



Determinants of Export Performance in SMEs : The Case of the French Wine Industry

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Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) represent the majority of French companies and the development of firms through export business remains the simplest way to internationalize and to lead to new markets. Improving export performance could be a major factor in the recovery of the French wine industry, which has been going through a crisis since the beginning of the 2000s. According to the French “Ministre de l’Agriculture”, Dominique BUSSEureau, the industry, which is mainly composed of SMEs, would be coming out of this crisis, pointing out a recovery of exports in 2006. The aim of this paper is to determine on which factors wine companies can act to improve their export performances.

In order to answer this question, the existing literature about SMEs’ determinants of export performance will be first reviewed. The determinants will be classified according to three categories: *internal determinants* are related to firm’s characteristics and management, using, among other theories, the resource-based approach (RBV) or the transaction cost theory. On the other hand, external determinants regard the environment and the industry in which firms operate, introducing theories such as the contingency theory or the new trade theory... Finally, *international strategy-related determinants* are identified. Indeed, even if strategy can be included in internal determinants, a specific section will be devoted to it, because of its multiple dimensions.

This literature review will be followed by an exploratory study based on data from the “Enquête Entreprises Aval Filière Vin - Agro.M 2006 - Viniflor, CCVF, EGVF”, a survey set up by the “Ecole d’Agronomie” from Montpellier (ENSAM). This data base brings together information about 214 downstream wine companies, i.e. companies from French wine producing regions, whose activity includes one or several steps in the production of still or effervescent wine (bottling, blending and/or vinification). The purpose of this exploratory study is to test with the Ordinary Least Squares regression using SPSS statistical software whether the determinants identified in the literature review are relevant to the French wine industry.

After the presentation of the results of the study (and their theoretical explanations) aimed at identifying existing correlations between export intensity and numerous factors, I will conclude by discussing the limitations of the paper and implications for the continuation of the thesis, whose purpose is to identify the numerous factors impacting not only on the export performance of the French wine companies but also on their global financial performances.

Keywords : export performance – determinants – French wine industry – SMEs.