

Abstract

The increasing tendency towards a global economy has led to a surge in international trade as more and more countries engage in large-scale export/import activities. Exports now account for a substantial portion of many nations' economies, and their growth and overall economic well being have become dependent on the performance of their exporting firms. As a result, export marketing has received considerable attention over the past decades, and governments everywhere provide export promotion programs with the objective of helping their firms overcome export barriers and improve their strategy in order to improve their performance in the international arena.

Although governmental export promotion has become a tool of government policy throughout the world and has received increasing research attention over the past decades, research studies that measure the effectiveness of export promotion programs, as well as the impact that firms' satisfaction with export promotion programs has on export performance, are limited. This dissertation aims to broaden the scope of export promotion knowledge by incorporating satisfaction with export promotion programs, export marketing strategy, and export performance into an integrated model and empirically investigating the direct and indirect impacts of satisfaction with export promotion programs on firms' export performance. To improve the effectiveness of export promotion programs, this study offers a new perspective to the analysis called "perceived gap", and it applies satisfaction theory to operationalize this concept. Level of satisfaction refers to how well the export promotion programs deal with the export activities that exporters find important. The size of the perceived gap is then related to the export success of firms. Large perceived gaps indicate that the government assistance program does not match firms' expectations, and they do not consider the programs helpful.

This study is specifically concerned with manufacturing firms that export non-commodity products, and with trading firms. A mail survey was conducted to obtain primary data from Thai exporting firms from 13 industries. A sample of 2,345 firms was randomly drawn from exporter directories of the Department of Export Promotion of Thailand, from which 370 usable questionnaires were returned. Path analysis was employed to test the relationships among variables. Cluster analysis was used to examine the extent to which firms achieved the objectives for their export business when they exhibited different levels of perceived gaps.

Hypotheses were divided into two groups, confirmatory and original. Confirmatory hypotheses tested the results against those of previous studies and were warranted because almost all previous studies had been conducted in the advanced economies of Europe and the USA. The results showed that all confirmatory hypotheses to extend previous research in the context of a developing country are supported. Significant, positive relationships were found to exist between firms' export involvement and export marketing strategy (both general export strategy and marketing mix strategy) and the firms' subjective export performance. Hypotheses that pertain to the original

research questions investigated in the study involved the relationship between perceived gap and export performance, and they are mostly supported by the findings. The predicted negative relationship between perceived gaps associated with export promotion programs, marketing mix strategy and subjective performance are supported, whereas the hypothesized negative relationship between perceived gaps associated with export promotion programs and general export strategy is not supported. Moreover, the findings fully support the hypothesis that involved the levels of perceived gap in relation to the levels of export performance. The findings indicate that firms with lower levels of perceived gap with export promotion programs achieved higher levels of subjective performance than firms with higher gap levels. The research results provide evidence that perceived gap, or satisfaction with governmental export promotion programs, plays an important role in the achievement of export goals of firms.

Understanding the association between export involvement of firms with export marketing strategy and subsequently with export performance, and understanding the impact of satisfaction with export promotion programs on firms' marketing mix strategy and export performance, can aid export promotion organizations to improve their efforts in order to enhance the performance of exporting firms.