between INN and EXP becomes greater as the utilisation of EPP increases.

An empirical model for EXP in Indian manufacturing enterprises was constructed for this study based on the RBV & IBV theories and literature evaluation. According to the model, three contextual elements influence the EXP of Indian SMEs. Fig. I present this model. EXP is the dependent variable in this model, while INN and MAR are the independent variables and EPP serve as the moderator.

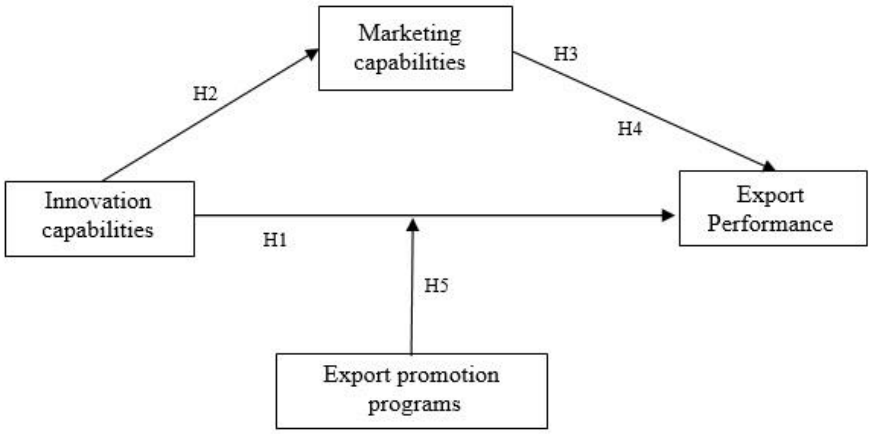

Fig. I Conceptual framework developed for the study

3. Method

3.1. Research design and data collection

The current analysis only focuses on the engineering manufacturing SME exporters in Bangalore's urban and rural areas of Karnataka (a south state in India). Karnataka is the nation's most industrially advanced state, and its capital, Bangalore, is ranked ninth among Asia's top global centres for technical innovation (KPMG survey). Compared to other Karnataka districts, Bangalore's urban and rural areas have the largest percentage of SMEs (Bala Subrahmanya, 2013). Bangalore has a high concentration of engineering industry encompassing ferrous and non-ferrous metals and its products, industrial machinery & equipment, Auto and auto parts, air crafts, space crafts, boats and floating structures and other engineering products. In the absence of an official database of Bangalore manufacturing SME exporters of the engineering industry, we relied on the export directories of associations like EEPC (Engineering Export Promotion Council), FKCCI (Federation of Karnataka Chambers of Commerce and Industry) and Visvesvaraya Industrial Trade Centre (VITC). Among the consolidated list of 590 SME engineering exporters in Bangalore, 482 SMEs with valid contact details were initially telephoned for an appointment to participate in the survey. 233 firms agreed to participate in the face-to-face survey.

After two follow-ups via telephone, a follow-up letter was sent asking for an appointment to complete the questionnaire at the respondent’s premises. Eventually, 112 responses were obtained with a response rate of 23.2 per cent. The respondents were mostly the directors/owners of SMEs, primarily the decision-makers of exporting operations. The sample SMEs were from various regions within Bangalore, which included Peenya industrial town, Bommasandra industrial estate, Rajajinagar

industrial town, Kumbalgodu, Koramangala and Kamakshipalya industrial area, Veerasandra industrial estate, Mahadevapura and Whitefield industrial estate. Table I. Shows the descriptive statistics of the sample firms. This finding is acceptable because low response rates are usual for industrial surveys (Paxson, 1992), and good response rates are 20–30% (Baker, 1992).

Accordingly, we compared early and late responders to determine the non-response bias (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). The absence of non-response bias in the study is supported by the insignificant differences (wave response technique). Data for the study variables were gathered using a single questionnaire, raising the possibility of common method bias (CMB). In terms of statistics, we used the one-factor method (Harman & Harman, 1976) and discovered that the percentage of variance explained is (40.04%) lower than the advised criterion of 50%. In PLS-SEM, a comprehensive collinearity analysis was also performed. When a model has a Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) greater than 3.3 to a random, this is a sign that common method bias is present (Kock, 2015). The model is free from common method bias because all factor-level VIFs (Table II.) obtained from the entire collinearity test are lower than 3.3, with the highest being 2.054.

Table I. Descriptive statistics of the sample firms

Variables		*FQ*	*Per cent*	*Variables*		*FQ*	*Per cent*
Firm age	Less than 10 years	14	12.5	Export Experience	3 - 5 years	38	33.9
	11 - 20	36	32.1		6 - 10 years	17	15.2
	21 - 30	21	18.8		11 - 15 years	13	11.6
	31 - 40	16	14.3		16 - 20 years	14	12.5
	Over 40 years	25	22.3		Over 20 years	30	26.8
	Total	112	100.0		Total	112	100
Firm's turnover	5 crore - 10 crore	16	14.3	Number of export markets	1	31	27.7
	10 crore - 25 crore	20	17.9		2 - 3	8	7.1
	25 crore - 50 crore	28	25		4 - 6	31	27.7
	50 crore - 100 crore	25	22.3		7 - 9	38	33.9
	100 crore - 250 crore	23	20.5		10 or more	4	3.6
	Total	112	100		Total	112	100
Export Markets	European Union	52	16.10	No of employees	1 to 50	42	37.5
	North America	45	13.62		51 to 100	26	23.3
	ASEAN	44	13.93		101 to 150	16	14.3
	West Asia & North Africa	25	7.74		151 to 200	7	6.3
	North-east Asia	35	10.84		Over 200	21	18.8
	South Asia	40	12.38		Total	112	100
	Sub-Saharan Africa	18	5.57				
	Other Europe	21	6.50				
	Latin America	19	5.88				
		9	2.79				

Oceania	15	4.64
Others		

Table II. Full collinearity assessment – VIF values (factor-level)

Constructs	*VIF*
INN	1.190
MAR	1.251
EPP	1.137
EXP	1.470
Export experience	2.054
Export markets	1.778
Firm age	1.792
Firm size	1.458

3.2. Measurement

The following literature served as a basis for the items used to capture the variables in this study.

A scale developed by Haddoud et al. (2018) was used to measure INN (Kaleka, 2002; Leonidou et al., 2011; N. Morgan et al., 2006). The last four elements in the original article are related to innovation, while the first five are related to technology. Respondents used a scale of 1 to 5 to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with claims made about the firm's capacity for innovation.

The measurement of MAR was done using a scale created by Haddoud et al. (2018) and Jin & Cho, (2018a). Respondents ranked their level of agreement (1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree) with statements about their knowledge of customers, advertising, pricing, and promotional techniques connected to MAR.

The study's moderator, EPP, was operationalised as a single-item construct. Respondents ranked the usefulness of the programmes that the company has implemented to improve its innovation capability.

Finally, we evaluated the EXP using measures created by Kayabasi & Mtetwa, (2016) and (Okpara, (2009). For each of the following statements—export sales, the firm's reputation, market share, and overall growth—respondents ranked their level of agreement (1-strongly disagree; 5-strongly agree).

Four additional control variables were added to reduce the results' likelihood of being skewed. a firm's size is determined by how many employees work full-time; Firm age is the number of years a company has been in business since its establishment; Export markets are the total number of markets the firm exports to, and export experience is the number of years the company has been exporting. The "Measurement model" comprehensively lists all the items used in this study.

3.3. Data analysis

The research used two statistical packages – IBM SPSS statistics version 25.0 and SmartPLS version 4.0.8.4. Raw data collected from the survey was inputted and coded using SPSS (Bryman and Bell, 2015). According to Kline, 2005, reliability and validity tests were conducted to confirm the suitability for further measurement model analysis. The partial least square (PLS) approach to structural equation

modelling (SEM) was employed to show the effects of hypothesised relationships between the dependent and independent variables (Hair Jr et al., 2021).

4. Results

4.1. Assessment of Measurement model

Consistent PLS (i.e. PLSc) was used since the measurement model uses reflective constructs (Watanuki & Moraes, 2016). PLSc corrects estimates by estimating consistent path coefficients, indicator loadings, and construct correlations (Henseler et al., 2016a). Several criteria were employed to evaluate the quality of the measurement model. All AVEs are shown in Table III to be more than 0.50, indicating good convergence validity (Zhou, 2011). The construct reliability is proven because the CR, Cronbach's alpha, and Dijkstra-A Henseler's alpha are more than 0.70. (Chang et al., 2014). The discriminant validity of the constructs was examined using a variety of methods. The AVE's square root and correlation coefficients were first compared to apply the Fornell-Larcker criteria. Several techniques were used to check the constructs' discriminant validity. The Fornell-Larcker criterion was first applied by comparing the AVE's square root to its correlation coefficients. We conclude that discriminant validity has been attained from Table IV, which demonstrates that all square roots are larger than the corresponding correlation coefficients. We also assessed the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, as advised by Henseler et al., 2015 and Voorhees et al., 2016. The HTMT inference approach suggests that all constructs are significantly different based on the HTMT ratio, less than 0.85, and HTMT confidence intervals, which do not include the value "1," as shown in Table V.

Table III. Convergent Validity and construct reliability

Construct and measures	*VIF*	*Factor Loadings*	*Average variance extracted (AVE)*	*Composite reliability (ρC)*	*Cronbach's α*	*Composite reliability (ρA)*
Innovation Capabilities (INN)			**0.592**	**0.927**	**0.929**	**0.941**
Our firm possesses unique products (INN1)	2.016	0.537				
Our firm possesses proprietary technical knowledge (INN2)	2.843	0.664				
Our firm spends considerable amounts of money on R&D (INN3)	2.930	0.783				
Our firm possesses modern production technology and equipment (INN4)	1.925	0.650				
Our firm possesses sufficient production capacity (INN5)	2.225	0.794				
Our firm is constantly adopting innovative marketing techniques (INN6)	4.077	1.008				

Our firm is constantly sensing trends and competitors' movements (INN7)	3.917	0.920				
Our firm is constantly adopting new methods in the production process (INN8)	2.495	0.764				
Our firm is constantly developing new products (INN9)	2.111	0.697				
Marketing Capabilities (MAR)			**0.514**	**0.862**	**0.864**	**0.872**
Capturing market information (MAR1)	2.137	0.720				
Identifying prospective customers. (MAR2)	2.565	0.676				
Monitoring competitive products. (MAR3)	1.845	0.742				
Doing an effective job of pricing the products. (MAR4)	2.209	0.616				
Communicating pricing structures and levels to customers. (MAR5)	3.208	0.758				
Developing effective advertising and promotion programmes. (MAR6)	2.518	0.856				
Export Performance (EXP)			**0.588**	**0.893**	**0.895**	**0.906**
Growth of export sales (EXP1)	2.235	0.703				
Awareness and image of firm in foreign market. (EXP2)	3.616	0.928				
Market share associated with export activity (EXP3)	2.927	0.836				
In last three years, successful growth of export activities. (EXP4)	2.247	0.580				
Achieving the planned export sales (EXP5)	2.137	0.716				
Overall Export performance (EXP6)	2.168	0.790				

Table IV. Discriminant validity - Fornell-Larcker criterion

	EXP	*MAR*	*INN*
EXP	0.767		
MAR	0.613	0.717	
INN	0.352	0.551	0.769

Table V. Discriminant validity - HTMT ratio and confidence intervals

	EXP	***MAR***	***INN***
EXP			
MAR	0.609 $CI_{.850}$ [0.454; 0.760]		
INN	0.339 $CI_{.850}$ [0.257; 0.512]	0.536 $CI_{.850}$ [0.416; 0.806]	

4.2. Assessment of Structural model

Following the instructions given by J. Hair et al. (2017), we first assess the structural model for collinearity issues using the variance inflation factor (VIF) values of all the predictors in the framework. We conclude that collinearity is not present at a critical level since none of the VIF values surpasses the cut-off point of 3.3 (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006). Based on the Consistent PLS (PLSc) bootstrapping of 5,000 samples, a structural model was examined using SmartPLS 4.0.8.3. The model can accurately predict 30.3% and 48.4% of the variation in MAR and EXP, respectively. The standardised root means square residual (SRMR) global fit indices were used for additional investigation into the goodness of fit criteria. In today's study utilising PLS-SEM models, it is crucial to evaluate how well the model fits the data using a global model fit measure, such as SRMR (J. F. Hair et al., 2020). The study's model has an SRMR value of 0.075, below the cutoff point of 0.080, indicating that it has a good explanatory power (Henseler et al., 2016; Hu & Bentler, 1999).Table VI thoroughly explains the structural model evaluation and hypothesis testing.

In contrast to our hypothesis H1, our results did not show a significant link between INN and EXP (β=0.066, t= 0.796, p=0.426), thereby not supporting H1. On the other hand, INN did register a significant impact on the MAR of the owners (β=0.499, t= 6.306, p=0.000), at $p<0.05$ per cent significance, supporting H2. In line with this, H3 revealed a strong link between MAR and EXP (β=0.482, t= 5.608, p=0.000).

To evaluate the mediating function of MAR on the relationship between INN and EXP, a mediation test was conducted. According to the findings (see table VI), there was a substantial total effect of INN on EXP ($\beta = 0.307$, $t = 4.275$, $p = 0.000$). The influence of INN on EXP became insignificant at $p<0.05$ in the presence of mediating variable MAR ($\beta = 0.066$, $t = 0.796$, $p = 0.426$). INN had a significant indirect effect on EXP through MAR ($\beta = 0.241$, $t = 3.701$, $p = 0.000$). This strongly validates H4 by demonstrating that the association between INN and EXP is fully mediated by MAR at $p<0.05$.

To determine how the use of EPP between INN and EXP acted as a moderator, hypothesis H5 was put forth. According to the findings, EPP moderates the association between INN and EXP moderates the association between INN and EXP, according to the findings (β = 0.488, t = 2.132, p = 0.033). The findings show (see fig. II) that INN was found to have a stronger positive influence on EXP, upsurging from a negative to positive EXP value with increased use of EPP (rising sharp green line). On the contrary, for firms with lower usage of EPP, there is a descent in the impact of INN on EXP (dropping steep red line).

In addition, all direct effects of the export firms' characteristics like firm age, firm size, number of export markets and export experience, which were controlled for on the dependent variable, were found to be non-significant. Fig. III summarises the hypotheses testing output.

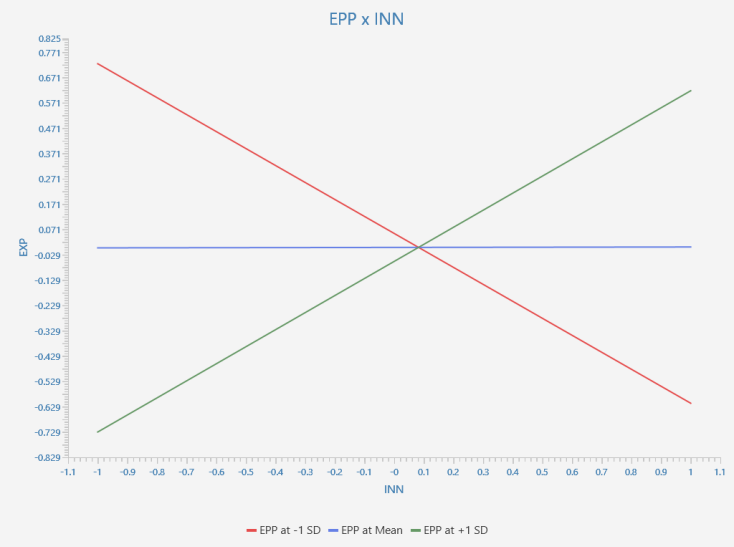

Fig. II Simple Slope analysis – EPP as moderator

Table VI. Structural model assessment and hypotheses testing results

Hypothesis	Path relationships		Effect type	Std Beta	Sample mean	t-values	p values	CI 2.5 %	CI 97.5 %	Decisions
H1	INN EXP	->	Direct effect	0.066	0.062	0.796	0.426	-0.107	0.224	Not Supported
H2	INN MAR	->	Direct effect	0.499	0.527	6.306	0.000*	0.406	0.716	Supported
H3	MAR EXP	->	Direct effect	0.482	0.493	5.608	0.000*	0.320	0.658	Supported
H4	INN MAR EXP	-> ->	Indirect effect	0.241	0.261	3.701	0.000*	0.152	0.409	Supported (Full mediation)

H1	INN -> EXP	Total effect	0.307	0.323	4.275	0.000*	0.184	0.468	-
H5	EPP * INN -> EXP	Moderating effect	0.488	0.395	2.132	0.033*	0.027	0.848	Supported
	Firm age	Direct effect	-0.109	-0.104	1.332	0.183	-0.273	0.044	Not Supported
	Firm size	Direct effect	0.177	0.124	1.29	0.197	-0.057	0.305	Not Supported
	No of export markets	Direct effect	-0.031	-0.02	0.329	0.742	-0.198	0.168	Not Supported
	Export experience	Direct effect	-0.04	-0.034	0.428	0.669	-0.216	0.144	Not Supported

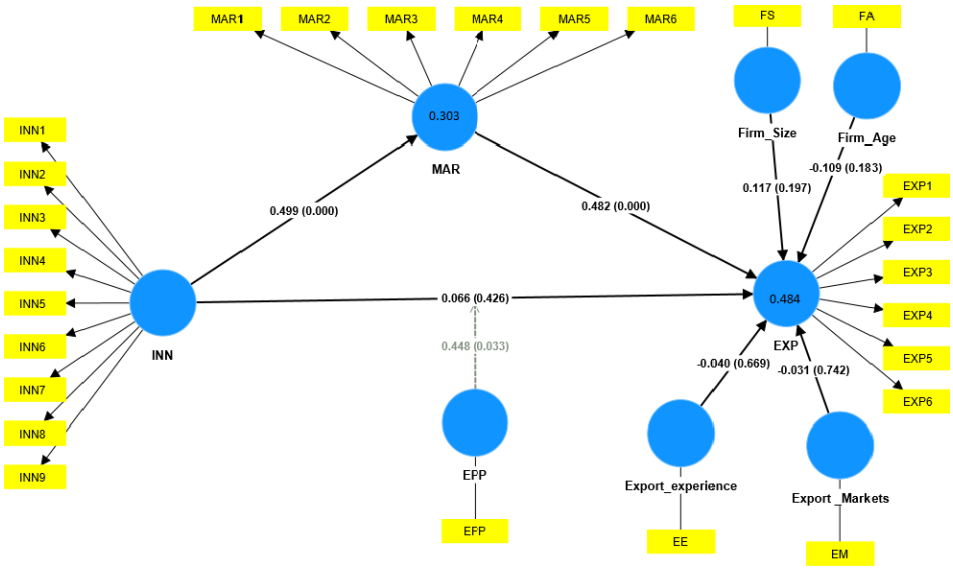

Fig. III Structural model assessments

Following Shmueli et al. (2019), we use PLSpredict with ten folds and ten repetitions to simulate how our PLS model will ultimately be utilised to predict a new observation acquired at various times and situations. We discover that all endogenous constructs' indicators perform better than the most simplistic benchmark (i.e., the indicator means from the analysis sample), as they all produce Q2 predicted values greater than 0. We find that the PLS-SEM analysis yields lower prediction errors for all the indicators except EXP2, MAR2, MAR3, and MAR6 when we compare the RMSE values from the PLS-SEM study with the LM benchmark. The study model offers a moderate level of predictive power since four indicators have higher values for PLS-SEM RMSE when compared to LM. Table VII displays the PLSpredict evaluation of the studied construct indicators.

The effect size (f2) and (Q2) of the suggested model were used to test the predictive significance and relevance. In this study, MAR have a very significant effect size (f2=0.436), whereas INN has a very

weak effect size (f2=0.000) on EXP. On the other hand, the most significant composite that explains EXP is MAR (f2=0.414). A large effect size (f2=0.149) is also demonstrated by the moderation effect of EPP on the INN - EXP link. Last but not least, Stone-Q2 Geisser's was used to assess the structural model's predictive significance; it found that it was highly predictive, with 0.180 for the MAR (Geisser, 1975; Stone, 1974). Additionally, Stone-Geisser's Q2 for EXP was determined to be 0.108. Any value above 0.02 has the considerable predictive ability and can be used to generalise the results in the future (Richter et al., 2016). Thus, it can be concluded that both independent constructs are important in the study's conceptual framework and that the findings can be applied to various scenarios in the future.

Table VII. PLSpredict assessment of variables

	Q^2predict	PLS-SEM_RMSE	LM_RMSE	(PLS-SEM_RMSE) - (LM_RMSE)
EXP1	0.049	0.728	0.784	-0.056
EXP2	0.095	0.850	0.813	0.037
EXP3	0.068	0.832	0.879	-0.047
EXP4	0.004	0.709	0.732	-0.023
EXP5	0.112	0.983	1.125	-0.142
EXP6	0.082	0.746	0.750	-0.004
MAR1	0.067	0.673	0.758	-0.085
MAR2	0.019	0.803	0.797	0.006
MAR3	0.115	0.859	0.797	0.062
MAR4	0.062	0.737	0.782	-0.045
MAR5	0.083	0.783	0.806	-0.023
MAR6	0.236	0.796	0.793	0.003

4.3. Importance-performance Map Analysis (IPMA)

We used importance-performance map analysis (IPMA) to improve the findings for the study's constructs (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016). Determining which of the constructs, MAR or INN is crucial in influencing EXP is the major goal of the IPMA. In this procedure, it's crucial to consider the strong total effects on EXP. Simultaneously, their average latent variable scores show their performance in boosting the target variable. Studies using mediators are well suited for IPMA. The total effects of the target construct EXP are shown in Table VIII. In the structural model, the total effect is the sum of the direct and indirect effects (J. F. Hair et al., 2016).

We employed importance-performance map analysis (IPMA) to further strengthen the results of the constructs under the study (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016). The main objective of using IPMA is to identify which among the constructs, MAR or INN, is important to influence EXP. The strong total effects on EXP are important in this process. At the same time, their average latent variable scores represent their performance in increasing the target variable. IPMA is suited for studies with mediators. Table VIII. summarises all the total effects of the target construct EXP. The total effect is the sum of the direct and indirect effects in the structural model (J. F. Hair et al., 2016). In IPMA, all effects are based on non-standardized effects, and 95% BCs confidence intervals are calculated using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 samples and no sign changes. Interpreting the importance dimension of the IPMA

is challenging when moderators are in the total effect (Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016). To determine the importance values, the moderator was eliminated from the model.

Table VIII. Direct, Indirect and Total Effects in the IPMA

Predecessor Construct	Direct effect on EXP	Total indirect effect on EXP	Total effect on EXP	Are the total effects on EXP significant?
INN	0.327	0.255	0.582	YES
MAR	0.513	-	0.513	YES

The importance-performance map of EXP can be created by the importance and performance values of EXP's predecessor constructs, MAR and INN. The values of importance and performance dimensions are summarised in Table IX.

Table IX. Data of the Importance-Performance Map for Construct EXP

Constructs	Importance	Performance
INN	0.582	33.37
MAR	0.513	52.12
Mean Value	0.547	42.75

Scatter plotting the information in Table IX. allows us to create an importance-performance map, as shown in fig. IV. INN has a relatively low performance of 33.3, slightly below average. On the other hand, INN's importance is high, with a total effect of 0.582, compared to MAR. Therefore, one unit increase in INN's performance from 33.3 to 34.3 would increase the performance of EXP by 0.582 points from 52.323 to 52.905. Hence INN is the highest interest for managers to achieve improvement. In contrast, MAR takes the second priority of interest with above-average performance but slightly below-average importance. In this way, IPMA prioritises crucial managerial tasks for the factor that forms the basis of the selected target but still needs to be performed better.

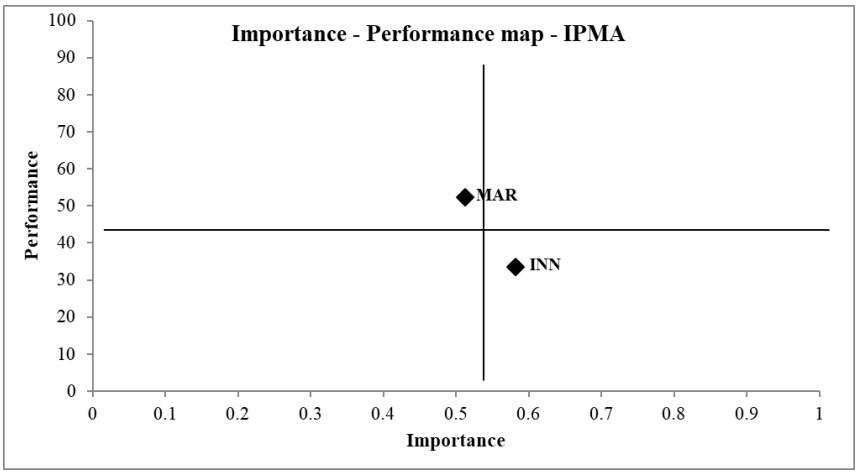

Fig. IV Importance-performance map of target construct (EXP)

To identify more precise areas for improvement, we also performed an IPMA at the indicator level. The rescaled outer weights of a predecessor construct's indicators and its unstandardised total effect on the target construct were multiplied to create the importance values. The importance-performance map at the indicator level is depicted in Fig. V.

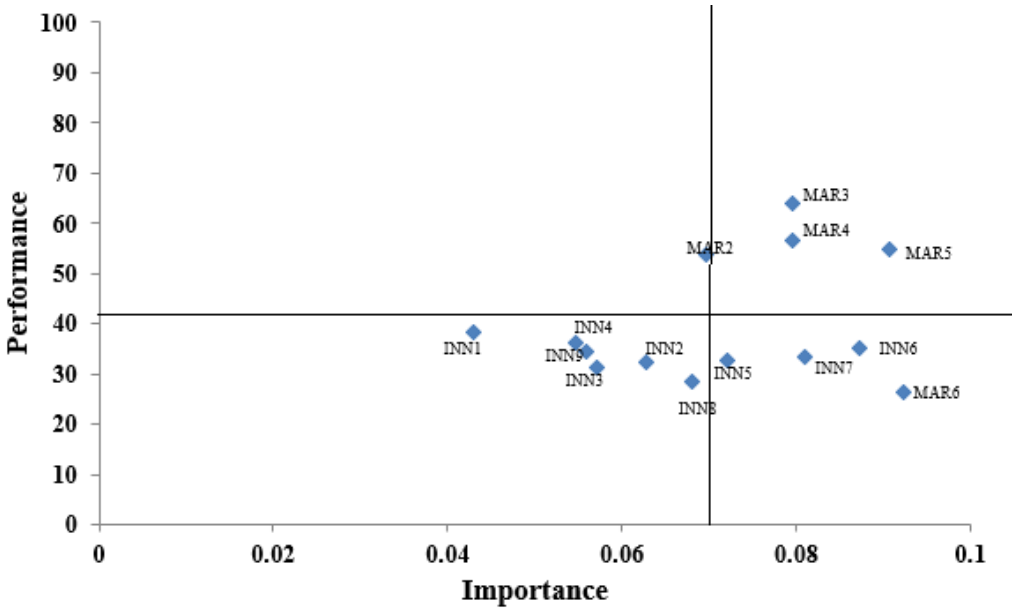

Fig. V IPMA Analysis at the indicator level

Since indicator MAR6 has the highest importance but the lowest performance, it should be highly prioritised for improvement. Indicators INN6, INN7, INN5, MAR5, MAR4, and MAR3 are next, with priorities ranging from second to seventh. The other indicators displayed in the lower left and upper left areas are less important for enhancing EXP's performance.

5. Discussions & Implications

This study proposed that INN drive SMEs' superior EXP. According to the findings of the structural model, the hypothesis (H1) was not statistically significant. Therefore, findings from this research do not support the significant effects of INN on the EXP of Indian SMEs in the engineering industry, in contrast to empirical evidence from other studies that INN presents as a critical component of firm capabilities for export success (Azar & Ciabuschi, 2017; Costa et al., 2015). The results, however, were consistent with the hypothesis (H2), which claimed that a firm's INN positively affects its MAR. The findings of earlier studies (Babelytė-Labanauskė & Nedzinskas, 2017; Jin, Jung, et al., 2018) indisputably show that SMEs' MAR is bolstered by the level of innovation and uniqueness of their products. Additionally, it was hypothesised that SMEs' EXP would positively correlate with their MAR. The findings, which show that MAR has a favourable impact on SMEs' EXP, are substantially supported by the data, as predicted (H3), in accordance with findings from other settings. Thus, current findings support the crucial role of MAR in EXP literature, which is consistent with earlier studies (Konwar et al., 2017; Mahmoud et al., 2020; Pham et al., 2017). This study also hypothesised that MAR could improve SMEs' EXP by mediating the link between INN and EXP. A mediated structural path between INN, MAR, and EXP was evaluated in this regard, and the results were statistically significant (H4). As a result, the full mediation impact on INN to achieve superior EXP has been confirmed. This

complements previous research findings that highlighted INN as a vital aspect of MAR that considerably increases the success of exporting firms on the global market (Calantone et al., 2006b; Jin, Jung, et al., 2018; Lages, Silva, & Styles, 2009b). Literature suggests that for INN to boost EXP, indirect links must be mediated by one or more intermediate variables, such as MAR. In the context of the performance of SMEs, the data analysis revealed a specific impact of INN on MAR that was missed in earlier research. Therefore, in addition to the direct impact of INN on the EXP of SMEs, the presence of MAR also leads to better EXP when they act as a mediator between the INN-EXP link.

Another key point of the study is that using EPPs helps to increase innovative capabilities, which leads to improved SME's EXP. As predicted, our findings revealed a sizable positive moderating effect on the association between INN and EXP (H5). According to a prior study by Yi et al. (2013), government support plays a positive and significant moderating effect in the association between INN and EXP. Government support for enhancing SME capabilities through participation in training programmes, according to Easmon et al. (2019), may greatly improve their resources and the skills necessary to manage their export operations effectively.

Finally, from IPMA analysis, we can find a construct's importance in predicting the target construct (directly or indirectly linked) in our structural model, i.e., EXP. The direct effect of INN on EXP is not much more important than the indirect effect. INN has a slightly low performance of 33.3, which is below average. On the other hand, its importance is high, with a total effect of 0.582, compared to MAR. Hence INN is of the highest interest for managers to achieve improvement. In contrast, MAR takes the second priority of interest with above-average performance but slightly below-average importance.

Thus, this study has integrated aspects from the two theoretical lenses, i.e., RBV and IBV, to develop the conceptual model. Empirical findings indicate that the two theoretical approaches are complementary and that RBV and IBV perspectives can be combined to allow a more comprehensive account of factors determining EXP. Future developments in this direction have strong prospects of providing new avenues for expanding the theoretical base of EXP literature.

5.1. Policy and Managerial implications

Our findings provide crucial pointers for international marketing managers of SMEs who want to understand how internal capabilities and institutional aspects like EPP improve EXP. By building superior firm capabilities, notably in INN and MAR, Indian engineering exporters, in particular, can enhance their performance in international markets. First, MAR can be significantly improved by INN, viz., creating unique and new products that meet market demands, implementing cutting-edge production techniques, accelerating production cycles, and increasing production capacity. More importantly, the firm should have in-house technical expertise by continuously observing market trends and competitor activity to improve competitive advantage and promptly respond to consumers' shifting wants. Second, the mediating effects of MAR suggest that the successful development of a firm's INN leads to superior performance in overseas markets through MAR. When managers decide to enhance their EXP, the firm's MAR should be properly developed and fostered in terms of pricing the product and creating efficient advertising and promotional offers for their unique products.

Last, for SME exporters to compete in the global market, they must regularly acquire the necessary information about the industry and potential clients. Gaining market and customer knowledge is necessary for developing INN. The study suggests that fostering innovative capabilities depends on the institutional environment in which the firms operate. According to our analysis, firms should attempt to use the EPPs provided by various government bodies and institutions rather than merely

concentrating on developing conventional capabilities to seek appropriate guidance and support regarding finance and information to achieve superior EXP.

The policy implication that can be drawn from this study is that government should upgrade their institutional support facilities to stimulate INN in SMEs, which in turn boosts EXP. Firms have a better chance to build INN by constantly utilising EPP. Because it has been empirically demonstrated in this study, SMEs who use such government assistance are better able to build the capacities necessary to improve their EXP. When developing export promotion initiatives, government policymakers should be aware of managers' needs for their export support services.

6. Conclusions, Limitations & Future research

The purpose of this study was to broaden our understanding of a structural relationship between a firm's capabilities and EXP in the context of Indian SMEs by including INN as a predictor, EPP as a moderator, and MAR as a mediator. The results largely supported the theories in the suggested framework based on the RBV and IBV. According to the findings of this study, higher EXP may not be achieved solely through INN. As a result, to achieve the intended firm's outcome in overseas markets, INN must be combined with MAR. Despite the demand and rise in innovation among SMEs in the global market, MAR still appears vital in improving EXP. This research has sufficiently disproved that smaller firms do not require marketing to succeed, encouraging SMEs to focus on their MAR in producing advertising and promotional offerings to survive in foreign markets. The findings of this investigation are, for the most part, consistent with theoretical predictions. This study also supports the moderating function of EPP in enabling INN to influence EXP; as a result, SMEs should be aware of these programmes and devote time to using them effectively. This is especially important for SMEs with limited resources and experience since they lack the capabilities to create value, maintain a competitive advantage, and increase profitability.

There are a few limitations to be aware of, though, as with any scientific study. The cross-sectional methodology used in this study could not capture the dynamic aspects of SMEs' marketing and innovation capacities and the causal relationships between constructs. Future research should use longitudinal data to address the relationships presented in the hypotheses, overcoming such limitations and allowing for a more accurate evaluation of the causality in the relationship between INN, MAR, and EXP. We restricted our analysis to Indian SMEs in engineering manufacturing industries, which may have limited the generalizability of our findings. Thus, this research should be replicated in subsequent studies in different geographical and industrial settings. EXP results from a dynamic process involving various combined firm resources and capabilities. Since this study is constrained to a limited number of variables, there is additional room for the further extension of the conceptual model and theory development. In future studies, it may be interesting to include some of the other factors which we know are interrelated and contribute to INN - EXP link, such as cultural distance (Azar & Drogendijk, 2016b), environmental turbulence (Zhang et al., 2015), export experience (Ogasavara et al., 2016), human capital (Liu et al., 2017), international entrepreneurial orientation (Jin & Cho, 2018b), and social capital (Easmon et al., 2019). Researchers can also consider a more composite construct of innovation by including other dimensions such as process, product, service, and business model innovation. Our study is also limited to exploring the combined moderation effect of the overall utilisation of EPP on the INN–EXP relationship. Future research may further advance theory and practice by identifying and evaluating the individual effects of the various EPP offered by government and private institutions to enhance EXP. Lastly, the subjective measurement of EXP is another drawback. The effectiveness of the empirical findings would have been improved by gathering factual

data on EXP. However, it has been previously mentioned by several authors, including (Diamantopoulos et al., 2014; Katsikeas et al., 2000), that gathering objective performance data is exceedingly challenging.

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