

# Entrepreneurship and internationalisation: to what extent do the perceptions of male and female entrepreneurs differ on success factors

Gender  
perception of  
export success  
factors

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of the paper is to explore gender variations in entrepreneurship and internationalisation from the perspective of the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm; in particular, the paper explores how differences in the personal idiosyncrasies of both males and females in part account for the variations in export internationalisation.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study draws on extant literature on the critical success factors in entrepreneurship and internationalisation research (e.g. foreign market knowledge, firm-level technology and firm age) as the conceptual framework to explore the issue. The study is based on 21 male and 17 female export entrepreneurs from Ghana and uses a descriptive research design (i.e. frequencies and chi-square test) to analyse the results.

**Findings** – The results show that the perceptions of male and female exporters differ on key internationalisation success factors based on extant literature. Implicitly, whilst both groups shared a similar degree of basic knowledge on a few export success factors, across most of the other key export success factors, the male counterparts demonstrated a more expanded view compared to the females. The results support the assumption of the RBV theory applied in this study to argue that to account properly for the internationalisation outcomes of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the personality characteristics of the owner entrepreneurs are critical resources which cannot be ignored.

**Research limitations/implications** – In terms of limitation, the study is exploratory study based on non-probability sampling methods using descriptive frequencies tables and analysis of chi-square test and so readers must bear this limitation in mind in interpreting the results to improve on future studies.

**Originality/value** – The paper contributes to the empirical literature by offering a unique perspective regarding how women and men perceive and interpret export success factors and how that impacts on the internationalisation outcomes of women and men. The paper responds to calls by researchers (e.g. Terjesen *et al.*, 2011; Ratten and Tajeddini, 2018; Kuschel and Labra, 2018; Javadian and Richards, 2020) to populate studies on the topic to deepen the present understanding. By using data from Ghana, West Africa, the study sheds a fresh insight on the topic from an under-studied and under-researched geographical context.

**Keywords** Internationalisation, Ghana, Export, Gender difference

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Gender difference in entrepreneurship and internationalisation is a dominant research field because of its relevance to practitioners and policymakers. As a result of the creation of entrepreneurship awareness globally, entrepreneurial activity is being intensified between males and females (Dilli and Westerhuis, 2018; Jena, 2020). Previously, entrepreneurial activities used to be associated with males, but these days, the contribution of female entrepreneurial



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activity towards employment, innovation and economic growth in all stages of economic development is recognised, confirming the relevance of entrepreneurship to both groups (Costa and Pita, 2020). According to Kuada (2009), the gender factor in the entrepreneurship literature emerged in the late 1970s following a seminal paper by Schwartz (1976). Kelley *et al.* (2017) argued that to this day, more females are seen entering personal entrepreneurship. Moreira *et al.* (2019) maintain that the decision of the United Nations to include gender equality in the Sustainable Development Goals has revived female entrepreneurship across the world. Women entrepreneurship impacts national employment levels (De Bruin *et al.*, 2007). Studies (e.g. Duberley and Carrigan, 2013; Hodges *et al.*, 2015) found that women gain control over their work-life balance because of the flexibility from entrepreneurship. Financial independence and recognition in society are amongst other benefits arising out of women entrepreneurship (Petridou and Glaveli, 2008; Tajeddini *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, research in gender and entrepreneurship continues to gain research interest (see Cabrera and Mauricio, 2017; Henry *et al.*, 2017; Gimenez and Calabro, 2018; Ennis, 2018; Costa and Pita, 2020).

However, because of competitive advantages (e.g. innovation opportunities, increased resource capacity, international exposure and market intelligence (see Farahat *et al.*, 2020; Zahoor *et al.*, 2020) associated with firms that operate in the international market over those that operate wholly in the local market, a stream of research have extended the debates regarding gender difference in entrepreneurship to internationalisation. Unfortunately, there is a paucity of knowledge and inconclusive findings on the topic thereby limiting our understating (Ratten and Tajeddinim, 2018). Kuschel and Labra (2018) argue that though gender and internationalisation occupy a significant position in promoting gender equality in the international market, research output regarding the issue is at its infant stage. Researchers (e.g. Al-Dajani and Marlow, 2010; Terjesen *et al.*, 2011; Ratten and Tajeddinim, 2018), concur that whilst research on gender and entrepreneurship have advanced, studies on gender and internationalisation are under-researched causing a lacuna of knowledge on the topic. Likewise, regarding the gender difference in entrepreneurship, a question that is yet to be resolved is why gender difference in internationalisation is still unresolved. A sample of studies and theoretical assumptions has shed light on the issue, yet there are still inconsistencies and a lack of clarity on the empirical front. For example, according to Javadian and Richards (2020), gender differences in internationalisation are accounted for largely by industry variations and country of origin. Moreira *et al.* (2019) found that varied motivations inform why females enter the international market compared to males.

Besides, Gender theories (e.g. the gender-aware framework of women entrepreneurship (Bates *et al.*, 2007; Brush *et al.*, 2009) and the social feminist theory (Fischer *et al.*, 1993) argue that external influences are the determinants of gender variation in internationalisation. Amongst the factors from the perspectives of these theories include, but are not limited to industry differences, country of origin and domestic responsibilities. The present study builds on this line of research (i.e. the gender difference in the internationalisation) and offers four (4) new contributions to the field. First, the study diverts from the existing line of argument (i.e. “external determinants” of the issue) and uses the resource-based view (RBV) theory of the firm to examine whether or not the personal idiosyncrasies of male and female entrepreneurs account for the variation, a perspective that to date researchers have overlooked. Second, the paper contributes to the dearth of empirical literature in this line of research and in so doing responds to calls by researchers (e.g. Terjesen *et al.*, 2011; Ratten and Tajeddini, 2018; Kuschel and Labra, 2018; Javadian and Richards, 2020) to populate studies on the topic to deepen our understanding. Third, the study uses evidence from an under-studied and a new geographical context, Ghana to shed new insights into the topic. Ghana, a sub-Saharan African country has much to offer the developing world because although the country is yet to become one of the BRICS countries (e.g. Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), its democratic credentials have won it the title of “the beacon of African democracy and the gateway to Africa”. Consequently, empirical evidence from Ghana presents much inspiration to similar developing countries on the topic.

Fourth, the study seeks to extend the external validity of the RBV of the firm (Barney, 1991) to argue that the difference in the phenomenon is partly accounted for by the differences in the personality characteristics of both counterparts. Furthermore, besides the call to scale up research in the area to deepen our understanding, the topic is highly relevant because presently the promotion of female involvement in economic activities is one of the global initiatives from the perspectives of the United Nations and national governments (Moreira *et al.*, 2019). From the foregoing, the following research questions guide the study.

- RQ1. To what extent do male and female exporters perceive the following export success factors - firm size, firm age, prior international experience, management commitment to export business, firm-level technology and international market knowledge differently?
- RQ2. To what extent do the relevance/importance that male and female exporters attach to extant export success factors in bullet one (1) above differ?
- RQ3. To what extent does the relative strength of the six selected factors on export success differ between male and female exporters?

## Literature review

### *Women internationalisation in Africa*

Whilst there is a general agreement on the dearth of literature regarding women entrepreneurship and internationalisation research, the topic is lacking more in the African context. For instance, Madsen and Andrade (2018) concluded that most of the researchers working on entrepreneurship and internationalisation studies turn to come from North America and Europe, whilst regions such as Latin America and Africa are considered underrepresented. In a systematic review of women entrepreneurship and internationalisation research, it was found that out of 277 articles reviewed between 1990 and 2016, Africa was not represented in the top 10 countries of origin of the authors who published papers on the topic “women entrepreneurship and internationalisation” (Moreira *et al.*, 2019). Moreira *et al.* (2019) maintain that the top 10 countries that featured in the review and the associated papers included the United States, 92 papers; the United Kingdom, 39 papers; Canada, 26 papers; Spain, 24 papers; Germany, 14 papers; Scotland, 12 papers; India, 11 papers; Netherlands, 11 papers; Italy, 10 papers and Switzerland, 9 papers. Moreira *et al.* (2019) called for more studies on the topic from under-researched regions, especially in Africa. In another systematic review that examines the pattern and trends in women entrepreneurship and internationalisation research, Ratten and Tajeddini (2018) found that out of 232 articles reviewed on the topic, the researchers were from the United States (31%), the UK (12%) and Canada (10%), whilst Spain, Switzerland, Ireland and India being the country of origin of the rest of authors; the author stated that there was no authorship from Africa in that review.

### *Internationalisation of SMEs*

Research has shown that the international market is not exclusively preserved for multinational companies (MNCs), but the activities of SMEs in the international market are recognised in the literature (e.g. Etemad, 2004; Coviello and Martin, 1999; Coviello and Jones, 2004; McAuley, 1999, 2010). The literature contains several definitions of SMEs, but the conclusion is that each is varied in its context. According to the European Commission (2014), SMEs are firms that possess less than 250 workforces, turnover not higher than 50 million Euros and a balance sheet total of not more than 43 million Euros. Conversely in the USA, the Small Business Administration (2014) maintains that firms possessing between 100 and 1,500 workforces and a turnover between 2.2–21.5m US\$ are considered SMEs. In Ghana, SMEs are also defined in several ways; however, this study is based on the definition offered by the World Bank in its project of Regional Project for Enterprise Development based on selected

countries in West Africa. In the project, the World Bank defined SMEs into three (3) categories based on firm size. The categorisations are: micro firms as those employing 1–5 workers; small firms as those employing between 6–29 workers and medium-sized firms as those employing 30–99 workers (Abor and Quartey, 2010).

As regards the motivation to enter the international market, SMEs are driven by various motivations consisting of proactive and reactive motivations (Albaum *et al.*, 1994; Hollensen, 2004). However, the proactive and reactive motivations have been argued using several theories ranging from the stage theory (Johanson and Vahlne, 1977) to the network theory (Johanson and Mattsson, 1988). Several methods are presented in the literature with regard to internationalisation entry modes (e.g. Foreign Direct Investment [FDI], contract manufacturing, licensing and exporting). Amongst the various methods, SMEs are known to be associated with export businesses because of its flexibility and low investment cost compared to the other entry modes such as the FDI (Dalli, 1995).

#### *Defining gender*

Gender is defined in the literature variously. There is a view that gender is a multilevel phenomenon because it involves labels and stereotypes regarding values, biological and behavioural patterns (Ayman and Korabik, 2010). For instance, Nightingale (2006) views gender as a process where people perceive and analyse the differences regarding the biological sex. Apergis and Pekka Economon (2010) contend that gender is culturally defined and that cultural embeddedness impact women's engagement in entrepreneurship. In line with Chen *et al.* (2018), gender is operationalised in this paper as a discrete variable (i.e. males and females).

#### *Defining entrepreneurship*

The concept of entrepreneurship is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. The concept can be seen as a mindset and therefore, sometimes classified as personal and organisational entrepreneurship (Bahrami *et al.*, 2023). In line with Smith *et al.* (2020), this study defines entrepreneurship as an individual enterprise activity for the purpose of economic gain and continuous growth.

### **Theoretical framework**

#### *Gender-aware framework*

Several theories have been advanced to explain gender differences in business. Amongst these theories include the gender-aware framework of women entrepreneurship (Bates *et al.*, 2007; Brush *et al.*, 2009). The framework argues that gender differences in entrepreneurship are accounted for by both social and institutional factors and these factors pose a great impact on female entrepreneurs. Brush *et al.* (2009) presented these factors as consisting of motherhood and meso and/or macro external factors (e.g. the motherhood role of a woman, national-level policies, culture, economic factors, laws and regulations and business-level factors such as organisational-level structures and structures in industries). The conclusion in this theory is that differences in gender and entrepreneurship outcomes must not be explained in isolation, because family-level as well as meso/macro-level factors are key in women entrepreneurship and internationalisation outcomes. Based on the gender-aware framework, it is confirmed that the macro-level factors account for the gender variations in the internationalisation of SMEs (Javadian and Richards, 2020). Another theory is the social feminist framework (Fischer *et al.*, 1993). This theory maintains that gender differences in entrepreneurship outcomes (e.g. business sizes, performance, activities, etc.) are also accounted for by the socialisation process in society which over the years has shaped the

gendered forms of attitudes which impact female entrepreneurship as opposed to their biological sex criteria. This paper is based on these theories because they have been employed in extant studies (see [Javadian and Richards, 2020](#)).

#### *Resource-based view of the firm*

In the internationalisation research field, several theories are put forward to explain SMEs' internationalisation (e.g. stage, theory ([Johanson and Vahlne, 1977](#)), the network theory ([Johanson and Mattsson, 1998](#)), international entrepreneurship ([McDougall et al., 1994](#)) and the RBV of the firm [Barney \(1991\)](#)). However, the study is based on the RBV; the RBV argues that a firm consists of a bundle of tangible and intangible resources which determine the behaviour of a firm and its eventual outcomes. Consequently, in line with SME internationalisation, the RBV assumes that it is the unique bundles of the resources of firms (SMEs) (whether owned by a female or male) that enable the firm to make key business decisions, including embarking on export business. Of the various frameworks of SMEs' internationalisation, [Ruzzier et al. \(2006\)](#) argue that one unique aspect of the RBV in accounting for the internationalisation of SMEs is that it is the only framework that takes into consideration, the personality characteristics of the SMEs' owner-manager/manageress (i.e. personal perceptions, motivations, aspirations) in internationalisation decisions. Therefore, because this study is based on the idiosyncratic perceptions of male and female entrepreneurs regarding success factors in internationalisation, the RBV is employed to account for the total resources owned by an entrepreneurial firm, including the personality characteristics/capacity of entrepreneurs.

#### **Export success factors in extant research**

In the internationalisation research field, variables that account for success factors have been confirmed over time by different researchers in different contexts. This sub-Section presents six (6) selected export success factors that inform the study. The success factors consist of firm size, firm age, international experience, firm technology, management commitment and foreign market knowledge. These factors were selected because of their wide support in extant literature over time and in different contexts (e.g. India, Indonesia, Nigeria and Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Malawi, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zambia, USA, UK, Brazil, Columbia, Slovenia, Poland, China, Kosovo, Argentina, Spain, Malaysia, Portugal, France, Greece, Turkey, Belgium). Limited empirical literature supporting each of the six selected variables is presented below because of the limited word count requirement of this journal.

#### *International experience*

Studies have confirmed that one of the success factors that account for success in the international market is the entrepreneur's international experience. What this means is that the deeper the international experience and exposure, the higher the positive impact on internationalisation activities. Sample empirical evidence of the entrepreneur's prior international experience included, but is not limited to [Bianchi and Wickramasekera \(2016\)](#), [Khokhar \(2018\)](#), [Leonidou et al. \(2015\)](#), [Love et al. \(2016\)](#), [Galati et al. \(2017\)](#), [Ursic and Czinkota \(2015\)](#), [Oura et al. \(2016\)](#), [Escandon-Barbosa et al. \(2019\)](#), [Celec and Globocnik \(2017\)](#), [Kotorri and Krasniqi \(2018\)](#) and [Alkhateeb \(2019\)](#).

#### *Firm age/experience*

In the internationalisation research field, firm age is associated with a firm's experience. The argument is that because internationalisation appears complex compared to a domestic

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market operation, a firm's experience is recommended as one of the success factors. The following empirical results confirm firm age and/or firm experience as one of the success factors in internationalisation. These studies include, but are not limited to [Serrano et al. \(2016\)](#), [Acar \(2015\)](#), [Reis and Forte \(2016\)](#), [Pickernell et al. \(2016\)](#), [Aziz and Samad \(2016\)](#), [Meschi et al. \(2017\)](#), [Babatunde \(2016\)](#) and [Faruk and Subudhi \(2019\)](#).

#### *Firm size*

Firm size which is operationalised as the total number of full-time employees has been confirmed as one of the critical success factors in the export business. This is explained both in the aggregate skills and knowledge that the workforce brings to bear on the firm's activities. Empirical confirmation of a firm's size as a key success factor in internationalisation also includes, but is not limited to [Onkelinx et al. \(2016\)](#), [Chen et al. \(2016\)](#), [Reis and Forte \(2016\)](#), [Coo \(2017\)](#), [Tuhin and Swanepoel \(2017\)](#), [Fernando et al. \(2017\)](#), [Khokhar \(2018\)](#), [Faruk and Subudhi \(2019\)](#) and [Bekteshi \(2020\)](#).

#### *Management commitment*

Most exporting SMEs operate in the domestic market and export goods abroad. Over the years, management commitment as operationalised as the amount of time and resources management allocates to internationalisation activity is found as one of the critical export success factors. Management commitment is an indicator of management's ability to prioritise resource allocation across various activities in a firm by making exporting activity a priority. Amongst the empirical findings are: [Yu and Lindsay \(2015\)](#), [Fuchs and Köstner \(2016\)](#), [Lin et al. \(2016\)](#), [Erdil and Özdemir \(2016\)](#), [Sraha et al. \(2020\)](#), [Purwanto et al. \(2018\)](#), [Kotorri and Krasniqi \(2018\)](#), [Munawar et al. \(2019\)](#) and [Faruk and Subudhi \(2019\)](#).

#### *Firm-level of technology*

As a result of the competition in the global market, compared to the domestic market, firm-level technology such as technological innovation and innovation know-how, amongst others are seen as key success factors in international market. The following empirical findings confirm the importance of firm-level technology and export success. Amongst the papers are: [Damijan et al. \(2017\)](#), [Uyar and Oralhan \(2017\)](#), [Azar and Ciabuschi \(2017\)](#), [Coo \(2017\)](#), [Khokhar \(2018\)](#), [Krammer et al. \(2018\)](#), [Faruk and Subudhi \(2019\)](#), [Rauf et al. \(2019\)](#), [Radacic and Djalilov \(2019\)](#) and [Alkhateeb \(2019\)](#).

#### *Foreign market knowledge*

Research has found that knowledge of the export market is a key success factor. Samples of empirical findings that confirm this are as follows; they include but are not limited to [Pascucci et al. \(2016\)](#), [Boso et al. \(2017\)](#), [Kim-Soon et al. \(2015\)](#), [Fernando et al. \(2017\)](#), [Dhliwayo \(2017\)](#), [Bahar et al. \(2018\)](#), [Mohammed \(2018\)](#), [Alkhateeb \(2019\)](#), [Lejpras \(2019\)](#) and [Haddoud et al. \(2021\)](#).

### **Methodology**

The objective of the paper is to examine the extent to which the perception of female and male exporters differs on export success factors in extant papers (see literature review sub-section titled *Export Success Factors in Extant Research*). The context of the study is Ghana; Ghana is a sub-Saharan African country and the country is credited as the beacon of Africa's democracy because of its stable democratic governance credentials in the African region. Economically, Ghana is considered one of the fastest-growing countries on the continent of Africa ([Amankwah-Amoah, 2017](#)). Within Ghana, the study is based on the capital city, Accra because it is the

commercial city of Ghana with more than 95% of corporate and commercial activities in the country (GRA, 2018). Male and female SMEs exporting firms were the target population of the country. The sampling method used is based on the convenience and snowball non-probability sampling that is supported by a sampling frame obtained from the Ghana Export Promotion Authority (GEPA). Questionnaire was used to collect the data for the study. Because the respondents were asked to share their thoughts on export success factors used as the conceptual framework for the study, some parts of the questionnaire were made open-ended. The questions were composed of the demographic details of the respondents and questions regarding their perceptions of export success factors. The study was conducted from June 2020 to July 15, 2020. Due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), the data collection was supplemented with online Google Forms to the target population using e-mails and their WhatsApp pages, coupled with some face-to-face and telephone interviews (i.e. depending on a respondent preference and availability). An average of one hour was expended on 16 of the respondents that agreed to be interviewed face-to-face. The data collection lasted for one and a half months (June 5, 2020–July 15, 2020). Overall, 38 respondents participated in the study consisting of 21 male and 17 female exporters. Being a quantitative exploratory study, descriptive statistics based on frequencies and chi-square analysis were employed to analyse the responses (Aziz and Samad (2016). Table 1 presents the profile of the sample.

Variable	Female	Male	Total	Percentage
Owner Gender	17	21	38	100
<i>Owner age</i>				
>30	3	1	4	11
30–40	3	1	4	11
41–50	7	12	19	50
51–60	4	7	11	28
Total	17	21	38	100
<i>No. of employees</i>				
0–5	5	6	11	29
6–10	6	3	9	24
11–15	1	3	4	10
16–20	3	1	4	10
21–25	2	4	6	17
26–30	0	2	2	5
30 and above	0	2	2	5
Total	17	21	38	100
<i>Number of years in export business</i>				
1–5	4	2	6	16
5–10	5	7	12	32
11–15	6	5	11	29
16–20	1	4	5	13.5
21–25	0	2	2	5
26–30	1	1	2	100
Total	17	21	38	
<i>Owner's education</i>				
Below Degree	10	8	18	47
Degree	6	12	18	47
Above Degree	1	1	2	6
Total	17	21	38	100

Source(s): Author 2020

**Table 1.**  
Respondents' profile

**Table 1** shows that whilst 55% (21 respondents) of the exporters were males, the female exporters accounted for 45% (17 respondents). Exporters between the ages of 41–50 (50%) dominate the sample with the majority being males. This is followed by those aged between 51–60, accounting for 28% (11 respondents), also with the majority being males. The least represented group is those below 40 years. Following the SMEs definition that informs this study, small firms dominate the sample (i.e. those employing 6 and 29 workers) accounting for 66% (i.e. 25 firms, 13 male firms and 12 female firms) whilst the micro firms (those employing 1–5 workers) followed representing 29% of the sample. Amongst the three classes of firms - micro, small and medium-sized, the size of the male firms outweighs the female firms across all the size dimensions. Regarding export experience, those with 5–10 (32%) years of experience dominate the sample with the majority of the firms in this category being males. This is followed by those with 11–15 years (29%) with the female firms dominating the sample. The least experience is those between 21–25 years and 26–30 years representing 5% each. Most of the exporters are non-degree holders and degree holders, accounting for 47%, but more educated ones being males.

### Results of research questions

**RQ1** To what extent do male and female exporters perceive the meaning of firm size, firm age, prior international experience, management commitment to export business, firm-level technology and international market knowledge differently?

The first question sought to explore the perceptions of the male and female exporters regarding the export success factors from the literature. **Table 1, Appendix**, presents the categories and subcategories which show their perceptions leading to the main themes from the responses. As regards firm size, both groups have a fair understanding of the concept, yet the categories revealed that the males have an expanded view of the concept. The perceptions concerning foreign market knowledge show that both groups possess a fair understanding of the concept. Regarding international experience, although the categories which emerged from both groups are valid, the responses show that the males possess an extensive view of the theme compared to the females based on the main meaning ascribed in extant literature. Both groups showed a good understanding of firm age, but there was also an expanded view exhibited by their male counterpart. The results further show that both groups have an equally fair understanding of firm-level technology. Regarding management commitment, again there is also an expanded understanding of the male counterpart in terms of its relations to the export business.

**RQ2** To what extent do the relevance that male and female exporters attach to extant export success factors in research question one differs?

As can be seen in **Table 2**, the results of research question two are ranked. This is because respondents were asked to rank which of the factors were more important to

Factors	Freq	Male		Female	
		Percentage	Freq	Percentage	Freq
International experience	21	100	13	76	
Age of firm	20	67	9	53	
Number of employees	20	95	16	94	
Management commitment to export	20	95	15	88	
Firm's level of technology	20	67	16	94	
Foreign market knowledge	21	100	17	100	

**Source(s):** Author 2020

**Table 2.**  
Perceptions of the  
relevance factors to  
export success by  
gender

internationalisation and/or export business from their view. Table 2 presents the results as follows.

The second research question seeks to explore the perceptions of male and female exporters regarding which of the factors are important to export success. The results show that both the female and the male exporters perceive that the selected factors are important to export business. The results further show that whilst their perceptions vary on five (5) out of the six factors, their opinion converged on the importance of foreign market knowledge, accounting for 100% confirmation of both groups. Although, the male exporters outweigh the females, that is 21 versus 17; the results further show that most of the males jointly and unanimously agree on the importance of the variables on the success of the export business, whilst that of the females differs.

**RQ3** To what extent do the relative strengths of the six selected factors to export success differ between the male and female exporters?

Table 3 presents the perceptions of male exporters concerning the relative strengths of the selected export success factors. The results from Table 3 show that the relative power of the export success factors differs between males and females. As a result of the fact that the factors are six (6), the following phrases: *most important*, *moderately important* and *least important* are used to categorise the relative difference of the factors based on the frequencies. Amongst the male exporters, they all did not agree equally on the importance of the factors. First, all the male exporters perceived possessing foreign market knowledge and having international experience as the most powerful export success factors, representing 100% each. The results show that about 95% of males unanimously confirmed that firm size, firm age, management commitment and firm-level technology as being the next bunch of factors which equally impinge successfully on export business. Consequently, the male exporters perceived export market knowledge and international experience as being the most important export success factors whilst firm size, firm age, firm technology and management commitment as being the moderately important factors. Given the pattern of the results, the perceptions of the male are categorised into two dimensions (i.e. most important and moderately important factors) as shown in Table 3.

Table 4 presents the perception of female exporters regarding the relative importance of the selected factors to export success. Like their male counterpart, all female exporters perceived that the most important export success factors amongst the six variables are foreign market knowledge, firm level of technology and the size of a firm and/or capacity, representing 100%, 94% and 94% respectively. Besides, the moderately important factors according to them are management commitment to export and international experience

Factors	Rank	Male Freq	Percentage
<i>Most important</i>			
Foreign market knowledge	1	21	100
International experience	1	21	100
<i>Moderately important</i>			
Number of employees	2	20	95
Management commitment	2	20	95
Age of firm	2	20	95
Firm-level technology	2	20	95

**Source(s):** Author 2020

**Table 3.**  
Relative importance of  
export success factors  
by male exporters

Factors	Rank	Female Freq	Percentage
<i>Most important factors</i>			
Foreign market knowledge	1	17	100
Firm-level technology	2	16	94
Number of employees	2	16	94
<i>Moderate important factors</i>			
Management commitment export	3	15	88
International experience	4	13	76
<i>Least important</i>			
Age of firm	5	9	53

**Table 4.**  
Relative importance of export success factors by female exporters

**Source(s):** Author, 2020

accounting for 88 and 76% respectively. The least important factor from the perception of the female is firm age. Because the perception of the females was spread through the three dimensions, they are analysed according to most important, moderately important and least important as follows.

Overall, the differences regarding the responses of the male and female exporters on each of the factors were examined using a non-parametric test approach of chi-square test of independence. Using this test, the aim is to find out whether the proportion of males who confirmed the importance of a particular export success factor significantly differs from the confirmation of the females or vice-versa. In this analysis, the null hypothesis of each variable is that there is a significant difference between the proportion of males who perceived the importance of a particular variable compared to the proportion of females on the same variables and/or they are not related. The result is presented in [Table 5](#).

From [Table 5](#), the chi-square test statistic is shown in column three (3) with its associated *p-values*. Since the *p-values* are less than 0.05, the output shows that there is no evidence to reject the null hypothesis that there are significant differences in the proportion of male exporters and females regarding their perceptions of each variable. Implicitly there is a significant difference between the male and female exporters regarding their perception of each variable.

Number	Gender and the variables	Stata output	Status
1	Gender and managers with international experience	Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 34.0000$ Pr = 0.000	significant
2	Gender and the firm-level Technology	Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 36.0000$ Pr = 0.000	significant
3	Gender and age of the firm	Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 29.0000$ Pr = 0.000	significant
4	Gender and number of employees	Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 36.0000$ Pr = 0.000	significant
5	Gender and knowledge of the foreign market	Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 38.0000$ Pr = 0.000	significant
6	Gender and Top management's commitment to Exporting	Pearson $\chi^2(1) = 35.0000$ Pr = 0.000	significant

**Table 5.**  
Output of chi-square test of independence

**Note(s):** Gender of the export chief executive officer (CEO) is coded as 1 = Female and 0 = Male  
**Source(s):** Author, 2020

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## Discussion

The paper sought to use the RBV of the firm (Barney, 1991) to explore whether the personal idiosyncratic perceptions of male and female exporters differ on extant export success factors. Extant literature on the internationalisation of SMEs has confirmed that the success of every small and medium-sized enterprise in international business is dependent on the management of certain key success factors. Six (6) key factors confirmed in extant literature over time in different contexts (e.g. Nigeria, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, Malawi, Swaziland, Mozambique, Zambia, USA, UK, Brazil, Columbia, Slovenia, Poland, China, Kosovo, Argentina, Spain, Malaysia, Portugal, France, Greece, Turkey, Belgium) which the present study is based on include the size of the firm, firm age, prior international experience, firm technology, management commitment and foreign market knowledge. Sample studies which confirm the authenticity of these variables include, but are not limited to Khokhar (2018) and Alkhateeb (2019), international experience; Babatunde (2016) and Faruk and Subudhi (2019), firm age; Coo (2017), Tuhin and Swanepoel (2017) and Bekteshi (2020), firm size; Kotorri and Krasniqi (2018) and Munawar *et al.* (2019), management commitment; Damijan *et al.* (2017), Uyar and Oralhan (2017) and Alkhateeb (2019), firm-level of technology; Alkhateeb (2019), Lejpras (2019), Haddoud *et al.* (2021), foreign market knowledge.

Previous studies (e.g. Moreira *et al.*, 2019; Javadian and Richards, 2020), coupled with sample theoretical frameworks (e.g. the gender-aware framework of women entrepreneurship (Bates *et al.*, 2007; Brush *et al.*, 2009) and the social feminist theory (Fischer *et al.*, 1993)) on the debates have argued that gender variation internationalisation of SMEs is principally accounted for by external factors which affect the actors (i.e. males and females). The paper diverts from the existing line of research and argues that even where the playing field between male and female exporters is levelled, the variation in entrepreneurship will still exist. Consequently, our understanding of the issue will not be full until the personality characteristics of both groups are analysed from the perspective of the RBV of the firm (Barney, 1991). The RBV was used because it is the only theoretical framework from the internationalisation of SMEs' field that takes into account the personality characteristics of entrepreneurs as a critical part of a firm's resource stocks which must be understood (see Ruzzier *et al.*, 2006). In total, the results show that both groups have a fair understanding of the categories (see Table 1, Appendix), yet the analysis of the responses indicates that the perceptions of the male exporters show a more expanded view of the success factors compared to the females. These results confirm the RBV theory (Barney, 1991) implying that besides the macro-level factors (Bates *et al.*, 2007; Brush *et al.*, 2009; Moreira *et al.*, 2019; Javadian and Richards, 2020), the personality make-up of both groups plays a very critical role, which unfortunately have been overlooked by earlier researchers to shed a full light on the topic.

These findings also imply that whilst other internationalisation models (e.g. the process theory (Johnson and Valne, 1977); the network theory, Johanson and Mattsson, 1998) have enriched our understanding regarding the internationalisation behaviour of SMEs, the RBV of the firm (see Barney, 1991; Ruzzier *et al.*, 2006), remains one of the best frameworks in accounting for the internationalisation behaviour of the SMEs. The uniqueness of the RBV is that, it explains the behaviour of SMEs' internationalisation, including the personality characteristics of the entrepreneurs. Using the RBV to understand how males and females think, view and perceive the determinants of internationalisation success factors is critical especially given that previous findings have settled on external factors to explain the problem. The implicit assumption is that the internationalisation outcomes for males and females are not only accounted for by external factors (e.g. culture, family responsibilities), but the personality characteristics of both groups. Confirmation of the variables by both groups in the study confirms the plausibility of extant findings as used as the conceptual framework for this study (e.g. see Alkhateeb (2019), Bekteshi (2020), Haddoud *et al.* (2021)). Regarding the importance and relative strengths of the factors, research questions two and

three, the results show that the perception of the male exporters in some cases were more uniform and convergent compared to the females. From [Table 3](#), the responses of the males were summarised into two divisions whilst that of the females were a bit fragmented ([Table 4](#)). This also supports the argument that there is the likelihood of a problem of perceptions accounting for gender differences in internationalisation, which is ignored by previous research though a critical variable in internationalisation success of SMEs. The results of the non-parametric test attest to the overall relative difference between the males and females regarding their perceptions of the factors. Implicitly, our understanding of gender differences in internationalisation will not be perfected without augmenting it with the perspective of the RBV to extant models (e.g. gender-aware framework ([Bates et al., 2007](#); [Brush et al., 2009](#)) as well as the social feminist theory [Fischer et al. \(1993\)](#)).

Furthermore, it can be argued that the variations in the perception of male and female exporters regarding the export success factors in this study may be attributed to the concept of personality and gender variations in entrepreneurship (see [Bernardino et al., 2018](#)). In the literature, five personality traits namely: openness to experience (e.g. creativity), conscientiousness (e.g. thoughtfulness), extraversion (e.g. sociability), agreeableness (e.g. kindness) and neuroticism (e.g. emotional instability) (See [Chell, 2008](#); [Brandstatter, 2011](#)). Following [Chell \(2008\)](#), the complementary-contribution view in the field of management recognises the value of the differences in the personality traits between males and females. For instance, [Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt \(2001\)](#) have argued that it is plausible to assume gender differences in personality characteristics such as assertiveness, aggressiveness, ambitiousness, forcefulness, daring and being competitive and their corresponding impacts on gender and entrepreneurship outcomes. Researchers (e.g. [Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001](#)) associate personality traits such as concern for welfare, affection and interpersonal sensitivity to females compared to males which also have implications on entrepreneurship outcomes.

## Conclusions

As a result of the advantages which accrue to firms that have international experience over those that operate wholly in the domestic market, gender and entrepreneurship research has been extended to internationalisation. Despite the importance of the topic, our knowledge is limited. Amongst the limited studies on the topic, an emerging line of research is that gender variation in internationalisation do exist and is principally influenced by external factors (e.g. motherhood [family and household responsibilities], meso and/or macro external factors [e.g. national-level policies, culture, economic factors, laws and regulations], business-level factors [e.g. organisational level structures and structures in industries]) ([Bates et al., 2007](#); [Brush et al., 2009](#); [Javadian and Richards, 2020](#); [Moreira et al., 2019](#)). Whilst these studies have moved the field forward to a greater degree, the present study uses the RBV theory of the firm ([Barney, 1991](#)) to draw attention to a critical variable which has been ignored by earlier researchers (i.e. components of the idiosyncratic characteristics of the owner entrepreneur). Using quantitative descriptive research design based on frequencies and chi-square test of independence, the results show that whilst the two groups agree on the relevance of the variables in export business, thereby attesting to the plausibility of extant findings of the variables, the perceptions of both groups differ. Specifically, the results implying that more work is needed from policymakers, educators and researchers to address the mindset of the entrepreneurs, a critical variable earlier research has ignored.

## Implications of the study

The study makes four contributions to the gender and internationalisation research field. First, it contributes to the empirical literature by offering a unique perspective regarding how

women and men think, perceive and interpret export success factors and how that impacts on their internationalisation outcomes. Second whilst extant frameworks [(e.g. the gender-aware framework of women entrepreneurship (Bates *et al.*, 2007; Brush *et al.*, 2009) and social feminist theory (Fischer *et al.*, 1993)] have made an impressive contribution to our understanding of what accounts for the gender difference in internationalisation, current researches have overlooked the mindset of males and females in predicting internationalisation success. Consequently, the present study brings a new dimension to the discourse from the RBV theory of the firm to show that more work is needed from educators, researchers and policymakers to address the mindset, including the personal idiosyncratic characteristics of male and female actors in export business. In so doing, the external validity of the RBV theory is confirmed.

Third, the paper responds to calls by researchers (e.g. Terjesen *et al.*, 2011; Ratten and Tajeddini, 2018; Kuschel and Labra, 2018; Javadian and Richards, 2020) to populate studies on the topic to deepen our present understanding. Fourth, by using data from Ghana, West Africa, the study sheds a fresh insight on the topic from an under-studied and under-researched geographical context. By so doing, the paper again responds to calls to extend the research topic to under-researched regions such as Africa (i.e. the gender and internationalisation research given the scarcity of Africa region (Ratten and Tajeddini, 2018; Moreira *et al.*, 2019). Fourth, the study sheds a fresh light on the topic from an under-studied and a new geographical context, Ghana to shed new insights into the topic, paying the way for non-BRICS countries.

The results have practical implications. First, exporters must participate in targeted education and training based on systematic research findings which impact export success. Since socioeconomic development in developing countries such as Ghana is low compared to the advanced countries, one of the things that will address the knowledge gap in export success is that both male and female exporters must work together as partners in the export business as confirmed in the findings. Such partnership has the potential advantage of knowledge spillovers to individual exporters (e.g. from male to female exporters). In addition, female exporters must make a conscious effort to enrol in capacity building in export success factors.

From the policy standpoint, government ministries, departments and agencies whose activities impact entrepreneurship (e.g. in the case of Ghana, the Ghana Enterprise Agency, the Empretec Ghana and the National Entrepreneurship Program, Ghana [NEIP]) must enhance their capacity-building efforts especially, targeted training programmes that aim to expose entrepreneurs to export success factors through outputs from a systematic peer-reviewed research. In this regard, working on the entrepreneurs' mindset will be critically important because with SMEs, the owner-managers are the centre of everything. In particular special attention to female exporters regarding capacity building in export success will be critical to bridging the knowledge gap in export success between males and females.

### **Limitations and implications for future research**

Analysis of the personality as a key determinant in SMEs' internationalisation success is ignored in the field and future research must advance that, especially in different contexts. In terms of limitation, the study is exploratory based on non-probability sampling methods using descriptive frequency tables and chi-square test and so readers must bear these limitations in mind in interpreting the results to improve future studies.

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Main themes	Gender of respondents	Categories	Sub-categories
Firm size	Females	Firm capacity	Total capital Total assets Lands and equipment Machines
	Males	Firm capacity	All workers and total resources Total assets Total investment capital Money value of all assets
Foreign market knowledge	Females	Foreign market awareness	Nature of foreign demand Foreign pricing Foreign government import regulations Specifications
	Males	Foreign market awareness	Foreign tastes and preferences Countries with the most immigrants Specifications Foreign government import regulations Foreign pricing
International experience	Females	Familiarity in foreign countries	Frequent foreign travel Foreign connections Previous stay abroad Having foreign partners
	Males	Familiarity in foreign countries	Previous stay abroad Previous foreign work experience Extensive foreign experience Collaboration with foreign partners Working with foreign partners
Firm age	Females	Firm years in business	Calendar years of a firm The age of a business Years in business
	Males	Firm years in business	Age of a firm since formation Firm experience in business Calendar years in business Age to date
Firm technology	Females	Firm known-how	Machines Foreign machines Foreign equipment Process change
	Males	Firm known-how	Innovation and inventions New production methods New processes Known how in business
Management commitment	Females	Management motivation	The seriousness of managers Managers' total interests Managers' concern for the firm
	Males	Management motivation	General motivation for export Proportion of resources allocated to export General aggressiveness of managers Management time for exporting activities

**Table A1.**

Themes and sub-themes developed from the responses using the deductive approach