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## Five decades of research on export barriers: Review and future directions

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## ABSTRACT

Although research on export barriers spans five decades, no single prior study has systematically reviewed findings in this field. This study enriches the discourse on internationalization through a systematic review of the factors associated with export barriers, the theories underpinning this, and the exact nature of the relationships. Findings indicate the bulk of empirical studies focus on drivers of export barriers. The study identifies thirty-six such variables, falling in the categories of *firm demographics*, *export venture characteristics*, *managerial factors*, *environmental and operational factors*, and *international trading environment*. Smaller sub-streams of research investigate export barriers as predictors, mediators, and moderators. A vote counting approach dissects the associations (i.e. positive, negative, and weak) between the various factors and export barriers. Moreover, the study identifies four explicit (i.e. *resource-based view*, *incremental internationalization*, *network*, and *institutional theories*) and two implicit (i.e. *attribution* and *rationalization*) theories underlying the associations. Concerning research design and methodology, the study highlights the underrepresentation of emerging markets, longitudinal studies, cross-national comparisons, and advanced multivariate analytical tools. Finally, the study draws key implications for managers, policymakers, and educators, before setting an agenda for future research.

## 1. Introduction

The 800-plus export-focused (e.g. export performance, organizational determinants of exporting, export attitude/behavior, and export barriers) studies published over the past six decades, stress the importance of export development (see Chabowski et al., 2018; Leonidou & Katsikeas, 2010). More than 500 of these focus on small to medium-size enterprises (SMEs) Ribau, Moreira, and Raposo, 2016. The sheer volume of research suggests appraising accumulated knowledge “deserves higher priority now than adding a new experiment or survey to the pile” (Glass, 1976, p.4). Yet, the number of past reviews is skewed toward drivers and measures of export performance (e.g. Aaby & Slater, 1989; Chen, Sousa, & He, 2016; Katsikeas, Leonidou, & Morgan, 2000; Sousa, Martínez-López, & Coelho, 2008; Zou & Stan, 1998) and organizational determinants of exporting (e.g. Leonidou 1995a; Leonidou, 1998; Leonidou, Katsikeas, & Piercy, 1998). Two of the major sub-streams – export attitudes/behavior and export barriers, have received scant attention. This paper focuses on export barriers.

Leonidou (1995b) Leonidou’s (1995b) study, dissecting constraints frequently encountered, is the earliest review on export barriers. Further, Leonidou (2004) built taxonomy on impact and categories of export barriers. Tesfom and Lutz (2006) collated the barriers pertinent to emerging market firms, whereas Arteaga-Ortiz and Fernández-Ortiz (2010) focused on scale development. Kahiya (2017) and Morgan (1997) elaborated on conceptual boundaries and categories of exports

barriers. Two of the more recent reviews (i.e. Doern, 2009; Paul, Parthasarathy, & Gupta, 2017) examine generic barriers SMEs face. However, past reviews have overlooked factors associated with export barriers. To address this gap, a systematic evidence-based approach is adopted (see Greenhalgh et al. (2005); Jones and Gatrell (2014); Pawson, Greenhalgh, Harvey, and Walshe, 2005; Tranfield et al. (2003)). The search period is not bound by time, which enables this review to identify a much larger sample ( $n = 100$ ) of export barrier research, than used in any of the previous studies. For example, Leonidou (1995b, 2004) Leonidou’s (1995b, 2004) highly cited reviews employ sample sizes of 35 and 32, respectively. By including research published post-2000, and not captured in the earlier reviews, this study paints a comprehensive and up-to-date picture.

The review answers the following questions; (1) *what factors are associated with export barriers*, (2) *what theories explain this*, and (3) *what is the nature of the association?* Scholars study export barriers as outcomes, predictors, and mediators/moderators. The bulk of this literature (i.e. 91 studies) investigates export barriers as outcomes. There are 36 variables associated with export barriers. Four explicit theories (i.e. incremental internationalization, institutional theory, network theory, and resource-based view) omnipresent in IB, explain the association(s). The review opens avenues for additional research by suggesting two implicit theories – attribution and rationalization. Vote counting aggregates the nature of the relationships between these variables and export barriers. Moreover, bibliometric properties and methodological

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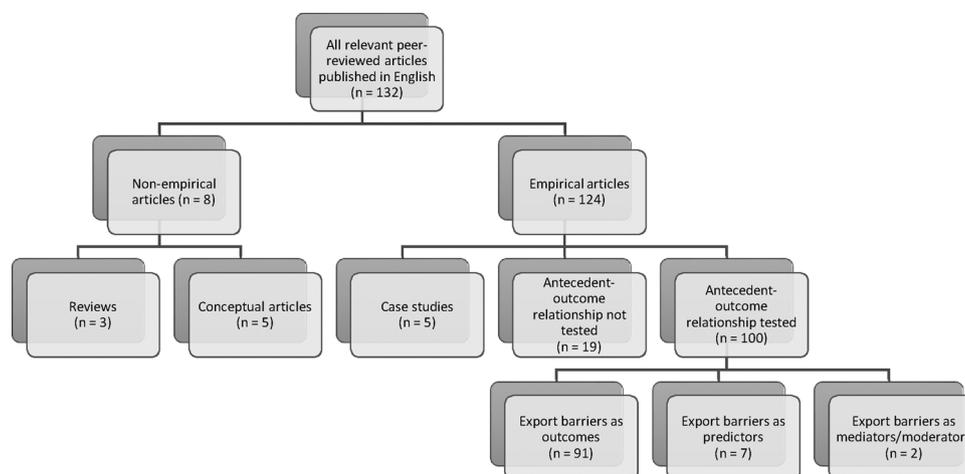


Fig. 1. Overview of the initial list of studies considered.

aspects of export barrier research are scrutinized using *historicity* and *plurality*. Thus, by assembling this fragmented literature into a coherent body of knowledge, this review helps eliminate “*the misuse of existing research, the overuse of limited and inconclusive findings, and the underuse of research evidence with substantive implications*” (Rousseau, Manning, & Denyer, 2008, p.477).

The review contributes to education, research, managerial practice, and policymaking on export development. It provides *educators* with a synopsis of thematic topics for inclusion in teaching and learning resources. For export *researchers*, it offers nomenclature and a reference point for future studies. Export *managers* gain insights on ‘coping mechanisms’ for overcoming export barriers. *Policymakers* rely on such knowledge to develop effective need-based export incentives. The next section provides context before elaborating on searching, coding and data extraction procedures. Descriptive results address the bibliographic and methodological profiles. A discussion follows from a synthesis of findings. Finally, conclusions and implications set the stage for charting directions for future research.

## 2. Background

The study of export barriers began in the late 1960s/early 1970s (see Groke & Kreidle, 1967; Pinney, 1971; Simpson & Kujawa, 1974), influenced in part by the nascent bodies of knowledge on *international trade* and *foreign direct investment*. While Groke and Kreidle’s (1967) research is the seminal article for this stream of research, Simpson and Kujawa (1974) Simpson and Kujawa’s (1974) paper is the first peer-reviewed empirical study. Research has grown substantially since, creating the need for integrative reviews. Past reviews (e.g. Leonidou, 1995b, 2004; Tesfom & Lutz, 2006) contributed toward the understanding of the nexus between barriers and internationalization, yet, they addressed fundamentally the same research question – *what are the common barriers encountered and how do they influence international activities*. Thus, export barriers affect internationalizing firms in four ways; (1) they discourage non-exporters from internationalizing, (2) inhibit the ongoing international expansion of current exporters, (3) induce de-internationalization, and (4) dissuade ex-exporters from re-engaging international markets.

None of the previous reviews examine the factors, which explain the differential impacts of export barriers, and the mechanisms by which this occurs. In addressing this gap, this empirical review helps “*lower the production rate of isolated knowledge and (could) foster the harmonization of still partially fragmented elements of knowledge*” (Oesterle and Wolf 2011, p.742). The remainder of the review details the systematic evidence-based approach adopted, starting with a description of the literature search.

### 2.1. Literature search

Leonidou, Katsikeas, & Coudounari’s (2010, p.79) definition of export-focused studies, covering the cross-border buying and/or selling of goods/services using a direct or indirect export channel, is adopted. The review excludes economics and trade literature (e.g. Porto, 2005), modelling trade barriers as costs or distortions to market efficiency.<sup>1</sup> Omitted from this review are studies examining challenges unique to a specific mode of entry (e.g. international joint venturing).

#### 2.1.1. Search terms and databases accessed

The initial phase focused on identifying substitutes for ‘export barriers’. Search terms comprised “barriers to exporting”, “barriers to internationalization”, “export barriers”, “export challenges”, “export constraints”, “export hindrances”, “export impediments”, “export obstacles”, and “export problems”. Three scholarly databases; *ABI Inform*, *JSTOR*, and *Science Direct* were searched for pertinent literature. To supplement the search, publisher-specific databases (i.e. *Blackwell-Wiley*, *Elsevier*, *Emerald*, *Palgrave*, *Sage*, *Springer*, and *Taylor and Francis*) were included. The search encompassed keywords, abstract; and full text. A manual method was added to find older literature; some of which is yet to be fully digitized.<sup>2</sup> Finally, through an email request, 6733 scholars affiliated with the *Academy of International Business (AIB)*, had an opportunity to provide additional studies to those already identified.<sup>3</sup> These search procedures yielded 177 peer-reviewed journal articles. Disregarded on the grounds of pertinence, are forty-five articles, mentioning export barriers as a fringe construct. Fig. 1 provides a synopsis of the research on export barriers; whereas the subsequent discussion outlines the criteria adopted to qualify each study for inclusion in this review.

#### 2.1.2. Criteria for inclusion for further analysis

The validity of the resultant sample depends on the criteria for qualifying studies (Glass, 1976; Krippendorff, 1989). To be eligible for coding and analysis, four criteria were set:

- (1) Export barriers are a focal construct, and factors associated with them are identified.
- (2) A link between specific factor(s) and export barriers is hypothesized and tested.

<sup>1</sup> See Leonidou et al. (2010) for a similar approach.

<sup>2</sup> This was particularly the case for literature disseminated in *Emerald* journals prior to 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Based on confirmation from the AIB-listserve (10 November 2015).

- (3) The study is of an empirical nature and reports on methodological parameters.
- (4) Adequate information is provided vis-à-vis (1), (2), and (3) to allow valid comparisons.

This reduced the sample by thirty-two studies (see Fig. 1). The final sample comprises 100 empirical peer-reviewed journal articles published in English, and compares to several recent studies [see Canabal and White (2008) –  $n = 126$ ; Leonidou et al. (2014) –  $n = 76$ ; Li et al. (2016) –  $n = 47$ ; Martineau and Pastoriza (2016) –  $n = 121$ ; Sousa et al. (2008) –  $n = 52$ ].

## 2.2. Data extraction and coding

Extraction, coding, and organizing of data from the 100 empirical articles, derives from content analysis. In pursuit of objectivity and systematization (see Kassarjian, 1997), a draft coding protocol focusing on (1) bibliometric aspects – authorship, citations, and publication outlet, (2) research design – setting and method, (3) methodology – data collection, sample size, response rates, statistical analysis, and (4) variables – drivers, mediators/moderators, and outcomes, was established. The protocol is in line with studies in this area (see Canabal & White, 2008; Chen et al., 2016; Li, He, & Sousa, 2016; Leonidou & Katsikeas, 2010; Leonidou et al., 2010; Leonidou, Samiee, Aykol, & Talias, 2014; Sousa et al., 2008). A coding manual assisted coders with a common frame of reference. It specified operational definitions to guide coders to interpret information in the studies. The draft manual was pretested using fifteen randomly selected studies, with a view to refining it to facilitate coherent coding. These additional refinements were critical for ensuring functionality, consistency, and flow in coding.

Two human coders, who had published in exporting/internationalization, were preferred due to their superior ability to process “*semantically complex texts*” (Krippendorff 1989/Krippendorff 1989, p. 407). Working independently, the coders transcribed data from the articles onto the coding sheets. Inter-coder agreement for the dimensions in the manual, ranged between 0.85 and 0.91, which is adequate.<sup>4</sup> Discussion and joint resolution ironed out disagreements arising from coding. Transcription of data from coding sheets focused on accuracy and completeness. A *Supplementary data file* (i.e. evidence portfolio) presents the data set for this review.

It is vital to elucidate on the protocol followed to code independent and dependent variables, since this served as a prelude to the synthesis. The procedure involved (a) identifying factors associated with export barriers, (b) documenting the nature of the association, (c) establishing a method for quantifying the association. Export barriers are studied as outcomes ( $n = 91$ ), antecedents ( $n = 7$ ) and mediators/moderators ( $n = 2$ ). From the 91 articles conceptualizing export barriers as outcomes, there are 42 drivers. These were refined against operational definitions and checked to eradicate overlap. Six variables were eliminated following additional refinement and cross-validation against several past reviews (e.g. Aaby & Slater, 1989; Chen et al., 2016; Leonidou et al., 2010; Li et al., 2016; Sousa et al., 2008; Tan & Sousa, 2011; Wheeler, Ibeh, & Dimitratos, 2008; Zou & Stan, 1998). The variables fit in four categories, namely; *firm demographics, export venture characteristics, managerial factors, environmental and operational factors*, and *international trading environment*. Subsequently, the review established the nature of the association between these factors and export barriers. Initially, this was captured as a narrative-synthesis, but the imperative to collate and quantify direction of the associations (Kassarjian, 1997), dictated a method be adopted, to aggregate results. As will be discussed later, synthesis of the findings for ‘export barriers as outcomes’ utilized vote counting. Due to sample size restrictions, a narrative method was deemed adequate to condense the findings concerning export barriers as, ‘predictors’, and ‘mediators/moderators’.

## 3. Results

The results first address the bibliometric profile of the studies (i.e. authorship, citations, publications), before shifting to an overview of the relevant theories. A description of the research setting and methods (i.e. countries covered, data collection, and statistical analysis) follows thereafter.

### 3.1. Profile of the studies

#### 3.1.1. Publication outlets

Table 1 shows that 12 outlets – *European Journal of Marketing (EJM)*, *International Business Review (IBR)*, *International Marketing Review (IMR)*, *International Small Business Journal (ISBJ)*, *Journal of Business Research (JBR)*, *Journal of Global Marketing (JGM)*, *Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)*, *Journal of International Entrepreneurship (JIEnt)*, *Journal of Marketing Management (JMM)*, *Journal of Small Business Management (JSBM)*, and *Management International Review (MIR)*, have disseminated most of this research. IMR (nine), EJM (eight), and MIR (seven) are the top three.

While this list is consistent with recent reviews (e.g. Chen et al., 2016; Leonidou et al., 2010; Li et al., 2016; Paul et al., 2017; Sousa et al., 2008; Tan & Sousa, 2011), research is migrating from the general marketing and business journals (e.g. *EJM*, *JBR*, *JIBS*, *JMM*, *MIR*), to specialized entrepreneurship and small business management publications (e.g. *ISBJ*, *JIEnt*, and *JSBM*).<sup>5</sup> Scholarly thought maybe evolving from viewing export barriers as broad factors shaping international expansion, to a nuanced slant, conceiving them as constraints to SME internationalization.

#### 3.1.2. Authorship

Table 2 lists the ten most influential articles, based on citations. Bilkey and Tesar (1977) and Cavusgil (1984) are the most influential in terms of both the total and average number of citations. Eight of the studies are in the top ten for both measures. Pinho and Martins (2010) and Uner, Kocak, Cavusgil, and Cavusgil (2013) are the exceptions, as they feature in the top ten on annual citations. This, probably, indicates some recent studies are just as impactful as the foundational research.

#### 3.1.3. Publishing trends over time

Fig. 2 shows that the first empirical studies go back to the 1970’s, but it was not until the 1980’s that a body of research emerged. Although the 1990’s were the peak period for this research stream (i.e. 32 studies published 1989–1997), interest in the topic has not waned. For instance, more than half of the studies in this review are from 1998 onwards.

### 3.2. Theories on export barriers

The review identifies explicit and implicit theories of export barriers. Explicit theories are self-evident in the relevant studies, whereas implicit theories exist by inference. Explicit theories include *resource-based view, incremental internationalization, network, and institutional theories*. Implicit theories (i.e. *attribution and rationalization*) emanate from ‘widely shared, taken for granted, and seldom questioned’ assumptions social actors make, to explain or justify outcomes (Johnson, 2008 p.4). The following discussion provides a digest of the theories before shifting to the methodological profile.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This is consistent with Cavusgil, Deligonul, and Yaprak (2005) who suggest that ‘International Marketing’ is migrating from mainstream journals to specialized publications.

<sup>6</sup> Excluded from this discussion are theories focusing predominantly on the international expansion of multinational enterprises (i.e. internalization, transaction cost, eclectic paradigm, international product life cycle, and monopolistic advantage).

<sup>4</sup> Based on Cohen’s Kappa coefficient ( $\kappa$ ) as recommended by Tinsley and Weiss (1975).

**Table 1**  
Journals Disseminating Export Barrier Research.

Journal	#	Articles
International Marketing Review (IMR)	9	Albaum (1983), Czinkota and Ursic (1983), Yaprak (1985), Karafakioglu (1986), Keng and Juan (1989), Eshghi (1992), Leonidou (1995c), Bennett (1997), Da Silva and da Rocha (2001)
European Journal of Marketing (EJM)	8	Barrett and Wilkinson (1985), Schlegelmilch (1986), Tseng and Yu (1991), Barker and Kaynak (1992), Katsikeas and Morgan (1994), Katsikeas et al. (1996), Ibeh and Young (2001), Fillis (2002)
Management International Review (MIR)	7	Rabino (1980), Kaynak and Kothari (1984), Kedia and Chhokar (1986), Sharkey et al. (1989), Sullivan and Bauerschmidt (1989), Sullivan and Bauerschmidt (1990), Kwon and Hu (1996)
Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)	5	Simpson and Kujawa (1974), Bilkey and Tesar (1977), Christensen et al. (1987), Dichtl et al. (1990), Gripsrud (1990)
International Business Review (IBR)	4	Ramaseshan and Soutar (1996), Bell (1997), Tesar and Moini (1998), Uner et al. (2013)
Journal of Small Business Management (JSBM)	4	Holden (1986), Campbell (1996), Karagozoglu and Lindell (1998), Crick (2002)
Journal of International Entrepreneurship (JIEnt)	4	Shaw and Darroch (2004), Pinho and Martins (2010), Kahiya (2013), Kahiya et al. (2014)
Marketing Intelligence and Planning (MIP <sup>a</sup> )	4	Crick and Chaudhry (1997), Crick et al. (1998), Crick and Chaudhry (2000), Al-Hyari et al. (2012)
International Small Business Journal (ISBJ)	4	Cheong and Chong (1988), Suarez-Ortega (2003), Arranz and de Arroyabe (2009), Baum et al. (2013)
Journal of Global Marketing (JGM)	4	Katsikeas (1994), Moini (1997), Korneliusen and Blasius (2008), Julian and Ahmed (2005)
Journal of Business Research (JBR)	3	Cavusgil (1984), Czinkota and Ursic (1991), Naidu and Rao (1993),
Journal of Marketing Management (JMM)	3	Diamantopoulos, Schlegelmilch, and Allpress, 1990, Kaleka and Katsikeas (1995), Katsikeas and Leonidou (1996)
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics (APJML)	2	Köksal and Kettaneh (2011), Kahiya and Dean (2014)
Industrial Marketing Management (IMM)	2	Morgan and Katsikeas (1998), Dean et al. (2000)
Journal of Transnational Management (JTM)	2	Smith et al. (2006), Saeed and Vincent (2011)
International Journal of Emerging Markets (IJEM)	2	Adu-Gyamfi and Korneliusen (2013), Tesfom et al. (2006)
Other <sup>b</sup>	10	See for instance, Jones (1980), Shoham and Albaum (1995), Leonidou (2000), Crick (2004)
Other <sup>c</sup>	23	See for example Al-Ali (1995), Crick (2007), Hornby et al. (2002)
Total	100	

<sup>a</sup> Studies were published in the *Journal of Marketing Practice* which merged into *Marketing Intelligence and Planning* in 1999.

<sup>b</sup> Category includes other mainstream journals which have published one article on export barriers. They comprise *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, *Australasian Marketing Journal*, *British Food Journal*, *Business Horizons*, *Journal of Business Venturing*, *Journal of International Management*, *Journal of International Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Omega*, and *Thunderbird International Business Review*.

<sup>c</sup> Included in this category are niche journals that focus on electronic commerce (e.g. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research*; *Journal of Internet Commerce*), food marketing (e.g. *Journal of International Food and Agribusiness Marketing*), forestry (e.g. *Journal of Forestry Products*), medical supplies (e.g. *Journal of Medical Marketing*) and niche entrepreneurship (e.g. *Journal of Enterprising Communities*; *Journal of Small Business and Entrepreneurship*), among others.

**Table 2**  
The Ten Most Cited Studies.<sup>a</sup>

	Author(s)	Total Citations		Author(s)	Citations per year <sup>b</sup>
1	Bilkey & Tesar (1977)	2203	1	Bilkey & Tesar (1977)	56.49
2	Cavusgil (1984)	877	2	Cavusgil (1984)	27.41
3	Dichtl et al. (1990)	524	3	Karagozoglu and Lindell (1998)	24.17
4	Christensen et al. (1987)	490	4	Katsikeas et al. (1996)	20.35
5	Sullivan and Bauerschmidt (1990)	441	5	Dichtl et al. (1990)	20.15
6	Karagozoglu and Lindell (1998)	435	6	Pinho & Martins 2010	19.00
7	Katsikeas et al. (1996)	407	7	Sullivan and Bauerschmidt (1990)	16.96
8	Simpson & Kujawa (1974)	325	8	Christensen et al. (1987)	16.90
9	Katsikeas & Morgan (1994)	300	9	Uner et al. (2013)	16.67
10	Leonidou (1995c)	291	10	Leonidou (1995c)	13.86

<sup>a</sup> Based on *Google Scholar* (09/01/2017).

<sup>b</sup> Current year (2016) minus year of publishing.

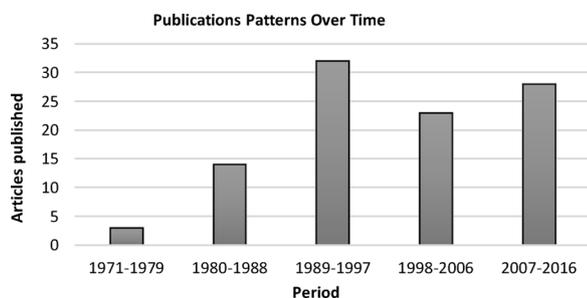


Fig. 2. Publishing Trends over Time.

### 3.2.1. Incremental internationalization theory

The Uppsala and the innovation adoption models are the principal variants of incremental internationalization (Bilkey, 1978; Czinkota & Johnston, 1981; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; Johanson & Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975). They postulate internationalization is experiential, and

firms become more sure-footed with international involvement (MacGarvie, 2006). Experiential learning increases the level of tacit knowledge and reduces perceived uncertainty in international markets (Forsgren 2002). Within the export barrier discourse, incremental internationalization is synonymous with stage models and its earliest mention traces to Bilkey and Tesar (1977), who studied the export activities of Wisconsin firms. All but one study (i.e. Sullivan & Bauerschmidt, 1990) test the innovation-adoption stage models. Leonidou and Katsikeas (1996) condense the stage model-export barrier connection by advancing that the influence of export barriers dissipates with increased international expansion. Fifteen studies (e.g. Bilkey & Tesar, 1977; Cavusgil, 1984; Kahiya & Dean, 2016; Naidu & Rao, 1993; Sharkey, Lim, & Kim, 1989; Suarez-Ortega, 2003; Sullivan & Bauerschmidt, 1990; Uner et al., 2013) test this universal hypothesis. They propose that as the reservoir of experience/knowledge grows, the export development undertaking becomes manageable. As will be explained later, variables such as export involvement and market expansion strategy also align with this view.

### 3.2.2. Institutional theory

Institutional theory posits that institutional actors like government departments or trade bodies set ‘formal’ economic policies, bank regulations, and trade agreements (Peng, Wang, & Jiang, 2008) which act as the ‘rules of the game’ (North, 1990). Likewise, ‘informal’ aspects such as values, beliefs, norms, attitudes, and ways of doing business, shape the institutional environment. Research on internationalization focuses predominantly on the regulative component of the institutional environment – the formal ‘rules’ which facilitate or constrain international expansion (Welter & Smallbone 2011; Whitelock & Jobber, 2004). The research advances that a stable and supportive institutional environment, in which funding opportunities, government assistance, and favorable trade regulations are abundant, is fundamental for internationalization (Matanda & Freeman 2009; Morgan 1999). Barrett and Wilkinson (1985) first introduced the institutional perspective to the export barrier discourse, suggesting that the brunt of export barriers ensues from the quality of the institutional environment. However, empirical testing (e.g. Awan 2011; Da Rocha, Freitas, & Da Silva, 2008) is more recent. The handful longitudinal studies (e.g. Bjarnason, Marshall, & Eyjólfsson, 2015; Kahiya, Dean, & Heyl, 2014) in this review adopt institutional theory to illuminate on the change in the influence of export barriers over time. Overall, sixteen studies (e.g. Awan, 2011; Bjarnason et al., 2015; Da Rocha et al., 2008; Hornby, Goulding, & Poon, 2002; Kahiya et al., 2014; Korneliusen & Blasius, 2008; Schlegelmilch, 1986; Sullivan & Bauerschmidt, 1989) reason that, differences in institutional settings, or changes in institutional quality, impact export barriers.

### 3.2.3. Network perspective

Pursuant to Johanson and Mattsson (1988) Johanson and Mattsson’s (1988) pioneering work, network theory is garnering attention in internationalization (see Coviello & Munro, 1995, 1997; Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003). Networks provide a stepping-stone for a firm to gain a foothold in distant markets (Freeman, Edwards, & Schroder, 2006; Johanson & Vahlne, 2009). Manolova et al. (2010) underscore the importance of both personal and inter-firm networks to internationalization. Regarding personal networks, extensively travelled decision-makers, with foreign education or expatriate experience, have a greater capability to build large and diverse networks (Leonidou et al., 1998). Ghauri et al. (2003) are the first study to use network theory to inform research on export barriers. They illustrate that some measure of “cohesion, solidarity, and commitment” is imperative for the benefits to accrue (Ghauri, Lutz, & Tesfom, 2003, p.739). Thus, networking is especially effective if the network is demand-driven (i.e. aimed at solving specific export problems) and relationships are deep and enduring (Ghauri et al., 2003; Manolova, Manev, & Gyoshev, 2010; Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003). Nonetheless, the application of network theory to export barrier research is limited to three studies (see Ghauri et al., 2003; Freeman et al., 2006; Milanzi 2012).

**Table 3**  
Most Frequently Surveyed Countries.

Country	1971–1979	1980–1988	1989–1997	1998–2006	2007–2016	Total
USA	3	9	11	2		25
UK		1	4	6	1	12
New Zealand				3	5	8
Canada		1	2	1	2	6
Australia		1	1	3		5
Greece			4		1	5
Turkey		1		1	3	5
Germany		1	2		1	4
Brazil		1		1	1	3
Cyprus			2	1		3
Finland			3			3
Norway			2		1	3

### 3.2.4. Resource-Based view

The Resource-Based View (RBV) is a well-established theory (see Andersen & Kheam, 1998; Barney, 2001; Wernerfelt, 1984). Resource-based advantages are strong where the endowments are *valuable, rare, inimitable*, and *non-substitutable* (VRIN) (Barney 1991). They create ‘resource position buffers’ which insulate a firm against market forces, thereby fostering rapid expansion (Andersen & Kheam, 1998; Wernerfelt, 1984). RBV is relevant to export barrier research, if one approaches internationalization from the perspective of International Entrepreneurship (Peng, 2001). Specifically, the aphorism that firm demographics are proxy for resources, explains the application of RBV to SME internationalization (Dhanaraj & Beamish, 2003; Mittelstaedt, Harben, & Ward, 2003; Westhead, Wright, & Ucbasaran, 2001). For instance, larger and experienced firms possess the dual advantages of ‘legitimacy’ and ‘reproducibility’, which manifest through established routines (Singh, Tucker, & House, 1986). Where such established routines are VRIN, resource-based benefits are magnified. Thirty-three studies (e.g. Albaum, 1983; Crick & Chaudhry, 1997; Da Silva & da Rocha, 2001; Jones, 1980; Leonidou, 1995c; Morgan & Katsikeas, 1994; Tesfom, Lutz, & Ghauri, 2006; Kaputa, Paluš, & Vlosky, 2016) theorize that the larger the pool of proxy resources (e.g. firm size, age, and ownership) the less influential the impact of export barriers.

### 3.2.5. Attribution theory

Credited to Heider (1958), attribution addresses how social actors assign causes to outcomes. Da Silva and da Rocha (2001) were the first to suggest the plausibility of attribution theory in export barrier research. Attribution applies to the export barrier discourse at two levels: At a summative level, outcomes such as poor international performance or even failure of international operations are frequently attributed to export barriers. The concept of locus of control is crucial for understanding the application of attribution theory at a secondary level. While an internal locus of control assigns in-house ‘controllable’ causes, an external locus of control places ascription on external ‘non-controllable’ elements. Underpinning export barrier research is a ‘taken for granted assumption’ that internationalizing firms are at the mercy of the external/task environment. Twenty-one studies (e.g. Barnes, Chakrabarti, & Palihawadana, 2006; Barker & Kaynak 1992; Barrett & Wilkinson, 1985; Cavusgil, 1984; Da Silva & da Rocha, 2001; Gripsrud, 1990; Karagozoglu & Lindell, 1998; Tesfom et al., 2006), highlighting external barriers are more confounding than those within the firm’s control are premised on this pattern of attribution. As causal attributions, external export barriers play a self-serving role in explaining why the export development undertaking is ‘external’ to, and beyond a firm’s control.

### 3.2.6. Rationalization theory

Central to rationalization theory is the human predisposition toward finding justification, excuses, or explanations for behavior (Cherepanov, Feddersen, & Sandroni, 2013; Jones 1908). Drawing on

**Table 4**  
Change in Methodological Profile over Time.

Element	1971–1979	1980–1988	1989–1997	1998–2006	2007–2016	Total
<i>n</i>	3	14	32	23	28	100
<i>Survey method<sup>a</sup></i>						
Mail/Postal	2 (66.7%)	10 (71.4%)	28 (87.5%)	22 (95.7%)	20 (71.4%)	82
Phone		2 (14.3%)	1 (3.1%)			3
Personal	1 (33.3%)	4 (28.6%)	4 (12.5%)	1 (4.3%)	1 (3.6%)	11
Online/Electronic					7 (25.0%)	7
<i>Statistical Analysis<sup>a</sup></i>						
Descriptive/univariate	1 (33.3%)	11 (78.6%)	11 (34.4%)	9 (39.1%)	4 (14.3%)	36
Inferential/multivariate	2 (66.7%)	3 (21.4%)	23 (71.9%)	17 (73.9%)	19 (67.8%)	64
Advanced multivariate					5 (17.9%)	5
<i>Average sample size</i>	215.7	170.9	254.1	169.3	235.6	
<i>Average response rates</i>	42.0%	36.1%	42.2%	34.4%	45.7%	

<sup>a</sup> Totals exceed *n* because some studies use multiple methods/tools.

Jones (1908), Shorr (1954) advances that rationalization is fundamentally an ego defensive mechanism, and using a series of experiments, he outlines ten common ways individuals rationalize ‘non-involvement’. The reasons include *poor motivation, perception of difficulty, and fear of discomfort*. Rationalization theory is relevant in explaining why some firms internationalize whereas others do not. Here, the ‘taken for granted assumption’ is that going international is always more difficult than serving the domestic market. This aligns with common causes of non-involvement per Shorr’s (1954) experiments. Christensen et al. (1987) and Eshghi (1992) were among the earliest scholars to suggest the applicability of this theory to export barrier research. Rationalization is implicit in 25 studies (e.g. Bianchi & Wickramasekera, 2013; Eshghi 1992; Kaynak & Kothari, 1984; Ramaseshan & Soutar 1996; Shih and Wickramasekera 2011; Simpson & Kujawa 1974; Tseng & Yu, 199; Yaprak 1985), which indicate non-exporters evaluate export barriers as more problematic, than exporters. For non-exporters, barriers provide rationalization mechanism to justify the status quo (i.e. non-involvement in international operations).

### 3.3. Methodological profile

#### 3.3.1. Research setting

Research covers 32 countries, and Table 3 shows the most regularly surveyed. Twenty-five percent of the research surveys USA exporters. All but one (i.e. Barrett & Wilkinson, 1985) of the first 10 studies in this review used a USA sample. The Midwest region (e.g. Bilkey & Tesar, 1977; Cavusgil, 1984; Yaprak, 1985) is disproportionately represented, which speaks to the early influence of academic institutions and scholars in this area. Overall, seven countries (i.e. Australia, Canada, Greece, New Zealand, Turkey, UK, and USA) account for 61% (i.e. 66 of 108) of the samples used in this research.

#### 3.3.2. Research design and data collection

All but six studies utilize a single cross-section approach.<sup>7</sup> The longitudinal studies identified are relatively recent, with four of them having been published 2008 onwards – a signal researchers are starting to respond to this glaring void. Cross-national comparisons (e.g. Bell, 1997; Schlegelmilch, 1986) are limited to five studies. Table 4 shows mail surveys are the most frequently used approach, appearing in 82 studies. While their use has remained stable, recent years have seen a drop in the adoption of personal and phone methods. It may be that online/electronic methods, whose use increased post-2007, are replacing these traditional approaches.

<sup>7</sup> The paucity of longitudinal studies is a recurring theme, not only regarding export barriers (Cahen, Lahiri, & Borini, 2016), but also with respect to exporting and internationalization in general (Chen et al., 2016; Paul et al., 2017).

#### 3.3.3. Sample sizes and response rates

Table 4 also shows the largest average sample size ( $n = 254.1$ ) was recorded in the period 1989–1997, while the highest response rates (i.e. 45.7%) were attained in the most recent period. There is a large range in sample sizes (i.e. smallest –  $n = 33$ , and largest –  $n = 2159$ ) and response rates, which fall between seven and 100%. Discrepancies stem from the diverse approaches to research design. Larger sample sizes (i.e.  $n > 400$ ) are confined to studies that include multiple industries and both exporters and non-exporters as the unit(s) of analysis. Likewise, higher response rates are achievable in studies utilizing non-probabilistic sampling.

#### 3.3.4. Measurement and analysis

Twenty-six studies elucidate on non-response bias.<sup>8</sup> Key informants are another potential source of bias. Half the studies identify key informants, and 22 expressly test for bias. Testing for common method bias is limited to nine studies. The one factor test is the most frequently used. Finally, Table 4 depicts the evolution of analytical rigor. While the first 20 papers utilized descriptive statistics, 21 of the 25 most recent employ inferential or advanced multivariate statistical analysis. The 1990’s are the inflection point for statistical rigor, and the period 1989–1997, saw widespread adoption of inferential/multivariate tools. Nonetheless, advanced multivariate analytical methods [(e.g., confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM)] are limited to five studies.

### 3.4. Number and types of export barriers

#### 3.4.1. Export barrier scales

*Degree of difficulty/severity* and *level of importance/influence* are the two most regularly used anchors for export barriers scales, appearing in more than three-quarters of the studies. The total number of export barrier items utilized in these scales, exceeds 80. Table 5 shows the most frequently (i.e. 10 times or more) researched export barriers.<sup>9</sup> *Strong competition in overseas markets* is the most commonly researched barrier, appearing in nearly two-thirds of the studies, followed by *inadequate/untrained staff, locating a suitable agent/distributor, gathering data/information about foreign markets, and preparing/handling export documentation*. The majority of the barriers in the top 25 form part of a core group of 18 constraints, common across 52 studies. However, there remains no cross-nationally validated export barrier scale, much less a universal one.

#### 3.4.2. Export barrier groupings

Functional areas (i.e. distribution, finance, human resources,

<sup>8</sup> This approach derives from Armstrong and Overton (1977).

<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding, this review considers all barriers examined in each study.

**Table 5**  
The Most Commonly Researched Export Barriers.

	Barrier Items	Time Period					Total <sup>a</sup>
		'71-'79	'80-'88	'89-'97	'98-'06	'07-'16	
1	Strong competition in overseas markets		12	17	18	19	66
2	Inadequate/untrained personnel for exporting		8	14	15	14	51
3	Locating a suitable agent/distributor	1	10	11	16	12	50
4	Gathering data/information about foreign markets		10	15	8	13	46
5	Preparing/handling export documentation		10	15	8	10	43
6	Exchange rate risk/fluctuations	1	3	10	13	16	43
7	Delays/difficulties in collecting on foreign payments	1	4	10	12	16	43
8	High tariff barriers		4	12	11	16	43
9	Excessive transportation/insurance costs	1	5	11	9	15	41
10	Lack of government incentives/support		9	11	9	12	41
11	Language barriers		6	10	11	13	40
12	Strict foreign rules and regulations		9	12	10	9	40
13	Offering competitive prices		7	13	8	11	39
14	Limited working capital to support exports		8	9	8	12	37
15	Lack of access to distribution channels		7	9	10	11	37
16	High risks in selling abroad		4	10	12	11	37
17	Meeting export product quality requirements		3	8	10	14	35
18	Cultural differences		6	7	10	12	35
19	Lack of excess/dedicated production capacity for exports		6	6	9	11	32
20	Designing/adapting products for foreign markets	1	6	11	5	9	32
21	High non-tariff barriers		4	4	9	15	32
22	Offering technical/after sales services	1	6	7	6	10	30
23	Shipping/transportation difficulties		2	9	9	10	30
24	Lack of experience/knowledge in overseas markets		4	6	11	8	29
25	Lack of financial assistance		4	5	7	11	27
26	Political/economic instability in overseas markets		3	5	7	12	27
27	Complex export procedures and regulations	1	6	2	6	11	26
28	High value of/appreciating domestic currency		5	10	4	7	26
29	Inability to identify foreign opportunities	1	5	6	6	7	25
30	Adapting advertising/promotion for overseas markets		4	9	6	6	25
31	Different customer habits/product usage behavior		4	3	7	10	24
32	Communicating with overseas customers		3	12	3	5	23
33	Focus on domestic market		6	6	4	6	22
34	Different business practices in foreign markets	1	1	3	6	11	22
35	Lack of managerial time to deal with exports	1	1	3	8	8	21
36	Cost of market development	1	3	1	7	8	20
37	Unfavorable home regulations/policies		2	3	3	11	19
38	Lack of management focus and commitment		1	4	3	9	17
39	Providing inventory overseas on a continuous basis		1	7	4	4	16
40	Meeting packaging requirements	1	2	8	2	2	15
41	High cost of capital to finance exports			8	3	4	15
42	Lack of managerial expertise			5	4	4	13
43	Lack of export marketing research			8	4		12
44	Inflation and interest rates			2	3	5	10

<sup>a</sup> Since the number of studies equals 100, totals equate to percentages.

logistics, marketing, and production) provide the most common approach for classifying export barriers (see Arranz & de Arroyabe, 2009; Christensen, Da Rocha, & Gertner, 1987; Crick, 2002; Katsikeas & Morgan, 1994; Ramaseshan & Soutar, 1996; Uner et al., 2013).<sup>10</sup> Some studies (see Kahiya et al., 2014; Kaleka & Katsikeas, 1995; Shoham & Albaum, 1995) adopt dichotomies (i.e. internal-external, home – host market, people-product, controllable-noncontrollable, and static-dynamic), while others (e.g. Arteaga-Ortiz & Fernández-Ortiz, 2010; Suarez-Ortega, 2003) amalgamate barriers into four groups; knowledge and experience, procedures, resources, and exogenous. To date, there is no single universal typology for encapsulating export barriers.

### 3.5. Export barriers as outcomes

Table 6 highlights each of the predictors and the frequency of usage. Eighty-nine percent (i.e. 32 out of 36) of the predictors in this systematic review are corroborated by past literature reviews.

#### 3.5.1. Firm demographics

This review identifies eight demographic factors. *Export status* (i.e. exporter vs. non-exporter), *firm size*, and *industry sector* are the most routinely researched. *Export status* appears in more than a quarter of the studies. Demographic factors generally align with the RBV. Research hypothesizes the larger the resource-base, the lower the influence of export barriers.

#### 3.5.2. Export venture characteristics

Fourteen export venture characteristics influence export barriers. *Export stage* is the most frequently studied, and appears in roughly twice as many studies as the next factors – *export intensity* and *level of involvement*. These export venture characteristics embody a firm's degree of internationalization (DOI), and align with the incremental or process-based perspective.

#### 3.5.3. Management factors

Seven management characteristics influence export barriers. Examination of management characteristics is sparse, and the most regularly used factor, *ownership link*, appears in two papers. Often, managerial characteristics speak to networking or entrepreneurial

<sup>10</sup> Refer to Leonidou (2004) for an in-depth description of export barrier classification.

**Table 6**  
Classification and Frequency of Adoption of Drivers.<sup>a</sup>

List of Variables		Frequency	Percentage <sup>a</sup>
<b>Internal Factors</b>	<i>Firm Demographics</i>		
	Export status	25	27.17%
	Firm size <sup>b</sup>	22	23.91%
	Industry sector	11	11.96%
	Firm age	3	3.26%
	Ownership structure	2	2.17%
	Background organization	1	1.09%
	Domestic market share	1	1.09%
	Firm profitability	1	1.09%
	<i>Export Venture Characteristics</i>		
	Export stage	15	16.30%
	Export intensity	7	7.61%
	Level of involvement	7	7.61%
	Export orientation	6	6.52%
	International experience	5	5.43%
	Entry mode (EM)	4	4.35%
	Market expansion strategy	4	4.35%
	Venture type	3	3.26%
	Use of information technology	3	3.26%
	Export intensity growth	1	1.09%
	Export intention	1	1.09%
	Export profit contribution	1	1.09%
	Export value	1	1.09%
	Use of market research	1	1.09%
	<i>Managerial Characteristics</i>		
	Ownership link	2	2.17%
	Decision-making style	1	1.09%
	Management experience	1	1.09%
	Network composition	1	1.09%
	Network size	1	1.09%
	Resource commitment	1	1.09%
	Tie strength	1	1.09%
<b>External Factors</b>	<i>Environmental and Operational Factors</i>		
	Institutional differences	5	5.43%
	Cultural/psychic distance	4	4.35%
	Institutional change	3	3.26%
	Business confidence	1	1.09%
	<i>International Trading Environment</i>		
	Export assistance	1	1.09%
Trade liberalization	1	1.09%	
Trade protectionism	1	1.09%	

<sup>a</sup> Calculated as frequency of use divided by total number of studies in the review.

capabilities.<sup>11</sup> Literature posits the greater the manager's (networking/entrepreneurial) aptitude, the lower the influence of export barriers.

### 3.5.4. Environmental and operational factors

*Institutional differences* and *cultural distance* are the two most commonly researched environmental and operational factors, followed by *institutional change* and *business confidence*. Regarding these factors, studies suggest that the greater the difference/distance, the higher the influence of export barriers.

### 3.5.5. International trading environment

Three variables – *export assistance*, *trade liberalization*, and *trade protectionism*, encapsulate the link between the international trading environment and export barriers. Research posits that the more supportive/co-operative the trading environment, the lower the influence of export barriers.

### 3.5.6. Summary of independent variables

Overall, each study examines an average of two predictors.

<sup>11</sup> Refer to Leonidou et al. (1998) for a comprehensive treatment of managerial determinants of exporting.

Leonidou's (2000) paper, which pits eight demographic factors against an equal number of export venture characteristics, is by far the most comprehensive in its coverage of predictors. Irrespective of specific category, the five most regularly researched predictors are *export status*, *firm size*, *industry sector*, *export stage*, and *export intensity/level of involvement*.

### 3.6. Export barriers as predictors

Seven studies (see Altıntaş et al., 2007; Dean, Mengüç, & Myers, 2000; Julian & Ahmed, 2005; Kahiya & Dean, 2014; Katsikeas, Piercy, & Ioannidis, 1996; Köksal & Kettaneh, 2011; Mavrogiannis, Bourlakis, Dawson, & Ness, 2008), focus exclusively on export barriers as an antecedent to export performance.<sup>12</sup> Four (e.g. Altıntaş et al., 2007; Dean et al., 2000; Katsikeas et al., 1996; Köksal & Kettaneh, 2011) hypothesize that export barriers impede export performance. However, there are some exceptions (see Julian & Ahmed, 2005; Kahiya & Dean, 2014). These studies theorize both a negative and a positive relationship between export barriers and export performance.

There is evidence, for the generic postulation that export barriers have a negative effect on export performance. Altıntaş et al. (2007) and Mavrogiannis et al. (2008) provide the strongest support. This evidence pertains to *procedural*, *competition*, and *trade-related* barriers. Further, *management aspirations and predispositions* (see Dean et al., 2000; Julian & Ahmed 2005) and *knowledge and experience barriers* (see Kahiya & Dean 2014; Katsikeas et al., 1996) have an inverse relationship with export performance. Köksal and Kettaneh's (2011) cross-national comparison of Lebanese and Turkish exporters uncovers analogous patterns. For instance, their results show *trade-related barriers* have a negative influence on the performance of both Lebanese and Turkish exporters – findings consistent with Kahiya and Dean (2014) and Mavrogiannis et al. (2008). While *resources barriers* have a negative influence in both samples, different subgroups of *resource barriers* capture the relationship. *Market development costs* impact Lebanese exporters, while *operational and capacity constraints* affect their Turkish counterparts.

Four (i.e. Dean et al., 2000; Julian & Ahmed, 2005; Kahiya & Dean, 2014; Köksal & Kettaneh, 2011) of these seven studies reveal some barriers have a positive association with export performance. They encompass *adapting to foreign markets* (Julian & Ahmed, 2005; Kahiya & Dean, 2014), dealing with *foreign exchange risk* (Dean et al., 2000), and *international competition* (Köksal & Kettaneh, 2011). There are two plausible explanations: from a methodological perspective, lexical differences in scale development may account for this. Scales in all four studies request respondents to evaluate the *importance* of barriers, a notion differing from the more commonly adopted approach of evaluating them by the *degree to which they hinder/degree of difficulty*.<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, barriers may be triggers for specific response mechanisms, whose effect is that of improving export performance.

### 3.7. Export barriers as mediators and moderators

Karakaya and Yannopoulos (2012) are the sole study incorporating mediation into the analysis. They investigate the relationship between export support and export performance, and propose export barriers mediate this link. Moderation is limited to Baum, Schwens, and Kabst's. (2013) study. They propose, and test three hypotheses based on a moderated relationship between competencies/demographics and export status. Financial impediments and market barriers are the moderators.

<sup>12</sup> While the focus of their study is export barriers as outcomes, Adu-Gyamfi and Korneliusen (2013) also test export barriers as predictors.

<sup>13</sup> Both Moini (1997) and Da Silva and da Rocha (2001) have attempted to steer research in this direction, in the past.

**Table 7**  
Influence of Drivers on Export Barriers.

Antecedent	Knowledge barriers			Resource barriers			Procedural barriers			Exogenous barriers			Overall for all export barriers			
	+	0	–	+	0	–	+	0	–	+	0	–	Total <sup>a</sup>	+	0	–
<i>Firm Demographics (FD)</i>																
Export status (ES)	18	2	1	11	8	2	12	2	4	9	6	7	82	50	18	14
Firm size (FZ)	3	1	11	2	5	12	3	7	5	5	8	62	10	14	38	
Industry sector (IS)	6	2		7	4	1	3	3	1	7	2	36	23	11	2	
Firm age (FA)			2			2			1		2	1	8		2	6
Ownership structure (OS)			1			2			1		1	5				5
Background organization (BO)	1			1					1		1	4	2			2
Domestic market share (DMS)			1			1			1		1	4			1	3
Firm profitability (FP)			1			1			1		1	4			1	3
<i>Export Venture Characteristics (EVC)</i>																
Export stage (EST)	2	2	8	6	2	7	3	5	8	7	6	3	59	18	15	26
Export intensity (EI)		4	2	2	5	2	3	2		1	7	1	29	6	18	5
Level of involvement (LI)	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1			3		12	3	7	2
Export orientation (EO)	1	1	4	2	1	5	2	1	5	1	1	4	28	6	4	18
International experience (IE)		1	2	1	1	2		1	2	1	3		14	2	3	9
Entry mode (EM)	1	1		2			2	1	1	2	1		11	7	3	1
Market expansion strategy (MES)		1	3	2		1	3		1	1	1		13	6	2	5
Venture type (VT)			1			2	1		1		2		8	1	2	5
Use of information technology (IT)			1		1	1		2	3		1	2	11		3	8
Export intensity growth (EIG)		1			1			1					3		3	
Export intention (EIN)	1			1						1		1	4	3		1
Export profit contribution (EPC)		1			1			1			1		4		4	
Export value (EV)																
Use of market research (UMR)								1			1		2		2	
<i>Managerial Characteristics (MC)</i>																
Ownership link (OL)	2	1		2	1			1		1			8	5	3	
Decision-making style (DM)		1			1			1			1		4		4	
Management experience (ME)					1								1		1	
Resource commitment (RC)					1								1		1	
Network size (NS)		1			1			1			1		4		4	
Network composition (NC)						1				1		1	4		1	3
Tie strength (TS)			1		1			1			1		4		1	3
<i>Environmental and Operational Factors (EOF)</i>																
Institutional differences (ID)	2	1		2	1		3	1		5	1	2	18	12	4	2
Institutional change (IC)		1	2	3	2		1	1	1	2	2	1	16	6	6	4
Cultural/psychic distance (CPD)			3						2		1		6		1	5
Business confidence (BC)			1	1			1			1			4	1		3
<i>International Trading Environment (ITE)</i>																
Export assistance (EA)		1						1			1		3		3	
Trade liberalization (TL)											1		1		1	
Trade protectionism (TP)										1			1	1		

(+) denotes a positive relationship, (–) denotes a negative relationship, (0) denotes ‘weak’ or ‘no’ relationship.

<sup>a</sup> Total refers to the frequency with which the association between variables occurred as opposed to the number of studies.

Karakaya and Yannopoulos (2012) illustrate the direct path between export support and export performance is not statistically significant. However, export support has a measurable indirect impact by reducing *payment constraints* and *resource problems*. Thus, export support is impactful on performance, in as much as it insulates firms against the brunt of export barriers. Baum et al. (2013) find that financial barriers moderate the relationships between each of the three predictors (i.e. *growth orientation*, *international network contacts*, and *knowledge intensity*) and internationalization. However, market-based barriers do not moderate this relationship.

#### 4. Synthesis

From a ‘hierarchies of evidence’ perspective, an *effect-size* statistical meta-analysis is the most robust method for pooling results from different studies (Glass, 1976; Rousseau et al., 2008; Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). Although this method is gaining traction in International Business (see Leonidou, Katsikeas, & Samiee, 2002; Leonidou et al., 2014), Tranfield et al. (2003) Tranfield et al. (2003, p.213) outline differences between medicine and management, and use these to underscore instances where this approach may be problematic. Specifically, it demands a high degree of correspondence concerning the working populations from which samples are drawn, definition and

operationalization of constructs, and use of statistical methods (Hedges & Olkin 1980; Tranfield et al., 2003, Tranfield et al., 2003 p.217). As the earlier discussion outlined, there is methodological diversity in this research stream. Although lacking the precision of a statistical meta-analysis (Rousseau et al., 2008; Tranfield et al., 2003), vote counting ‘can have an important place in the meta-analyst’s toolbox’ (Bushman and Wang, 2009 p. 208).

In conventional vote counting, a study is the unit of analysis, and a ‘one study one vote’ system tallies the votes. However, where a study comprises multiple experiments, it is instructive to modify the voting system such that each experiment casts a vote (Dochy, Segers, Van den Bossche, & Gijbels, 2003). This modified approach focuses on the number of associations between independent and dependent variables observed across all experiments in all studies. Leonidou et al. (1998) used this approach to tally votes on the association between managerial factors and four export dimensions, while Zou and Stan (1998) utilized it to elaborate on the association between multiple drivers and seven indicators of export performance. The logic is also evident in Li et al. (2016) Li et al’s. (2016) recent review on export channel selection.

The review employs modified vote counting to aggregate the associations between 36 predictors and four main export barrier groupings – ‘knowledge and experience’, ‘procedural’, ‘resources’, and ‘exogenous’. Knowledge-related barriers are communication, informational

and experience-based; procedural barriers pertain to logistics and documentation; resource barriers refer to human, financial, and physical capacity constraints, and exogenous barriers are institutional and industry-based. These four classes constitute the most empirically robust and parsimonious way of amalgamating export barrier items and factors in extant literature (per [Arteaga-Ortiz & Fernández-Ortiz, 2010](#); [Arteaga-Ortiz and Fernández-Ortiz, 2010](#), p. 404–406).

The synthesis presented in [Table 7](#) adopts the standard convention of the direction of statistically significant relationships at ( $p < .05$ ) (Light & Smith, 1971). A vote captures the frequency with which a statistically significant association occurs. The number of votes a study casts is a function of the drivers and barriers examined, in that study. For instance, a study investigating the link between *firm size* and the four groups of barriers, casts four votes, each representing how *firm size* influences a specific barrier group. Likewise, the total number of votes associated with each driver is a multiple of the number of studies examining that driver and the barriers covered. For example, twenty-five studies (refer to [Table 6](#)) investigate the relationship between *export status* and *export barriers*. These studies can cast up to 100 votes (i.e. 25 factors across four barrier groups). The tally of 82 votes shown in [Table 7](#) arises from the fact that not all studies address all groups of barriers. For instance, 18 studies (12 + 2 + 4 votes) examine the association between *export status* and *procedural barriers*. The subsequent section underlines the patterns of associations (i.e. ‘positive’, ‘negative’, and ‘weak’/‘no’ – relationship) between drivers and export barriers.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4.1. Factors exacerbating export barriers

There is a positive association between seven drivers (i.e. *export status*, *industry sector*, *entry mode*, *export intention*, *ownership link*, *institutional differences*, and *trade protectionism*) and export barriers. Countless studies (e.g. [Al-Hyari, Al-Weshah, & Alnsour, 2012](#); [Barker & Kaynak, 1992](#); [Eshghi, 1992](#); [Pinho & Martins, 2010](#); [Rabino, 1980](#); [Ramaseshan & Soutar, 1996](#); [Yaprak, 1985](#)) investigating *export status*, test the proposition that export barriers are more problematic for non-exporters than exporters. Results (i.e. 50 out of 82 votes) generally support this hypothesis. Yet, there is no universally accepted rationale for this. [Korth \(1991\)](#) dismissed this as managerial myopia, while [Knight and Cavusgil \(2004\)](#) viewed it as a legacy of domestic market inertia. Moreover, [Bilkey \(1978\)](#) had asserted that non-exporters have no basis of knowing what exporting entails. This is an area where *rationalization theory* should generate new insights.

Twenty-three out of 36 votes support the hypothesis that ‘the more competitive or regulated the *industry sector*, the higher the influence of export barriers’ (see [Da Silva & da Rocha, 2001](#); [Kedia & Chhokar, 1986](#); [Leonidou, 2000](#); [Silva, Franco, & Magrinho, 2016](#); [Tesfom et al., 2006](#)). *Industry sectors* facing substantial competition or hamstrung by regulatory frameworks, consider barriers more influential than those in which these dynamics are not prevalent. The link explains the varying levels of participation and success in export development observed across different *industry sectors*. It is compatible with [Fernhaber, McDougall, and Oviatt, 2007](#) who elucidate on how characteristics of *industry sectors* influence internationalization.

Concerning *entry mode* (e.g. [Crick, 2007](#); [Kwon & Hu, 1996](#); [Mahone & Choudhury, 1995](#)), there is support (i.e. seven out of 11 votes) for the hypothesis that the more advanced the *entry mode*, the higher the influence of export barriers. A higher entry mode imposes additional demands on the firm regarding resources and commitment. *Export intention*, *ownership link*, *institutional differences*, and *trade protectionism* also show a positive association with export barriers. An intention to export (three out of four votes) generates a heightened sense of

awareness, conditioning a firm to notice, export barriers. Export barriers are more influential (i.e. five out of eight votes) for owner-managers than for managers with no ownership ties (see [Kaputa et al., 2016](#); [Shaw & Darroch, 2004](#)). ‘Personal involvement’ may be the rationale for the link, particularly in those SMEs where owners and ventures are ‘inseparable’. This corroborates the notion of inseparable effects (see [Ramaswamy, 2001](#)). Twelve out of 18 votes support a positive relationship between *institutional differences* and export barriers (see [Schlegelmilch 1986](#); [Smith, Gregoire, & Lu, 2006](#); [Sullivan & Bauerschmidt, 1989](#)). Likewise, *trade protectionism* (e.g. [Korneliusen & Blasius, 2008](#)) has a positive relationship with export barriers. Thus, understanding the effect of the global business environment is paramount, especially in times of environmental turbulence ([Matanda & Freeman, 2009](#)).

#### 4.2. Factors mitigating export barriers

Five demographic factors (i.e. *firm age*, *firm size*, *ownership structure*, *domestic market share*, and *firm profitability*) have a negative influence on export barriers. Studies (see [Awan 2011](#); [Leonidou 1995b, 2000](#)) show an inverse relationship (six out of eight votes) between the *firm’s age* and export barriers. Older and experienced firms tap into established routines, which play a vital role in reducing the influence of export barriers. Regarding *firm size*, 38 out of 62 votes support the hypothesis that ‘the larger the firm, the lower the influence of export barriers’ (see [Adu-Gyamfi & Korneliusen, 2013](#); [Crick, Al Obaidi, & Chaudhry, 1998](#); [Da Silva & da Rocha, 2001](#); [Jones, 1980](#); [Karafakioglu, 1986](#); [Katsikeas & Morgan, 1994](#)).<sup>15</sup> Larger firms are likely to have production capacity dedicated to exporting, ample working capital to finance exports, and a dedicated export/international sales department with skilled personnel.

Concerning *ownership structure* (see [Crick & Chaudhry, 1997](#); [Saeed & Vincent, 2011](#)), all five votes back the hypothesis that export barriers decrease where a firm possesses ownership-related advantages. For instance, the absence of the ‘alien’ stigma, which shadows some ethnic or immigrant-owned businesses, means indigenous-owned export ventures perceive lower barriers. This substantiates [Bates \(1997\)](#) Bates’ (1997) portrayal of ‘blocked mobility’ to which ethnic and immigrant-owned ventures are susceptible. *Domestic market share* and *firm profits* (three out of four votes for each of the variables) have a negative influence on export barriers. These metrics help create cash flow or working capital necessary to fund international expansion.

Four export venture characteristics – *export orientation*, *international experience*, *venture type*, and *use of information technology*, have a negative influence on export barriers. Research (e.g. [Arranz & de Arroyabe, 2009](#); [Campbell, 1996](#); [Ibeh & Young, 2001](#)) supports (i.e. 18 out of 28 votes) the perspective that adoption of a proactive or aggressive (as opposed to a reactive or passive) orientation reduces the influence of export barriers. This finding is generally consistent with the performance-related advantages of entrepreneurial and market orientation in extant literature (e.g. [Cadogan, Diamantopoulos, & De Mortanges, 1999](#)). Numerous studies (see [Albaou, 1983](#); [Da Silva & da Rocha, 2001](#); [Jones, 1980](#); [Leonidou, 2000](#)) support the hypothesized inverse connection (i.e. nine of 14 votes) between *international experience* and export barriers. Experience in exporting fosters learning and creates a knowledge reservoir the firm can access. This is compatible with the so-called ‘learn from exporting’ hypothesis (see [MacGarvie, 2006](#)). Regarding *venture type*, five out of eight votes, suggest the existence of prior knowledge pertinent to international expansion (e.g. re-exporting firms and international new ventures) reduces the influence of export barriers (see [Crick, 2002](#); [Kahiya, 2013](#)). The results are consistent with [Zheng, Khavul, and Crockett, 2012](#) who explain the connection between pre-internationalization experience and subsequent international

<sup>14</sup> (see [Chen et al. \(2016\)](#); [Katsikeas et al. \(2000\)](#); [Leonidou \(1998\)](#); [Leonidou et al. \(1998\)](#); [Li et al. \(2016\)](#); [Sousa et al. \(2008\)](#); [Wheeler et al. \(2008\)](#); and [Zou and Stan \(1998\)](#)).

<sup>15</sup> This includes ‘company assets’ and ‘number of employees’.

expansion. Studies (e.g. Awan, 2011; Bennett, 1997; Hornby et al., 2002) examining the link between *information technology* and export barriers show an inverse relationship (i.e. eight of 11 votes). This is compatible with research (e.g. Hamill, 1997; Petersen, Welch, & Liesch, 2002) detailing the facilitating role IT plays in international expansion.

*Network composition* and *tie strength* have a negative influence (i.e. three out of four votes for each of the variables) on export barriers. Networks comprising heterogeneous actors prosper from the diversity of support, which helps disable export barriers. Correspondingly, strong ties augment the benefits. This perspective is extensively supported by studies (e.g. Coviello & Munro, 1997; Freeman et al., 2006; Ghauri et al., 2003) on network-based internationalization. Results suggest the influence of export barriers escalates with a fall in *business confidence* (see Kahiya & Dean, 2015). Thus, an increase in *business confidence* should alleviate export barriers. While literature generally hypothesizes that the influence of export barriers increases with greater *cultural or psychic distance*, results of this review (e.g. Leonidou 2000) depict an unanticipated inverse relationship. Nonetheless, the inverse link is consistent with O'Grady and Lane's (1996) portrayal of the psychic distance paradox.<sup>16</sup>

#### 4.3. Factors generating conflicting results

Four drivers (i.e. *background organization*, *export stage*, *market expansion strategy*, and *institutional change*) have a 'conflicting' influence on export barriers. Although the existence of a *background organization* is conceptualized as having an inverse relationship with export barriers, evidence backs both an inverse and a direct relationship (i.e. two votes apiece). While a *background organization* offers structure, it may stymie flexibility and responsiveness. Results deriving from *export stage* (e.g. Bilkey & Tesar, 1977; Cavusgil, 1984; Kahiya & Dean, 2016; Naidu & Rao, 1993; Sharkey et al., 1989; Suarez-Ortega, 2003; Uner et al., 2013) show a conflicting influence, with wide-ranging support (i.e. 15 votes or more, out of 59) for the three categories 'positive', 'negative' and 'no'-influence. Generally, literature suggests an inverse relationship between export stages and export barriers [see Leonidou and Katsikeas' (1996) review on stage models]. The decrease in the influence of *knowledge barriers* across *export stages* substantiates, whereas the increase in the influence of *procedural barriers* contradicts the hypothesis. Moreover, *resource* and *exogenous* barriers are mostly impervious to *export stages*. These conflicting results refute the overarching hypothesis suggesting a uniform decline in export barriers across stages, and implicitly endorse the evolutionary perspective to the export stage/export barrier relationship. Barriers do not necessarily dissipate across *export stages*; their influence evolves to mirror a shift in the firm's adaptive choices as it extends its international footprint.

The relationship between *market expansion strategy* and export barriers (e.g. Kaleka and Katsikeas 1995; Leonidou, 2000) produced mixed results (i.e. six votes for a positive and five for a negative link). While diversification engenders economies of scope regarding shipping/logistics and reduced dependency on a few markets, it culminates in complexity-related costs and additional resource needs. *Institutional change* (see Bjarnason et al., 2015; Da Rocha et al., 2008) generated conflicting results (i.e. four votes or more, out of 16, for each of the categories 'positive', 'negative' and 'no' relationship). Perhaps the underlying hypothesis should be non-directional, with the influence of export barriers shifting (positively or negatively) in response to the specific nature of *institutional changes*.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4.4. Factors generating 'Weak' or 'No' relationship

Twelve drivers have 'no' influence on export barriers. They comprise six export venture characteristics (i.e. *export intensity*, *export value*, *level of involvement*, *export intensity growth*, *export profit contribution*, and *use of market research*), four managerial characteristics (i.e. *decision-making style*, *management experience*, *resource commitment*, and *network size*), and two elements of the international trading environment (*export assistance* and *trade liberalization*). It is striking that export intensity, one of the most frequently researched indicators of DOI/performance, generated a 'weak' or 'no' relationship. Regarding managerial characteristics and elements of the international trading environment, the lack of clear relationships possibly emanates from a limited sample of empirical studies probing such drivers.

### 5. Conclusions and implications

This systematic review sought to investigate; (1) the factors associated with export barriers, (2) theories underlying this, and (3) the specific nature of the relationship(s). The review indicates export barriers are primarily an outcome. Drivers of export barriers encompass firm demographics, managerial factors, export venture characteristics, environmental and operational elements, and international trading environment. Table 8 summarizes the associations discussed. Specifically, (a) there is positive association between seven drivers (i.e. *export status*, *industry sector*, *entry mode*, *export intention*, *ownership link*, *institutional differences*, and *trade protectionism*) and export barriers; (b) five demographic factors and four export venture characteristics have a negative influence on export barriers; (c) four drivers have a 'conflicting' influence, while (d) twelve drivers have 'no' influence on export barriers. Not only do these findings have important implications for export managers, educators, and policymakers, they provide impetus for charting directions for future research.

#### 5.1. Export researchers

There is some support for all explicit theoretical perspectives relevant to this discourse. The negative influence on export barriers, of variables such as *firm size*, *firm age*, *ownership structure*, *domestic market share*, and *firm profitability* supports RBV.<sup>18</sup> The review corroborates findings from studies (e.g. Dhanaraj & Beamish 2003; Mittelstaedt et al., 2003; Westhead et al., 2001) taking an RBV perspective on internationalization. Likewise, DOI-related variables such as *export stage* and *international experience* endorse, albeit to a lesser extent, the *incremental internationalization* perspective.<sup>19</sup> This is in line with MacGarvie (2006) MacGarvie's (2006) description of the 'learn from exporting' precept. The results deriving from *institutional differences* and *trade protectionism* back institutional theory. The 'rules of the game' North (1990) alluded to, have a constraining effect on internationalization (see Welter & Smallbone, 2011). Variables like *network composition* and *tie strength* support the networking perspective. This corroborates the stream of research (e.g. Coviello & Munro 1995; Coviello & Munro, 1997; Ghauri et al., 2003; Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003) on network-based internationalization.

The responsiveness of export barriers to various drivers, paints a distinct pattern.<sup>20</sup> Myriad drivers influence *knowledge and experience barriers*, making them the most dynamic. The bulk of the 'positive' and 'negative' relationships, trace to these barriers. *Procedural barriers* are mostly dynamic in that while they remain unresponsive to firm

<sup>18</sup> Support is stronger for the sales indicator as opposed to *company assets* and *number of employees*.

<sup>19</sup> Regarding export stages, support is limited to knowledge and informational barriers.

<sup>20</sup> One can picture this as a continuum going from 'dynamic' (typified by *knowledge and experience barriers*) to 'static' (represented by *exogenous barriers*), with *procedural and resource barriers* fitting in the middle of the continuum.

<sup>16</sup> The measurement of culture remains topical enough to warrant a JIBS special issue, 46(9), 2015. 'What is culture and how do we measure it?'

<sup>17</sup> Two of the studies do not elucidate on whether such institutional change was beneficial or detrimental.

**Table 8**  
Summarized Results of the Synthesis.

Association	Firm Factors	Export Venture Characteristics	Managerial Factors	Operational and Environmental Factors	International Trading Environment	Total
Positive	Export status, Industry sector	Entry mode, Export intention	Ownership link	Institutional differences	Trade protectionism	7
Negative	Firm age, Firm size, Ownership structure, Domestic market share, Firm profitability	Export orientation, International experience, Information technology, Venture type	Network size, Tie strength	Business confidence, Cultural/Psychic distance		13
Conflicting Weak/No	Background organization	Export status, Market expansion strategy			Institutional change	4
		Export intensity, Level of involvement, Export intensity growth, Export profit contribution, Use of market research, Export value	Decision making style, Management experience, Resource commitment, Network size		Export assistance, Trade liberalization	12

demographics, they respond to export venture characteristics and managerial factors. *Resource barriers* are somewhat static as their influence changes in response to some firm demographics. As a general observation, ‘conflicting’ results pertain to ‘votes’ associated with *procedural* and *resource barriers*. *Exogenous barriers* are impervious to most of the drivers identified in this review. The bulk of the results indicating ‘weak’ or ‘no’ relationship, are attributable to *exogenous barriers*.

### 5.2. Export educators

Curriculum development in secondary and tertiary education, and ongoing professional development, benefit from this review. For instance, interest in IB, in secondary schools, emanates from embedding content in business classes, and ‘*understanding the basics of exporting*’ is pivotal (Sanchez & Geisler, 1994; Sanchez and Geisler, 1994, p.77). The comprehensive treatment of export barriers and factors associated with them, offers an important resource, educators should embrace to excite interest in IB. The review contributes to the threshold concept of firm internationalization and provides a reference point for educators and students (Zhao, 2016). Its updated nature allows educators to integrate the substance into teaching and learning resources, and for IB students, to utilize it as impetus for new lines of enquiry regarding the role barriers play in internationalization.

The review empowers educators involved in ongoing professional development. By elaborating on the association between drivers and export barriers, the review suggests topics and concepts suitable for seminars and workshops. For example, specialized seminars focusing on customs requirements, documentation, and foreign payments are fundamental for overcoming procedural barriers. Such seminars should tap into the expertise of customs departments, third-party logistics providers, and the banking industry – indispensable stakeholders in the ecosystem supporting exports.

### 5.3. Export managers

For managers, ‘resource proxies’ critical for surmounting barriers encompass *firm size*, *firm age*, *ownership structure*, *domestic market share*, and *firm profitability*. In addition, managers should develop the capacity to distinguish the export venture characteristics which inflate (e.g. *entry mode* and *export intention*), from those which dampen (e.g. *export orientation*, *international experience*, and *use of information technology*) the influence of export barriers. Perhaps, there exists an ‘optimal mix’ of export venture characteristics, around which managers can develop an ideal profile for their ventures, ensuring that the export development undertaking remains manageable.<sup>21</sup> This notion of making do with what you have coincides with *effectuation* as described by Sarasvathy (2001).

<sup>21</sup> Cluster analysis is a suitable approach to construct profiles of exporting firms (see Barrett & Wilkinson 1985).

A manager’s aptitude for networking increases their ability to overcome export barriers. It is not so much the size of the network, as it is its composition and strength of ties among members. Managers who belong to networks comprising diverse members, each sharing strong ties, have an advantage in surmounting export barriers. Networks have the capacity to reduce trade, institutional, and cultural distances, while creating ‘insider positions’, even in distant markets.

### 5.4. Policymakers

Export barriers mirror exporters’ needs and provide a platform for need-based segmentation, a vital component in a national export strategy (NES). The exhaustive review of drivers of export barriers generates insights on the efficacy of targeted stimuli. For instance, need-based targeting can derive from ‘export-status’ (i.e. difference between exporters and non-exporters). Support programmes focusing on providing knowledge and informational resources, about international markets, may go some way in removing the stigma that export development is unduly burdensome. Similarly, targeting at the industry-level could focus on sectors with lower participation rates in international markets, low export performance, or intermittent export patterns (entry, exit, re-entry) with a view to assisting firms overcome industry-related barriers.<sup>22</sup>

While the relevance of fine-grained approaches is evident, the review advocates the adoption of mass targeting techniques. These approaches benefit all internationalizing firms regardless of industry, export status or other attributes. One such approach should address the empowerment and upskilling of decision-makers. The synthesis showed networking aptitude and proactive entrepreneurial orientation dampen outsidership-related barriers. Policymakers should offer training to impart, and emphasize the significance of these attributes to internationalization. Fostering a supportive and cooperative environment is another mass-targeting approach for stimulating exports. The synthesis pointed to the existence of a stubborn group of exogenous export barriers whose impact is static or universal. Evidently, most of these barriers ensue from the institutional environment, and astute macro-economic and trade policy is fundamental for tackling them.

## 6. Directions for future research

There is a sizeable volume of work, published over a 50-year period, comprising 100 peer-reviewed empirical studies examining factors associated with export barriers. The study has reasoned that the existence of this body of work justifies a systematic review. Nonetheless, as the results and discussion illustrated, the sheer volume of research belies manifest gaps and contradictions within this body of knowledge. It is against this background that the paper outlines an agenda for future research.

<sup>22</sup> See Vissak and Masso (2015) for an exposition of intermittent export patterns.

### 6.1. Research setting and methodological profile

Emerging and transitioning markets, particularly Sub Saharan Africa, Central and Eastern Europe, and Southeast Asia, remain underrepresented. This hampers efforts to develop generalizable theory. The review welcomes renewed interest by several journals to pledge special issues to internationalization activities in developing and transitioning markets.<sup>23</sup> However, what is required is not tokenism, but an ongoing commitment, on the part of publishers and editors, to attract and promote research from these regions.

Additional cross-national comparisons will contribute, not only to extant knowledge, but also to methodology, especially in the realm of ‘measurement’ and ‘equivalence’. While the number of longitudinal studies has increased over the past decade, most of this research is not quintessentially longitudinal, as the samples include ‘original’ ‘surviving’ and ‘new items’. Future studies should utilize a pure longitudinal approach to overcome the indeterminacy complications that confound multiple cross-sectional and quasi-longitudinal research. Longitudinal research is instrumental for testing the stability of scales/instruments and explanatory power of theory over time.

Although recent literature provides an overview of procedures used to determine key informant and non-response biases, research overlooks common method bias/variance.<sup>24</sup> Future research should test for, and determine its potential to bias a study. Subsequent studies should also adopt advanced analytical techniques to enhance methodological rigor and put research on the export barrier construct, on par with other export-focused topics (e.g. export performance).<sup>25</sup> Table 9 lists proposed topics for future research followed by an outline of each of the thematic areas.

The proposed topics in Table 9 reflect the major gaps and inconsistencies noted with respect to methodology (refer to Tables 3 and 4), export barrier scales and groupings (see Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2), drivers of export barriers (refer to Table 6) and synthesis of the findings deriving thereof (see Tables 7 and 8). These areas of future research also take into account emergent and influential concepts in IB and IE that are pertinent to internationalization (see Chabowski et al., 2018).<sup>26</sup>

### 6.2. Drivers of export barriers

Under-researched demographic variables encompass *ownership structure*, *background organization*, and *domestic market share*. The review advocates more replicative studies on these factors to provide a larger pool of findings. Demographic factors to consider in future research include structural aspects of the firm (e.g. *agile*, *ambidextrous*, and *lean*) or its place in the broader ecosystem (e.g. *reputation/status* or *political ties*). For instance, structural aspects enable a firm to adapt ‘on the fly’ – a vital attribute for managing barriers. Likewise, political ties, not unlike networks, foster an insider position in the marketplace.

A portion of empirical literature on export venture characteristics (e.g. *export intensity growth*, *export profit contribution*, and *use of market research*) emanates from a handful of studies. Additional studies on these variables are imperative. New lines of enquiry comprise *superior technological capabilities*, *immigrant effects*, and *relationship quality*. For example, *superior technological capabilities* (e.g. communication, information generation or international logistics), *immigrant effects* (i.e.

<sup>23</sup> [e.g. *Critical Perspectives on International Business* – International Business in Africa (forthcoming); *European Business Review* – Internationalization of Central and Eastern European Firms (2017); *Journal of East West Business* – Internationalization of Asian firms (2016); *Journal of World Business* – Internationalization of Latin American Firms (2017); *Thunderbird International Business Review* – Internationalization of African Firms (forthcoming)]

<sup>24</sup> See for instance, Doty and Glick (1998).

<sup>25</sup> See Chen et al. (2016) for a recent update.

<sup>26</sup> See Covin and Miller (2014), Doh (2017), Oviatt and McDougall (1994), Sarasvathy (2001), Schweizer (2012), Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997), Vissak and Masso (2015), among others.

recruiting and hiring talent from export destination), and *relationship quality* (exporter-importer), should dampen the influence of export barriers.

Managerial aspects are peripheral to the export barrier discourse. This is both unexpected and unwarranted, considering the relevance of these factors in illuminating internationalization. Future studies should examine the effect(s) of *global mind-sets*, *international orientation*, *locus of control*, and *managerial cognition*, on export barriers. Insights from this type of research may be impactful against the backdrop of need-based export stimulation. It may be that stimuli should focus on preparing decision-makers as opposed to, for instance, resourcing the internationalizing firms. Yet, a more expansive body of knowledge on the relationship between managerial factors and export barriers is required to back or refute this assertion.

Like much of the export-focused literature, export barrier research is detached from the global business environment. The review calls for new research explicating on how *institutional voids*, *liberalization*, *protectionism*, *multilateral trade pacts*, and *economic and financial crises* influence export barriers. Future research should examine how the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Brexit, or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis, impact export barriers. Phenomenon-driven research of this nature is conspicuously missing in International Business.<sup>27</sup>

### 6.3. Outcomes of export barriers

Export performance is the sole outcome of export barriers in this research stream. Conceivable outcomes of export barriers embrace international opportunity identification/discovery, country selection, and expansion strategy. For initial entry, do firms gravitate toward markets with lower perceived barriers? Regarding ongoing market entry, do firms deploy specific strategies (e.g. market mix or positioning) to counter-balance export barriers? This line of enquiry is relevant considering renewed interest in understanding the strategic importance of the initial market(s) of entry.<sup>28</sup>

### 6.4. Export barriers and Mediators/Moderators

Mediators and moderators are largely non-existent in export barrier research. Mediation and moderation enhance methodological rigor while offering fresh insights on inconclusive or contradictory findings. For instance, considering the confounding positive relationship between some export barriers and export performance, the case for a mediated relationship is compelling. Response mechanisms to barriers should serve as mediators. Foreign currency barriers are a case in point. They may trigger careful market selection or pricing strategies (response mechanisms) which enhance export performance.

### 6.5. Export barrier scales and operationalization of variables

There is need for a cross-nationally validated scale to create an equitable basis for comparisons and synthesis of extant knowledge. Additionally, scale development efforts should consider the impact of scale properties on the direction and strength of results. As argued earlier, anchoring a scale on *importance* (i.e. poles – ‘not important’ and ‘very important’) may not be equivalent to anchoring it on *difficulty/hindrance* (i.e. poles – ‘does not hinder’ and ‘strongly hinders’). Further, the meaning of scale items is subservient to lexical considerations. For instance, adding the term ‘lack of’ to a barrier creates the perception that it is resource-related.

Finally, researchers should abandon the litany of dichotomous (e.g. *export orientation*, *market expansion strategy*, *level of involvement*) and

<sup>27</sup> Some IB scholars (e.g. Doh, 2017) are advocating phenomena driven research.

<sup>28</sup> See for instance, recent work by Crick and Crick (2016) on the first export order.

**Table 9**  
Proposed Topics for Future Research.

Thematic Area	Proposed Topic
<i>Drivers of export barriers</i>	
Firm demographics	The link between the nature of the firm (e.g. agile, ambidextrous, lean) and export barriers The impact of organizational status/reputation on export barriers Political ties in home or host market and export barriers
Export venture characteristics	Effect of superior technological capabilities (e.g. in communication information generation, logistics) on export barriers How ‘immigrant effects’ apply to export barriers The connection between market dispersion (i.e. concentration-dispersion) and export barriers
Management Factors	The link between relationship quality (i.e. exporter-importer) and export barriers Possession of a global mindset and the influence of export barriers Managerial locus of control (e.g. internal or external) impact export barriers The connection between international orientation and barriers
Environmental and Operational Factors	The relationship between managerial cognition and export barriers Changes in business customs, norms and values and their impact on export barriers Export barriers and (block chain-based) virtual start-ups and borderless firms
International Trading Environment	The link between environmental hostility/turbulence and export barriers How economic policies (e.g. trade and exchange rate) influence export barriers The effect of an economic downturn (GFC, recession, austerity) on export barriers How institutional voids (especially in emerging markets) impact export barriers
<i>Outcomes of export barriers</i>	
International markets/opportunities	The effect of export barriers on international opportunity identification/discovery The role do barriers play in international market selection
International strategy	How export barriers influence product, pricing, distribution, and promotion strategy
International performance	Revisiting the relationship between export barriers and export performance Factors which mediate/moderate the relationship between barriers and performance
<i>Groups and types of barriers</i>	
Categories	Empirically testing the notion of export barriers as liabilities Developing a theory-based and parsimonious approach for categorizing export barriers
Scales	The effect of poles, anchors and language in scale development Cross-national validation of export barrier scales
<i>Theories/models/frameworks</i>	
Applying knowledge from within IB	How international entrepreneurial orientation adds to the export barrier discourse Embedding the phenomenon of early/rapid internationalization (i.e. born-globals and international new ventures) in export barrier research Export barriers and the concept of dynamic capabilities How absorptive capacity explains the influence of export barriers Networking theory as a prism
Extending knowledge beyond IB	The science of muddling through and inconsistencies in export barrier research Export barriers and human information processing (i.e. cognition and affect)

single item scales (e.g. *international experience*, *export intensity*), in favor of multiple item measures. For instance, the validated ‘export market orientation’ scale should enhance research on market expansion strategy or export orientation.

### 6.6. Theories of export barriers

Although there was some support for the four explicit (i.e. incremental internationalization, institutional, network, and resource-based) theories of export barriers, contributions to theory are lacking. Indeed, it is a travesty of the body of knowledge on internationalization that the much-maligned stage model is the pre-eminent paradigm for exploring the influence of export barriers. Export barrier research should prosper from the adoption of internationalization perspectives espoused by International Entrepreneurship (IE). They comprise constructs/paradigms such as *absorptive capacity*, *causation*, *dynamic capabilities*, *effectuation*, *international entrepreneurial orientation* (IEO), and *sense-making*. For instance, one can posit that the proactive, innovative and risk-taking proclivity associated with IEO, has a negative influence on export barriers. The burgeoning stream of research on early, rapid and non-sequential internationalization, synonymous with the constructs ‘international new venture’ and ‘born-global’, should contribute to the export barrier discourse.<sup>29</sup>

Beyond IE, several theoretical lenses can enrich export barrier research. The raft of inconclusive findings, beg explanations other than what extant literature offers. Could it be that internationalization does

not lend itself to rational choices (regarding market selection, levels of involvement, and export intensity among other elements), in which case Lindbloom’s (1959) depiction of the science of muddling through becomes relevant? This perspective is not without merit considering the nexus between internationalization and muddling through (see Schweizer, 2012). Empirical testing of implicit theories of export barriers (i.e. attribution and rationalization) is a priority. This calls for profiling decision makers and adopting traits and attributes as proxies for elements like locus of control and attributional bias.

### 6.7. Limitations

The systematic approach employed to uncover pertinent literature, does not preclude, the existence of additional studies relevant for this review. The results derive from aggregation by vote counting. Vote counting is rudimentary and robs this systematic review of the capacity to state findings more authoritatively. At best, it outlines the direction and frequency with which statistically significant relationships occur, a far cry from true effect sizes. Pitting a vote counting approach against an effect size *meta-analysis*, demonstrates the superiority of the latter method especially in its capacity to dissect ‘inconclusive’ or ‘contradictory’ results (see Stanley, 2001). Thus, it is conceivable the proportion of inconclusive and contradictory findings would have been smaller, had an effect size method been utilized. Since vote counting-based aggregation does not go beyond frequency of association, the reader should recognize this synthesis might be unsuitable for making causal inference. Thus, from a ‘hierarchies of evidence’ viewpoint, it falls somewhat short of ‘assembling the field’s full weight of scientific knowledge’ (Rousseau et al., 2008).

<sup>29</sup> See Oviatt and McDougall (1994).

Nonetheless, the systematic review has collated and synthesized fragmented literature on the factors associated with export barriers. The conceptual and methodological gaps suggest academics and practitioners may be prone to the overuse of research with limited and inconclusive findings.<sup>30</sup> The review advocates new theory-setting research and replicative studies to help create a cogent body of knowledge. It calls for an assimilation, within the export barrier discourse, of the phenomenon of early, rapid and non-sequential internationalization. For example, what is the link between export barriers and levels of ‘born-globalness’? Likewise, new research is required to explore, in a deeper context, the effect on export barriers, of managerial factors and the global business environment.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibusrev.2018.04.008>.

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<sup>30</sup> Refer to Rousseau et al. (2008) for the genesis of this argument.

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