The impact of resource management and strategy on SMEs' export performance: A bibliometric analysis and case study

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Abstract– This paper analyzes resource management and strategies for the export performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Using a mixed method approach that integrates bibliometric analysis of 166 documents with Bibliometrix of RStudio and a multiple-case study involving in-depth interviews with five exporting SMEs, analyzed through NVivo. Findings reveal patterns in scientific productivity and empirical evidence on how competitive advantages, business environment, and marketing strategies can influence profitability, internationalization, and firm performance.

Keywords– export performance, strategy, resource management, bibliometric, case study.

I. INTRODUCTION

Resource management in all types of businesses has become a significant topic of interest for academics and entrepreneurs today. Managers must consider key resources, including research, development, organizational, and managerial resources. The precedent for linking resources to export performance is strategic resources [1]. Similarly, it is important to have a clear, well-defined strategy, especially for SMEs, focused primarily on the limited resources that many SMEs in developing countries identify as their main challenge in achieving adequate export performance or even in internationalizing their operations. Foreign investment is crucial, particularly for SMEs, to gain a competitive advantage in emerging global markets and achieve adequate export performance, a topic of great interest to experts [2].

Export performance can be defined as the extent to which a company can succeed in international markets. This is measured by economic indicators (e.g., profit or sales), product-related indicators (e.g., number of new export products), market-related indicators (e.g., new markets), and more general indicators (e.g., customer satisfaction) [3]. These export results are influenced by the export strategy, characteristics, and marketing capabilities, as well as by attributes of the industry, management, and domestic and foreign markets [4].

We found a gap in the literature regarding how managerial experience, firm resources, and the export product influence export performance [5], as well as the current need to analyze the internal and external challenges that firms, especially SMEs, face in internationalization [6]. Furthermore, it is necessary to study export performance in emerging economies, as most of the literature focuses on developed countries, to help SMEs succeed in exporting [7].

Therefore, the following research question is posed: How do resource management and strategy influence the internationalization and export performance of SMEs, based on a bibliometric analysis and a case study? To answer this research question, it is expected that the Web of Science and Scopus databases be consulted. Focusing on finding the main authors, journals, alliances, findings, and the best contributions of literature, and following a triangulation with a case study conducted on five SMEs regarding their resources, strategy, and export performance.

The study's main results indicate that He, X., Sousa, C., Javalgi, R., Lages, L., Martin, S., Shoham are listed as the main authors of the topics, the strongest international alliances are between the United States of America and the United Kingdom, and the other is between China and the United Kingdom, aspects such as Resource Based View (RBV) were unique resources and capabilities of the company allows it to improve their competitive advantage, the strategy for proper resource management is based on resources such as financial, physical, and experiential.

The paper is organized as follows, section II. provides a literature review, section III. includes the methodology used, followed by the results obtained in section IV., section V. consists of the discussion, and finally, section VI. provides the conclusions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

First, it is essential to understand the export performance that refers to the level at which a company's objectives regarding the export of a product to a foreign market, in strategic and economic terms, are achieved through the planning and execution of an export marketing strategy [8], regarding the leading indicators of export performance, mention internal capabilities and competencies, company size, and international experience, which have been of great interest to SMEs and to both academia and the government due to their contribution to the economy [9]

Another aspect that improves export performance is trust and social interaction, which, in turn, positively influence export market orientation; it is also important to highlight government support [10]. In Latin American markets, companies must focus on combating corruption and implementing strict regulations to protect their resources [11].

The flexibility of international strategic alliances positively affects SME export performance, and international marketing mediates this relationship and moderates the adoption of digital technologies [12]. Likewise, to enhance SME export performance, products should be exported to developed countries, in addition to innovation, collaboration, and participation in trade fairs [13]. When discussing export performance, it is also important to consider the resource-based view (RBV). This is based on the firm's unique resources that differentiate it from competitors; however, it argues that having valuable, rare, and inimitable resources is not sufficient for achieving success in strategy [14]. SMEs' interest in internationalization has been increasing in recent years. They face a broader, more diverse environment with many areas yet to be researched, but which have led to growth and positive results [15].

The above reaffirms the importance of addressing the research question, as the resulting findings can help fill the gap in the literature regarding how to assist SMEs in achieving their internationalization goals through effective resource management and strategic approaches. The main internationalization barriers faced by SMEs include risks such as costly and time-consuming procedures, environmental regulations, intense competition, substitute products, and a lack of government support [16].

Regarding strategies for successful global expansion, it is important to develop efficient distribution channels to ensure timely and cost-effective product delivery, thus improving customer satisfaction and facilitating market penetration [17]. Having a contact system for international markets that is easy and quick for managers to access is essential to the export process. On the other hand, there is a lack of literature on geographic diversity, distance, entry modes, the scale of internationalization, and how to address diversity through intercultural communication and inter-team coordination [18]. Certain factors are required to initiate or achieve better export performance. These are known as antecedents of export performance, and Table I presents the main results of these factors.

TABLE I
ANTECEDENTS OF THE EXPORT PERFORMANCE

Antecedents	Explanation
Export knowledge	This is obtained from one's own experience or in learning institutions, it is used for the understanding of situations, it serves to know the background, to make decisions and to identify the market or destination of the partners.
Export perception	It refers to the manager's interpretations, primarily regarding pricing strategies, comparative advantages, risks, barriers, export documentation, and export procedures, to maintain the firm's export performance credibility.
Export commitment	It refers to the duties and responsibilities of managers with respect to export activities, which involve assessing markets and evaluating potential opportunities in the global environment.
Export strategy	It is the one that reflects the thought process for reaching the desired international market, including a roadmap, objectives, and the company's capacity to achieve export performance.

Table 1 illustrates that achieving adequate export performance hinges on balancing knowledge, perception, commitment, and strategy to effectively address the challenges of exporting and accessing international markets. This Table I is adapted from ref [2]. An essential aspect of any organization, particularly one engaged in exporting, is knowledge of both foreign and domestic markets. Regarding resources, research categorizes them into seven types: financial, physical, and legal are considered tangible, whereas human, organizational, informational, and relational are considered intangible [19]. In this context, the strategic tripod perspective encompasses the institution-based view, the resources-based view, and the industry-based view, all of which contribute to increased export performance [20].

Regarding national strategies, specific national export promotion programs in which the firm enjoys competitive advantages in costs, products, or services, allowing it to achieve superior export performance in both market and financial terms [21]. Furthermore, empirical evidence indicates that access to economic, informational, and relational resources has a positive impact on dynamic capabilities, which in turn positively affects export performance [22].

The factors that influence a firm's export performance can be classified as internal (e.g., management-related attributes, firm characteristics, resources, competencies, strategies, and export marketing strategy) and external (e.g., environmental factors, the domestic market, and foreign markets) [23]. Additionally, technology and competitive intensity are key determinants of the firm’s success in the export market, as noted previously [24].

The literature supports the view that the national environment affects SMEs' export performance, as firms with knowledge of internationalization can significantly impact export performance, particularly in emerging markets [25]. More research is needed on the influence of diverse capabilities, such as firm product, learning, human, export financing, theoretical, and innovation capabilities, on export performance. Longitudinal studies would also be beneficial [26].

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research follows a mixed-methods approach; the design is sequential triangulation, the scope is descriptive, and the study’s temporality is cross-sectional. This approach combines quantitative elements, as demonstrated through a bibliometric study, with qualitative elements, supported by the triangulation of results with case studies, to substantiate the study's findings.

A bibliometric analysis synthesizes large volumes of data to present the state of the field's intellectual structure and trends [27]. While a case study is an in-depth investigation of a group of people or a unit of analysis to examine data on various variables, it is also used to examine complex phenomena [28]. It is essential to note that the case study was conducted to complement the bibliometric study, allowing for comparison and triangulation with the results obtained.

To conduct a successful bibliometric study, outlines a series of seven steps: 1) defining research objectives, 2) conducting literature searches and data collection, 3) performing data cleaning and preprocessing, 4) selecting bibliometric techniques, 5) analyzing data, 6) visualizing results, 7) interpreting findings and reporting [29]. To obtain literature, the Scopus and Web of Science databases were used because they are the leading bibliographic databases and are highly reliable, as REF [30] research notes in its title, "Web of Science and Scopus: the titans of bibliographic information in today's academic world". The keywords used for the investigation were: "export performance", "strategy", and "resources".

Other parameters, such as English-language articles only, research-only documents, and those in the business, economics, or social sciences categories, were included in the selection criteria. Individual readings of each article's abstract were also conducted to ensure it addressed the research topics of interest. This yielded a total of 146 documents from Web of Science and 21 articles from Scopus, for a grand total of 166 articles.

This final sample was refined by eliminating duplicate articles, which were found in both databases, thereby ensuring data consistency. It should be noted that all full texts were also accessed for in-depth review.

Bibliometric analysis techniques include Co-author, Co-word, Citation analysis, Co-citation, and Bibliometric coupling. [31]. These parameters are used to perform other analyses such as Bradford's Law graph, the most cited local sources, the production of sources over time, a collaboration network map, a global map of collaboration between countries, and a co-occurrence network map, among others. For this quantitative analysis, the Bibliometrix package in RStudio was used.

To collect qualitative data, 5 in-person, in-depth interviews were conducted with the export manager or the person responsible for these activities, using a semi-structured questionnaire comprising 12 open-ended questions. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and complemented with observations from the research field log.

Through thematic analysis, patterns, experiences, and concerns were identified, and findings were cross-verified with results from the bibliometric analysis.

The themes were categorized, and participants' significant contributions were highlighted through quotations or examples to illustrate the discussed ideas. The data coding process was supported by NVivo 15 software.

To put the case studies into context, five exporting SMEs with similar characteristics were examined to identify patterns in their export management strategies. These SMEs have over 15 years of exporting experience and fewer than 100 employees, as shown in Table II, which presents the SMEs included in the case study.

TABLE II.
CASE STUDY SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

SME Code	Number of employees	Years of market experience	Years of exporting experience	Main buyer country
1	95	41	34	Guatemala
2	15	30	26	USA
3	20	79	15	Nicaragua
4	3	15	15	USA
5	45	29	20	Honduras

Additionally, their primary market is in the Americas, and two of them have the United States of America (USA) as their main buyer country.

IV. RESULTS

Initially, the results of the bibliometric study indicate the following, which is detailed in Fig. 1

Fig. 1 Main information on bibliometric data

The period covered is 33 years, from 1991 to 2024; the number of journals is 67, and the number of documents is 166, which indicates that if taken as an average, each journal would have an average of 2.48 articles, but this is detailed later. The annual growth rate of 8.33%, which is positive, indicates an upward trend; therefore, the interest of researchers and academics in these topics has been high.

The number of authors is 426; 18 articles were written by a single author, accounting for 10.84% of the analyzed articles. This data, by contrast, indicates the large number of collaborations in scientific production. In turn, this is supported by the observation that there are approximately three co-authors per article.

There is also an international co-authorship rate of 45.18%. This indicates that nearly half of the analyzed articles were authored by researchers from different countries, further underscoring the high level of international collaboration. There are a total of 533 keywords and 10,155 references. The documents analyzed are approximately 7.88 years old, indicating that the works were published recently, considering the total 30-year period. There is an average of 46.85 citations per document, reflecting the strong literary foundation of the articles.

The most influential authors, by number of articles published, are He, X., and Sousa, C., with seven articles each, Javalgi, R., Lages, L., Martin, S., Shoham, A., with four articles each, Asseraf, F.Y., Fernández-Olmos, M., Leonidou, L., Rua, O. and Tanyeri, M., with three articles each.

The Lotka's Law, according to ref [32], is a distribution of the productivity of the authors, which indicates that the number of authors making n contributions is about 1/n2. This indicates that most authors wrote only one article, whereas fewer wrote two or more. The study confirms that very few authors have written three or more articles; on the other hand, 86.9% of the authors studied have written only one article, and 10.5% have written two articles. Therefore, what Lotka's law mentions is supported.

The most influential journals, by number of articles published, are International Marketing Review (22), International Business Review (16), Journal of Business Research (10), and International Journal of Emerging Markets, Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, and Journal of International Marketing (each with 8 articles).

An important bibliometric graph to highlight is the distribution of countries among the corresponding authors, shown in Fig. 2 in two colors: light blue indicates publications made only in that country, without any international collaboration. In contrast, red indicates publications from countries that have alliances with other countries.

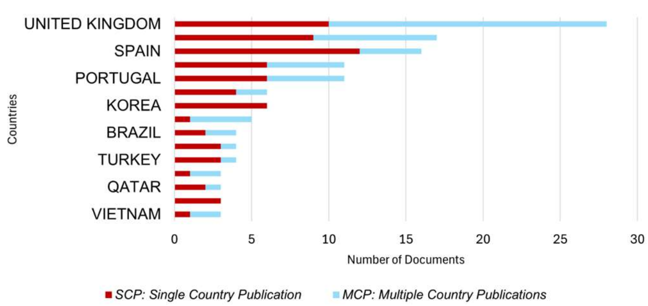

Fig. 2 Corresponding author's countries

According to Fig. 2, Spain has the most single publications, that is, the most publications without international alliances. At the same time, the USA has the largest number of publications with international partnerships. There is a similarity between the most cited countries and those with the largest number of publications. The United Kingdom leads in the number of publications but ranks second in citations. The United States of America is in second place in terms of the number of publications, but it is in first place in terms of the greatest number of citations. Fig. 3 illustrates the map of country collaboration, which reinforces this analysis.

Fig. 3 shows the main collaboration networks among countries, as well as the hue scale. The darker the color, the more co-authors are affiliated with that country, and the lighter the color, the fewer. Furthermore, many collaboration networks involve the United Kingdom, which is the center of scientific production and the largest in Europe.

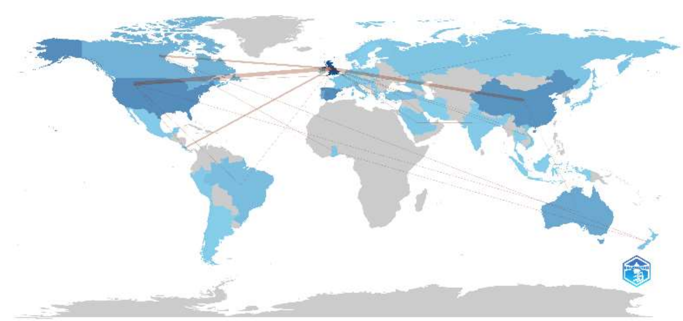

Fig. 3 Country collaboration map

Other countries with strong international alliances include the United States in North America and China in Asia. Additionally, Costa Rica stands out in Central America, Brazil in South America, and Australia in Oceania. It is observed that in Africa, there is a shortage of affiliated authors, and consequently, research in this region is limited.

An analysis of the keywords in the literature is presented in Fig. 4, which helps elucidate the intellectual structure and the main themes studied.

Fig. 4 Word cloud from author keywords

Figure 4 shows that export performance, strategy, capabilities, antecedents, firm performance, resource-based view, and competitive advantage are common factors across most articles, as they are the keywords most frequently used, ensuring that the analyzed information aligns with the research objectives. One of the main antecedents is that the firm must gain experience and therefore incur excessive costs in learning about international markets; however, once it overcomes the initial stage, the firm's export performance increases in sales and profits [33]. On the other hand, it has been demonstrated that both low cost and differentiation in competitive advantage mediate the relationship between marketing capabilities and export performance [34]. Regarding punctual contributions, as demonstrated in the literature review section, the articles focus on strategy, export performance, and resources. In the context of contributions in Latin American emerging economies, managers' commitment and experience, intangible assets, innovation, marketing, and financial capabilities are fundamental to adequate firm performance.

In the case study, the functions of the export department and the export manager for each company enable us to identify similarities in export activities. The letter "E" is used as a code to keep each company name confidential, thereby presenting the five case studies with consecutive numbers. Similarities between the five firms are primarily evident in transportation, delivery, and communication, indicating that the product is delivered successfully to the client. Likewise, details of the purchase order, including transit time and costs, are often handled by the export department rather than the logistics department. Another point concerns the role of technology in the E4, particularly the website's principal export function.

Fig. 5 presents the main results of the analysis of the influence of the business environment on three key areas in Costa Rica and its primary export market.

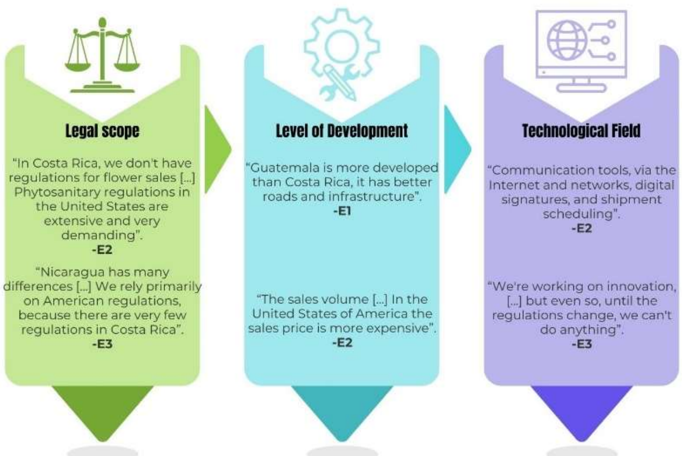

Fig. 5 Comparison of the business environment between the main buyer country and Costa Rica by area

Fig. 5 shows that, with respect to the legal scope, cases E2 and E3 note the lack of regulations in the country, which sometimes makes the export process more challenging, whereas the United States of America serves as the reference point guiding SME export procedures. The levels of development indicated by E1 and E2 suggest that Costa Rica's export destinations are more developed.

This is a call for further research into key areas for improvement in Costa Rica, thereby enabling SMEs to achieve better export performance. In technological fields, E2 highlights that the internet and communication tools have facilitated the control of shipments. However, E3 differs in that it depends on regulatory changes until innovation is no longer feasible.

A firm's competitive advantage is key to its continued market presence; the principal enhancers of competitive advantage are resources, including reputational, financial, cultural, relational, and knowledge-based [9]. These findings from the literature align with the case study, which will present the main findings of this aspect in Fig. 6.

From Fig. 6, we found similar aspects in both E5 and E4, taking speed and efficiency as a competitive advantage: E4 with the delivery of the product to the customer in a maximum of four days, and E5 with the after-sales service, making sure that their technicians can resolve any problem within 24 hours. On the other hand, E2 focuses more on quality and price, while E3 manufactures specialized products. Since it is a construction product, it would take much longer. To maintain each competitive advantage, firms need to improve certain aspects of their operations; furthermore, to increase profitability, this is illustrated in Fig 7.

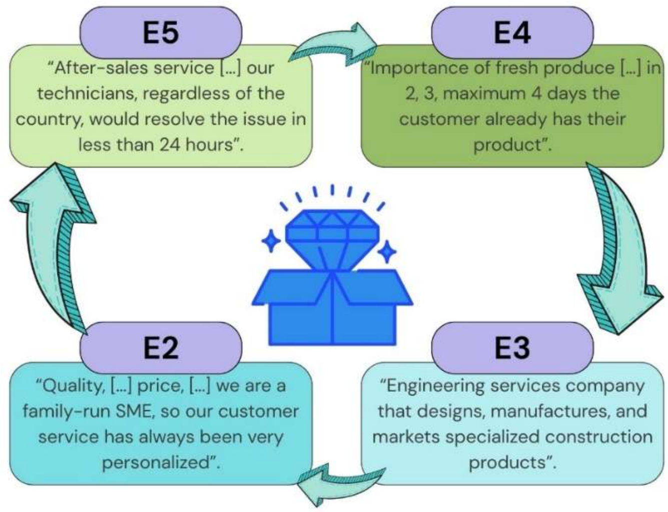

Fig. 6 Comparison of competitive advantage strategies by company

Company	Aspects to improve to increase profitability
E1	"The importation of supplies [...] is very expensive".
E2	"Phytosanitary barriers make the production process very expensive and costly".
E3	"The marketing side is our weakest area, and we need to invest in bringing our teams there to make visits".
E4	"Shipping costs, that's our Achilles' heel".
E5	"The cost of raw materials".

Fig. 7 Aspects to improve to increase profitability

From Fig. 7, the similarities between E1 and E5 are the cost of materials and the cost of shipping in E4. Thus, controlling costs is necessary for adequate export performance, and not only for this, but also when that competitive advantage is at risk. Related also to themes like supply chains, suppliers, markets, and other factors that will be important in future studies.

When triangulating results from the bibliometric analysis and the multiple case study regarding competitive advantage, the literature suggests that SMEs' competitive advantage is positively correlated with their international performance [35].

Furthermore, competitive advantage can be associated with resources, particularly within the RBV, which posits that a firm's unique resources contribute to enhancing internationalization [36]. In this line, the following are highlights from the case study:

> If you have a problem with the machine, our technicians, regardless of the country, would be able to solve it in less than 24 hours. […] So, I can solve it for you because I have staff, I have vehicles, I have technicians, I have everything in Honduras. I have the structure to respond to you promptly. (Finance manager/E5)

From the above, it is worth emphasizing the role of resource management in enabling the company to maintain adequate operations, particularly with respect to its competitive advantage. Having the financial resources to pay staff, as well as obtaining information and relational resources for excellent customer service, enables the company to maintain a strong international reputation. This aligns with the finding that physical and relational resources have the greatest influence on export marketing strategies [37].

To delve into the barriers that enterprises have when they are going to internationalize, there are external factors such as the business environment, which, as mentioned in the case study, includes the differences between Costa Rica and the main country exporter, including the legal, development, and technological factors. In this regard, a permanent commercial establishment abroad entails investments in personnel and legal formalities; the firm must develop international management skills, particularly in adapting to diverse legal environments [38]. In this line, the following are highlights from the case study:

> FDA [Food and Drug Administration] regulations require you to fill out a form. I think there has been flexibility in that regard. Once it goes through Customs and is confirmed that it is for personal consumption, they will not stop your cargo and ask for the form. However, five years ago, it was mandatory, even for any small cargo, to fill out the FDA form and report what was coming in. (Owner/E4).

In this case, legal regulations are not a problem for E4, as they are in the destination country. Similarly, E2 and E4 have been guided by United States regulations.

Marketing capabilities and strategies are a crucial part of the analysis. The literature suggests that export marketing strategies positively influence export performance [39]. When comparing this with the case study, one of the interviewees mentions:

> The strategy, when implemented, is directed, let's say, at construction fairs and conferences. Let's say my boss is often invited to give conferences in Nicaragua, at universities in other places, where, for example, he offers a seminar. (E3/Purchasing and Logistics).

It is observed that the means of communication through which they make themselves known is in-person when attending fairs and giving conferences in the country to which they export. Additionally, universities play an important role, perhaps in relationships in which they share knowledge and conduct business, gain experience, form new partnerships, or recruit new employees.

Within the dimensions of international dynamic marketing capabilities, entrepreneurs utilize networking capabilities, which allow them to outsource to third parties rather than develop their own websites [40]. In this respect, the most common response from firms is that they agree on themes such as outsourcing, digital platforms, government institutions, or associates, which are directly related to networking. The findings of the E1 case are expanded below.

> I only handle exports; I don't manage strategies, production, or sales. The person who manages that is a separate entity, such as an outsourcer. (E1/Head of Logistics and Supply).

In this case, a third party manages the marketing strategy and relational aspects. Furthermore, this could be a future line of investigation: having a representative from the company’s outsourcing department explain their influence on export performance and the advantages and disadvantages they face. On the other hand, other firms relate to the institutions to which they belong.

> We contact some clients […] others contact us through PROCOMER [Promotora de Comercio Exterior de Costa Rica]’s database […] we belong to Cámara de Plantas y Flores Ornamentales so there are a lot of contacts between enterprises that buy and sell.

Based on the above, the literature reports similar findings: formal institutions improve export performance by serving as a coordinating mechanism and setting the pace for partners, thereby yielding collective advantages [41]. It is also worth noting that digital technologies are a crucial means of applying marketing strategies, as the firm states, as mentioned by another respondent:

> Social media has made it easier for us. We make ourselves known through the same networks used both locally and internationally. (E4/Owner).

Each day, digitalization is becoming an increasingly important theme in enterprises. The literature groups facilitators' applications in e-commerce, supply chain management, e-marketing, client relationships and communications, and e-business technologies in general [42].

V. DISCUSSION

To put the methodology used in this article into context, some articles that use a similar approach are mentioned [43] present a model for the creation of technological roadmaps, with the integration of quantitative (bibliometrics) and qualitative (literature review, interviews with experts, and workshops with experts) methodology.

On the other hand, [44] conducted a bibliometric study of 65 research articles from the Scopus database, using VOSviewer software, and a participatory case study in China that examined building information modeling and augmented reality. Similar studies, such as that of ref. [45], with a bibliometric analysis of 261 articles also from Scopus, with an analysis through the VOSviewer software, and a case study on fifteen of the leading higher education institutions in Germany, Denmark, Italy, England, Ireland, and the Netherlands.

Research addresses mixed methods at a general level, such as ref. [46] mention that the term triangulation comes from topography and refers to finding an object by the intersection of two straight lines drawn from different points, with triangulation being found in time and/or space to contrast a set of observations with others addressing the same phenomenon.

The bibliometric analysis articles begin with Yeats (1991) [47], which found that internal barriers to export are more important than external ones. There is a difference in the findings of the case study: although companies recognize the need to improve internally, such as in their marketing strategies, they acknowledge that, to increase their export performance, they must secure better prices from suppliers for the raw materials they require.

In the same year, the concept of competitive advantage was already being investigated, which is closely related to strategies for enhancing export performance. For example, the potential of resources in value, in terms of rarity, inimitability, and substitutability, to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage is well established [48]. This remains valid, especially in light of E5's observation that, if they lack these resources, their way of doing business can be very challenging.

A few years later, research focused primarily on the period 2006 to 2012, as reported in the primary sources. Contributions during these years include adapting to the culture of foreign markets in terms of strategy, resource deployment, and financial and human investment [49], as mentioned by E5:

> There is a very important cultural factor in the communication strategy. (E5/Financial Manager).

This firm underscores the importance of adapting to foreign markets. Cultural factors, such as customs, traditions, greetings, expressions, and language, are also part of interactions in the international sphere and can confer advantages or disadvantages depending on their application.

When discussing exporting or internationalization, innovation is a key topic. In light of this, [50] proposes a strategy that enhances both product innovation and product quality, thereby improving export performance. Not only was innovation not considered necessary in 2009, but it is also now considered a predictor of export performance [51]. However, during the period under investigation, events such as the 2008 financial crisis and the broader spread of technology may be of interest to researchers in this area.

Another theme for discussion is the geographic scope of the investigation, which is primarily in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Similarly, with respect to continents, most publications were from North America and Europe, indicating that the authors' affiliations are concentrated in developed countries. However, research has been conducted in countries with emerging economies; further research is needed, particularly for countries in South America and Africa, which have the fewest studies, excluding Antarctica.

An interesting aspect of this research, with respect to the case study, is that the companies' main exporting country is in the Americas. Therefore, future research could consider firms whose primary export market is European or Asian. One advantage of this study is that we were able to compare companies with export activities across both developed and developing countries. In developed countries, particularly the United States of America, the situation is better than in developing countries with respect to legal regulations, high purchasing power, and free trade agreements. On the other hand, developing countries often lack effective legal regulation, have lower purchasing power, and limited infrastructure. However, for this analysis, language and cultural similarities in Central American countries may work in their favor.

The findings discussed in this paper align with future research lines proposed in other articles analyzed as part of the bibliometric study presented. For example, ref. [52] note that research should consider the specific experiences of the top management team, including their international experience, as well as the uncertainty of the host nation's context. Further research is needed to identify which resources and capabilities most effectively support different corporate strategies for entering international markets and remaining competitive in both developing and developed countries [53].

Another area of research is how host- and home-country institutions influence the networks of foreign groups in the local market, as well as how strategic decisions regarding internationalization [54]. It is also worth noting that the KBV must continue developing research to adopt a dynamic and evolving approach, one that considers the international arena as key [55].

VI. CONCLUSIONS

A. *Concluding remarks*

First, according to the bibliometric parameters, the main authors on the topics discussed in this paper are He, X., Sousa, C., Javalgi, R., Lages, L., Martin, S., Shoham, A., Asseraf, F.Y., Fernández-Olmos, M., Leonidou, L., Rua, O., and Tanyeri, M. Additionally, the majority of the authors, nearly 87% of the 426 total authors, have written only one article. Hence, the authors are not consistent with this line of research. The top three most important journals are International Marketing Review, International Business Review, and Journal of Business Research; the fourth is the International Journal of Emerging Markets. All are included in zone 1 by Bradford's Law, which is the core of the literature analyzed. The strongest international alliances are between the

United States of America and the United Kingdom, and between China and the United Kingdom.

Second, in addition to strategy, export performance, and resources, literature deals with topics like competitive advantages, internationalization, innovation, capabilities, antecedents, firm performance, marketing, SMEs, technology, and standardization, as discussed in the literature review and results section, maintain a close relationship with the objectives of the investigation.

Third, we identified both similarities and differences between the literature findings and the multiple case study. The similarities that can be highlighted include the functions of the department or personnel responsible for export activities, such as logistics, transportation, cost management, customs, and documentation. In contrast, the differences lie in the strategy being managed by a different company or department other than the export department. Regarding the business environment, which is classified as an external factor for the company, these factors are not significant limitations on export performance; rather, they have been well managed. This could be related to the experience reported in the literature as a precedent for export performance, but it is intended as a future guideline for a study to examine how experience correlates with the variables used in this study. In most cases, the competitive advantage is obvious. However, to improve export performance, they note that the costs of raw materials and transportation are the main constraints on improvement in this area.

Finally, this investigation contributes to the literature by emphasizing and providing evidence of the effective management of financial, physical, and intangible resources, which is crucial for implementing a strategy aligned with achieving optimal export performance.

B. *Implications*

First, barriers to exporting include a lack of knowledge of the destination market, insufficient financial and human resources, legal regulations, and transportation challenges. To address these limitations, based on recommendations found in the literature, a few suggestions are proposed: leveraging a competitive advantage, establishing a network of collaborations or affiliations to support exporting institutions, and investing in qualified human resources. Additionally, factors such as commitment and the strategy's adaptation to the destination market are essential.

Second, in line with the above, the strategies for the exporting activities should be aligned with the company's resource availability, analyzing the possibility to finance their operation, not only in tangible assets but also intangible, especially with the knowledge management of the country where they are going to export, their regulations, language, and technologies.

Finally, this study contributes to the field with a mixed-methods approach, incorporating a comparative multiple-case study that provides the bibliometric information necessary to understand the field, along with practical research in the Costa Rican context.

C. *Future research lines*

First, the bibliometric analysis was conducted only in two databases: Scopus and Web of Science. It would be interesting to examine segregation by database or to include additional databases to broaden these results. More keywords could also be included in the search engines, such as those mentioned in this study.

Second, future research should address the limitations of the current study by including more cases from companies across a wider range of industries and by expanding the scope of countries to which they export, including Asia and Europe. Furthermore, when interviewing companies, representatives from various departments, as well as those outsourced, could be included, particularly from finance, marketing, and logistics.

Third, case study research has the limitation that it cannot be extrapolated to other contexts; as such, a subsequent quantitative study to analyze the variables discussed in this paper could help expand the research on this topic.

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