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Marketing Barriers and Export Performance: A Strategy Categorization Approach in the Vietnamese Seafood Industry

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Abstract

This study tests the combined effect of five marketing barriers (product, price, distribution, logistics, and promotion) on the export performance of Vietnamese seafood companies. Representative cross-sectional data on business managers of seafood companies in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, are used to validate construct measures and test hypotheses. The results indicate that, except for the promotion barrier, the barriers of product, price, distribution, and logistics have a significant negative impact on export performance. Based on the relative importance of the different marketing barriers, seafood firms should firstly focus on quality improvements in order to improve their export performance.

Keywords: Marketing barriers, Export performance, Seafood industry, Vietnam

Introduction

The determinants of the export performance of small and medium-sized firms are of vital importance for policy makers, firm managers, and researchers (Baldauf*et al*., 2000; Katsikeas*et al*., 2000; Sousa *et al*., 2008). In particular, marketing barriers, such as product, price, distribution, promotion, and logistics, occupy an important position because they often cause financial losses and negative attitudes towards international activities (Leonidou, 1995; Balabanis, 2000). Most previous studies investigate the effect of marketing barriers across industries (Leonidou, 2000; Morgan *et al*., 2004; Ogunmokun and Ng, 2004; Brouthers and Nakos, 2005; Solomon and Shaver, 2005) and only a few studies explore the effect of several kinds of marketing barriers within a specific industry, such as paper, wine, or logistics services (Sullivan and Bauerschmidt, 1989: Yeung, 2006; Karelakis*et al*., 2008). The focus on one industry is expected to provide a more accurate assessment of the relative role of the marketing barriers because this research context is more homogeneous than across industries (Leonidou, 2004).

The Vietnamese seafood industry has developed strongly in the last decade, with its export revenue increasing from about 1 billion USD in 2000 to about 5 billion USD[2] in 2010. It has continuously improved its position in the top ten seafood exporters in the world in recent

[2]The report of the Head Department of Vietnamese Customs in 2010.

years. This result comes from exploiting opportunities in new foreign markets, improving the production technology and management, and enhancing the ability to resist trade and legal barriers from foreign importers.[3] However, because most seafood companies in Vietnam are small and medium-sized firms, they often face difficulties in exploiting their potential fully due to the lack of appropriate marketing strategies.[1]

Thus, this study aims to contribute to the literature by exploring the combined effect of the five most important kinds of marketing barriers – product, price, distribution, logistics, and promotion (Leonidou, 2004) – on the export performance of the Vietnamese seafood industry at the individual firm level (Yeung, 2006; Karelakis*et al*., 2008). This study uses a multiple regression method based on a representative cross-sectional data set of managers from seafood companies in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, to test the proposed hypotheses. The next parts of this study will present the theoretical framework, test the hypotheses, and discuss the results.

Literature Review

Export Performance

Different approaches are used to access the construct of export performance, such as measure types (e.g., economic or behavioural; effectiveness or efficiency), the referent frame (e.g., absolute or relative competitors), or the time frame (e.g., static or dynamic) (Carneiro*et al*., 2006). The nature of export performance also varies according to the analytical unit (e.g., a firm or a strategic business unit), assessment approach (e.g., objective or subjective), or scale type (e.g., single or multiple) (Aulakh*et al*., 2000; Carneiro*et al*., 2006). This study defines and operationalizes export performance as subjective overall evaluations of small and medium-sized firms' managers regarding the economic success of selling products to foreign countries (Shoham, 1998; Carneiro*et al*., 2006).

Marketing Barriers across Strategy Categories

Marketing barriers refer to obstacles in the firm's overseas activities, such as product quality, price, distribution, logistics, and promotion (Karelakis*et al*., 2008; Sousa and Bradley, 2008). The overall review in Table 1 shows a comprehensive picture of the effects of those marketing barriers on export performance.

[3]The development strategy of the Vietnamese seafood industry to 2020.

Table I: The Literature Review of the Effect of Marketing Barriers on Export Performance

Literature review	Industrial sector	Product barrier	Price barrier	Distribution barrier	Promotion barrier	Logistics barrier
Kaynak and Kothari (1980)	M		X	X	X	X
Czinkota and Ursic (1983)	M		X			
Barrett and Wilkinson (1985)	M	X	X			X
Kedia and Chhokar (1986)	M	X	X		X	X
Cheong and Chong (1988)	M	X			X	
Keng and Juian (1989)	M	X	X	X	X	
Sullivan and Bauerschmidt (1989)	O	X		X	X	
Bauerschmidt*et al*. (1985)	O	X		X		X
Dichtl*et al*. (1990)	M	X	X			
Howard and Borgia (1990)	M	X	X		X	
Kaleka and Katsikeas (1995)	M	X				X
Leonidou (1995)	M	X		X		X
Moini (1997)	M		X	X		
Leonidou (2000)	M	X	X			X
Morgan *et al*. (2004)	M		X			
Ogunmokun and Ng (2004)	M				X	
Brouthers and Nakos (2005)	M	X*				
Solomon and Shaver (2005)	M				X*	
Yeung (2006)	O					X
Karelakis*et al*. (2008)	O	X	X			
Sousa and Bradley (2008)	M		X			

Source: Literature reviewed by the authors
*Notes: * Reversed scale; M: multiple industries; O: one industry.*

Generally, marketing barriers have been found to affect export performance negatively in most previous studies. However, empirical evidence has often been found using data from multiple industries and investigating mostly one, two, or three kinds of marketing barriers. The studies have also failed to determine the relative importance of those barriers and assess the difficulties firms have encountered regarding those factors in the export performance across industries (Kedia and Chhokar, 1986; Moini, 1997).

The *product barrier* occurs in developing new products for foreign markets, meeting export-product quality standards, adapting export product design/styles, and providing an after-sales service (Howard and Borgia, 1990; Kaleka and Katsikeas, 1995; Leonidou, 2000,2004). Small and medium-sized firms often lack managerial expertise, research skills, R&D competence, and financial resources, thus limiting the firms' fulfillment of the high-quality standards for products required by foreign markets (McConnel, 1979; Leonidou, 2004). Different facets of the product barrier have been found to impact differently on export

performance. Some facets have a very low impact (e.g., developing new products for foreign markets), while others have a low (e.g., meeting export product quality standards) to moderate influence (e.g., providing a technical/after-sales service) on export performance (see Leonidou, 2004 for a review). Generally, the relative role of product barriers is the weakest among the marketing barriers to the export performance of small and medium-sized firms across industries (Leonidou, 2004).

The *price barrier* involves offering satisfactory prices to customers and the difficulty in matching competitors' prices and granting credit facilities to foreign customers (Kedia and Chhokar, 1986; Moini, 1997; Leonidou, 2004). Small and medium-sized firms often suffer high costs due to the lack of economies of scale, causing them to face difficulties in controlling their exporting operations (Terpstra and Sarathy, 2000). The aspects of the price barrier are documented to have a high to very high impact on export performance across industries, and among the marketing barriers, it is the strongest predictor of export performance (Leonidou, 2004).

The *distribution barrier* refers to complex foreign distribution channels, accessing export distribution channels, obtaining reliable foreign representation and maintaining control over foreign middlemen, and facing difficulties in supplying inventory abroad (Bauerschmidt*et al*., 1985; Keng and Jiuan, 1989; Leonidou, 1995; 2004). The complexity and length of foreign distribution channels makes it difficult for firms to enter international markets (Terpstra and Sarathy, 2000; Czinkota and Ronkainen, 2001). Small and medium-sized firms face a very low to a high impact of the different facets of the distribution barrier on their export performance. For example, while accessing export distribution channels and obtaining reliable foreign representation have a high influence, maintaining control over foreign middlemen has only a very small effect on export performance (Leonidou, 2004).

The *logistics barrier* is considered as an extensive dimension of the distribution barrier (Kaleka and Katsikeas, 1995; Yeung, 2006). The logistics barrier reflects the difficulties in supplying inventory in overseas markets, unavailable foreign warehousing facilities, and excessive transportation and insurance costs (Kaynak and Kothari, 1984; Barrett and Wilkinson, 1985). The lack of financial and human resources and a large geographical distance generate many problems for the firms in delivering products on time as well as maintaining the reasonable storage of products abroad (Cateora and Graham, 2001). Most small and medium-sized firms feel that the excessive transportation/insurance costs are a major problem, while supplying inventory and warehousing facilities abroad is popular but relatively weak (Leonidou, 2004).

The *promotion barrier*, finally, deals with adjusting export promotional activities to individual foreign market requirements in relation to the variations in buying motives, consumption patterns, and government regulations (Sullivan and Bauerschmidt, 1989; Howard and Borgia, 1990; Leonidou, 2004). The lack of resources and geographical distance also generate difficulties in adjusting export promotional activities (Cateora and Graham, 2001). However, the effect of the promotion barrier on export performance for small and medium-sized firms is at a moderate level (Leonidou, 2004).

Based on the above discussions, this study explores whether different categories of marketing barriers (product, price, distribution, logistics, and promotion) influence export performance simultaneously in the context of one industry. Because different industries have different success factors and drivers of export performance (Leonidou, 2004), a comparison within one

specific industry can be more reliable for the firms or managers within this industry. The following hypotheses are suggested:

H1: The product barrier has a negative effect on export performance.

H2: The price barrier has a negative effect on export performance.

H3: The distribution barrier has a negative effect on export performance.

H4: The logistics barrier has a negative effect on export performance.

H5: The promotion barrier has a negative effect on export performance.

In order to prioritize the different categories of marketing strategies, it is important to gain an insight into the relative role of those marketing barriers in export performance for a specific industry (Leonidou, 2004). This study expects that the price barrier has the strongest impact, then distribution, logistics, promotion, and finally the product barrier with the weakest impact on export performance.

Methodology

Data Collection

Among the exporting industries in Vietnam, the seafood industry has to suffer the largest number of regulations on the control of safety product quality as well as antidumping laws from importing countries, such as the US, Japan, or Europe. These regulations cause the companies more difficulties in building exporting marketing strategies. Thus, focusing on this industry is expected to generate a comprehensive view of the role of marketing barriers in export performance in Vietnam. Seafood companies operate along all the coastal provinces in Vietnam with exporting markets covering over 100 nations and geographical areas. In preparation for this study, we focused on three key exported products: pangasius, shrimp, and surimi. About 150 seafood companies fulfilled the criteria and operate mainly in the Mekong Delta, in the south of Vietnam.

A survey questionnaire was sent by e-mail to the business managers of 102 seafood companies with labour numbers over 30. We decided to ignore about 50 companies with fewer than 30 employees, as their sizes are too small to contribute significantly to the export activities, especially due to the labour intensity of the industry. In order to increase the response ratio, the firms' managers were contacted by phone to confirm their participation in the survey. A total of 82 questionnaires were returned. The mean number of full-time employees for the sample is 670. The mean export revenue as a percentage of the total revenue is 50.3%. The average number of years for which the companies have participated in export activity is 9.2, and the average age of the managers is 30. The average number of exporting markets is 15.

Measures of the Variables

Export performance was measured by three items on a seven-point semantic scale from 1 = lower to 7 = higher in the form: "Compared with domestic business, export performance contributes to (1) the growth of the company is …; (2) the market share of the company is…; and (3) the profitability of the company is…". These three items were adapted from previous studies (e.g., Zou*et al*., 1998).

The *product barrier* was measured by four items on a seven-point Likert scale in the form: "We do not have enough competence to: (1) …develop and produce new products for foreign markets; (2)…meet the strict quality standards for export products; (3)… adapt export product design/styles; and (4) provide an after-sales service (Howard and Borgia, 1990; Kaleka and Katsikeas, 1995; Leonidou, 2000, 2004).

Three items were used to measure the *price barrier* on a seven-point Likert scale as follows: "We find it difficult to: (1)…offer satisfactory prices to customers; (2)…match competitors' prices; and (3)… grant credit facilities to foreign customers (Barrett and Wilkinson, 1985; Kedia and Chhokar, 1986; Keng and Jiuan, 1989; Moini, 1997; Leonidou, 2004).

The *distribution barrier* was assessed according to four general statements on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) "The complexity of foreign distribution channels is out of our reach"; (2) "Accessing, maintaining and controlling export distribution channels is difficult"; (3) "Obtaining reliable foreign representation is problematic"; and (4) "Maintaining control over foreign middlemen is not easy" (Bauerschmidt*et al*., 1985; Keng and Juian, 1989; Leonidou, 1995, 2004).

The *logistics barrier* was measured using four items on a seven-point Likert scale: (1) "We don't have the availability of warehousing facilities abroad"; (2) "We are faced with excessive transportation costs"; (3) "We are faced with very high insurance fees"; and (4) "We are faced with difficultyin renting suitable transportation means" (Kaynak and Kothari, 1984; Barrett and Wilkinson, 1985; Leonidou, 2004).

The *promotion barrier* was measured on a seven-point Likert scale using three items: "We do not have enough ability and financial resources (1) to conduct a promotion programme in foreign countries; (2) to justify promotional activities in foreign markets; and (3) to conduct an international advertisement programme" (Sullivan and Bauerschmidt, 1989; Howard and Borgia, 1990; Leonidou, 2004).

Analytical Procedures

The first goal is to explore whether each measure taps facets of the intended constructs (convergent validity) and whether the constructs are distinct from each other (discriminant validity). The constructs are then assessed in regard to their reliability by Cronbach's alpha. To do so, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). The second stage of the analysis uses a multiple regression technique to test the relationships between the constructs.

Analysis and Results

Reliability and Validity

The results of the EFA, summarized in Table 2, indicate that six factors are extracted, corresponding to six intended constructs, which explain 76.6% of the variance of the data. For example, Factor 1 is formed by the first three items corresponding to the product barrier, which explains 6.8% of the variance, and Factor 3 with the next three items corresponding to the price barrier, explaining 9.7% of the variance. The EFA results fit well with the data (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy = 0.75 > 0.50; chi-squared = 976.2, df = 231, $p < 0.001$). This means that the sample size is sufficiently large that it does not seriously influence the reliability of the factor analysis (Field, 2000). It is worth noting that only one item of the product barrier is rejected out of the data –"We do not have enough competence to provide an after-sales service". In addition, most of the reliability exceeds the minimum value of 0.70 (Malhotra and Birks, 2003). The individual item loadings on the constructs are all high, with values ranging from 0.60 to 0.92, which primarily show that the convergent validity and reliability of the constructs are acceptable.

Table II: Constructs, Factor Loadings, and Reliability (EFA)

Constructs/Items	Factor loadings					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Product barrier						
Developing and producing new products	0.84					
Meeting the strict quality standards	0.73					
Adapting export product design/styles	0.66					
Price barrier						
Matching competitors' prices		0.83				
Offering satisfactory prices to customers		0.81				
Granting credit facilities		0.60				
Distribution barrier						
Complexity of foreign distribution			0.92			
Accessing, maintaining, and controlling			0.91			
Obtaining reliable foreign representation			0.81			
Control over foreign middlemen			0.72			
Logistics barrier						
High insurance fees				0.88		
Availability of warehousing facilities				0.85		
Excessive transportation costs				0.85		
Renting suitable transportation means				0.82		
Promotion barrier						
Conducting international advertisement					0.83	
Conducting promotion programme					0.82	
Justifying promotion activities					0.72	
Export performance						
Profitability of the company						-0.86
Revenue growth of the company						-0.84
Market share of the company						-0.84
Variance (%) = 76.65%	6.82	9.67	16.81	16.12	11.78	15.46
Cronbach's alpha	0.71	0.67	0.91	0.88	0.86	0.94

Source: Investigated by the authors
Notes: KMO measure of sampling adequacy = 0.75; chi-squared = 976.2 (231), $p < 0.001$; rotation method: principal components; rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization.
As shown in Table 3, all the correlations are less than 0.55. Except for the promotion barrier, the rest of the marketing barriers correlate relatively highly with export performance. The results are important for the next step, multiple regression analysis.

Table III: Construct Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Constructs	Mean	S.D	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Export performance	5.08	1.49	–					
2. Product barrier	3.48	1.29	**–0.51**	–				
3. Price barrier	4.15	1.45	**–0.30**	0.22	–			
4. Distribution barrier	4.32	1.91	**–0.45**	**0.44**	0.19	–		
5. Logistics barrier	3.52	1.39	**–0.33**	–0.13	0.24	0.04	–	
6. Promotion barrier	4.70	2.09	–0.11	**0.49**	**–0.32**	**0.54**	0.05	–

Source: Investigated by the authors
Notes: Correlations in bold are significant at $p < 0.05$.

Regression Analysis

The estimated results of the multiple regression model indicate a good fit with the data (F = 7.24, $p < 0.001$; R^2 = 38.9%; all $VIF < 2.0$). The results of testing the effects of marketing on export performance are shown in Table 4. This study expected that the product, price, distribution, logistics, and promotion barriers, irrespectively, affect export performance negatively.

Table IV: The Effects of Marketing Barriers on Export Performance

Independent variable	Unstd Coefficients	Std Coefficients (β)	t-values	Sig. (2-tails)
Constant	9.24		11.31**	0.00
Product barrier	–0.43	–0.41	–3.27**	0.00
Price barrier	–0.26	–0.25	–2.18*	0.03
Distribution barrier	–0.20	–0.26	–2.04*	0.04
Logistics barrier	–0.25	–0.24	–2.12*	0.04
Promotion barrier	0.07	0.08	0.62^{ns}	0.54

Source: Investigated by the authors
*Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; ns: non-significant; all $VIF < 2.0$; R^2 (export performance) = 38.9%; $F = 7.42$, $p < 0.001$.*

The results in Table 4 indicate that while the barriers of product (β = –0.41, t = –3.27, p < 0.01), price (β = –0.25, t = –2.18, p < 0.05), distribution (β = –0.26, t = –2.04, p < 0.05), and logistics (β = –0.24, t = –2.12, p < 0.05) have a significantly negative effect on export performance, the promotion barrier has no significant influence on export performance (β = 0.08, t = 0.62, p> 0.10). Therefore, the results support Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4, but do not support Hypothesis 5.

Regarding the relative importance of marketing barriers, the product barrier has the strongest effect on export performance. The distribution, price, and logistics barriers occupy the next most important positions with relatively similar effects. Finally, the promotion barrier is the least important, without a significant impact on export performance. The estimated results are shown in Figure 1.

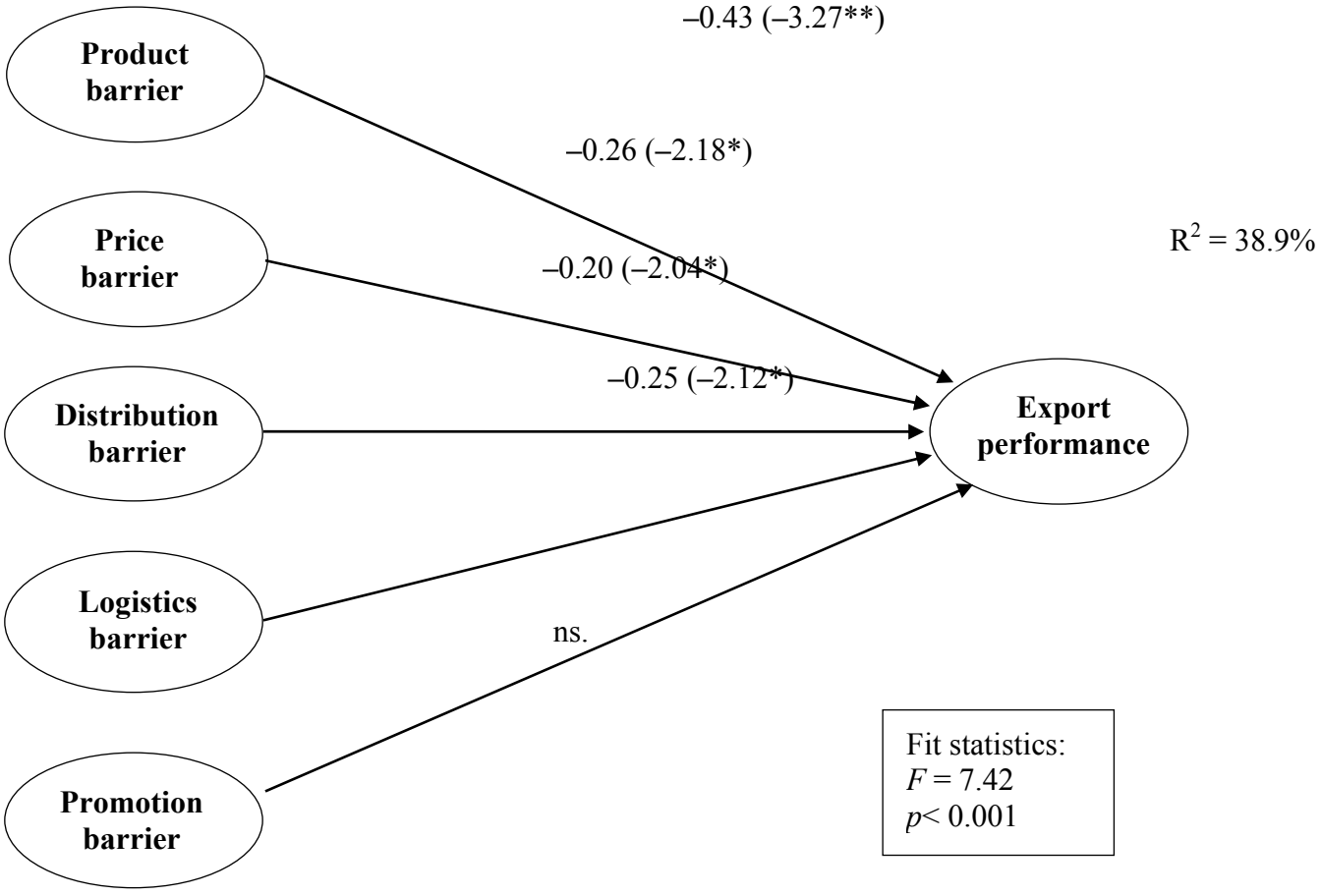

Figure 1: The Effects of Marketing Barriers on Export Performance

Discussions

Research Objectives

The present study has three main objectives. First, it tests the combined effect of five marketing barriers (product, price, distribution, logistics, and promotion) on export performance. Second, it investigates the relative role of those marketing barriers in export performance. Finally, this study aims to suggest some managerial implications based on the findings.

Theoretical Implications

This study extends the previous studies (Kaynak and Kothari, 1984; Leonidou, 2000; Brouthers and Nakos, 2005; Solomon and Shaver, 2005; Yeung; 2006; Karelakis*et al*., 2008; Sousa and Bradley, 2008) by combining and evaluating simultaneously the effects of the product, price, distribution, logistics, and promotion barriers on export performance within one industry with relatively homogenous marketing, distribution, and production environments. Using data from the Vietnamese seafood industry, it extends the previous research, which was mostly performed in Western countries. The results confirm a negative relationship between product barrier and export performance ($\beta = -0.41$, $t = -3.27$, $p < 0.01$). This result is consistent with most previous studies (Kaleka and Katsikeas, 1995; Leonidou, 1995, 2000; Brouthers and Nakos, 2005; Karelakis*et al*., 2008). However, while most previous studies in the context of developed countries show that the relative importance of the product barrier is the weakest (Kedia and Chhokar, 1986; Keng and Juian, 1989; Moini, 1997; Leonidou, 2004), this study confirms the product barrier to be the most important predictor of export performance of seafood firms in Vietnam.Most seafood companies in Vietnam only export a few product lines, such as shrimp, fish, or crab, as frozen raw products. In particular, most products are sold through foreign middlemen, and not to the ultimate consumers. This limits the ability to develop new products for a specific foreign market's needs and wants, regardless of the diversity of consumer preferences across countries. In addition, although the production of high-value-added products is encouraged and aided by the Government, many firms seem to be afraid of the risks due to the lack of international market understanding.[4] More importantly, while most companies consider Japan, Europe, and the US as target markets, fulfilling the special legislation of those countries regarding quality standards is always problematic. Furthermore, the inefficiency of the origin tracing system and the lack of public control of food quality lead to many cases in which a large number of batches of goods are returned due to their failure to fulfil the quality standards of overseas markets, especially health and safety regulations. In addition, we only know of a very few companies (e.g., Bianfishco, Agrifish) that selltheir products with their own brands. This reflects a weak status in building and developing seafood product brands, so the penetration in overseas markets is problematic.

The findings show a negative effect of the price barrier on export performance ($\beta = -0.25$, $t = -2.18$, $p < 0.05$). This result is similar to those of most previous studies (Moini, 1997; Leonidou, 2000; Karelakis*et al*., 2008; Sousa and Bradley, 2008). The price barrier is also found to be the second most important predictor of export performance in the industry. Although most seafood firms in Vietnam take advantage of the low labour cost, the price barrier is becoming more serious due to increasingly scarce materials and a polluted

[4]The report of the Head Department of Vietnamese Customs in 2010.

environment. In recent years, the competition for input materials has also become more severe because Chinese enterprises are willing to raise their price to gather all the raw materials. In addition, most firms lack the ability to compete in price, resulting from dumping legal proceedings and host countries' policies to subsidize the local industry. Furthermore, the firms face additional costs incurred by modifying the product, higher administrative, operational, and transportation expenses connected with exporting, and extra taxes, tariffs, and fees imposed when entering the host country (Tersptra and Sarathy, 2000).

The present results also confirm a negative relationship between the distribution barrier and export performance (β = –0.26, t = –2.04, $p < 0.05$). This result is consistent with most previous studies (Sullivan and Bauerschmidt, 1989; Leonidou, 1995; Moini, 1997). Although the distribution barrier's impact on export performance is weaker than that of the product and price barriers in the industry, the magnitude of its effect is relatively strong. In fact, most export markets in the seafood industry are in developed countries. Therefore, the firms have to face distribution channels consisting of many layers, direct distribution systems, and the diversity of the services required by distribution members across countries (Terpstra and Sarathy, 2000). This complexity of the distribution systems creates serious difficulties for the firms. Actually, we only know of a few Vietnamese firms that have overseas agents who are responsible for introducing and showing their products, while most firms export their products indirectly through foreign middlemen.[5] Furthermore, the firms encounter difficulties in obtaining reliable representation abroad (Leonidou, 2004). Therefore, the seafood exporters are limited in their access to overseas distribution channels. This is very common because some distribution channels have already been occupied by their competitors, or the length of the channel is too costly to manage (Czinkota and Ronkainen, 2001).

The findings also reveal a negative effect of the logistics barrier on export performance (β = –0.24, t = –2.12, $p < 0.05$). This result is consistent with most previous studies (Kaleka and Katsikeas, 1995; Leonidou, 1995, 2000; Yeung, 2006). Although the export revenue has continuously increased in recent years, the export markets of the firms focus mainly on the US, the EU, and Japan; the great geographical distance increases the transportation costs as well as limiting the ability to supply adequately. In addition, most firms have no warehousing facilities abroad. Thus, the flow of products to the host markets is not constant and is sometimes delayed. The characteristics of seafood products, which require special storage and faster transportation means, force the firms to pay extra costs. In most cases, the firms have to cover additional insurance, which increases the price of the products for the end-users. As a result, the logistics barrier can decrease the firms' competitiveness in international markets.

Finally, the results do not support a negative relationship between the promotion barrier and export performance (β = 0.08, t = 0.62, $p > 0.10$). This result is inconsistent with most previous studies (Keng and Juian, 1989; Sullivan and Bauerschmidt, 1989; Howard and Borgia, 1990). However, it is worth noticing that although the effect of the promotion barrier on export performance is not significant, the promotion barrier correlates highly with other marketing barriers (see Table 2). Thus, its effect on export performance may occur indirectly through other barriers, such as product, price, or distribution. As a result, it would be a mistake to ignore the role of the promotion barrier in export performance. In fact, not many seafood firms in Vietnam can carry out their promotion strategy abroad effectively. What we can observe is that only a few firms introduce their products at expo exhibitions, some have a

[5]The report of the Head Department of Vietnamese Customs in 2010.

website to advertise and provide limited information about their products, while most firms have no advertising activities in overseas markets due to high costs. These shortcomings generate risks for the firms when their export revenue is mainly based on a certain amount of familiar customers.

Implications for Business Marketing Practice

This study has some implications for managers and marketers in the industry. First, seafood firms should pay attention to the different marketing barriers based on their relative importance in reducing or improving export performance. Although the importance of each category of those barriers differs, as well as that of each facet of each category, most marketing barriers and their facets play a certain role in export performance in a combined effect. This means that managers and marketers should take a comprehensive view of the limitations in the firm's marketing mix strategy and make an effort to generate a better strategy. However, for such a strategy, the firms should ignore the domestic competition and direct their attention to competitors abroad. A strict association between consistent activities of the firms' members and building a mechanism to share information and use common resources may be a good solution to overcome the limitations of marketing barriers.

According to this study of the Vietnamese seafood export industry, firms should focus firstly on the product, then price, distribution, logistics, and lastly promotion barrier. More importantly, for each kind of marketing barrier, firms should determine the causes of the problem. For example, a lack of knowledge and information about consumer attitudes, preferences, and habits may be the cause of producing products that do not fulfil their consumers' needs and wants. As such, a consumer investigation in the target markets may help to solve the problem.

Finally, as mentioned in the introduction, the seafood industry plays an extremely important role in the economy, especially in providing jobs and bringing a large amount of foreign currency to the country. Thus, the policy makers in the industry need to aid the firms to decrease the negative impacts of marketing barriers. They should hold workshops or lectures or produce documents to educate the firms on how to improve their marketing mix strategy. They can also help the firms by providing information about safety food standards, potential customers or ways to enter a new foreign market and the like. Export encouragement tools, such as financial assistance or expert consultation, should be used to help the firms (Bauerschmidt*et al*., 1985; Karelakis*et al*., 2008).

Suggestions and Recommendations

Despite the above contributions, this study has several limitations. Different export barriers exist in the literature (Leonidou, 2004). This study only focuses on five marketing barriers. Thus, future studies would benefit from exploring other barriers (e.g., procedural, informational, or environmental) that affect export performance. The results presented here are based on self-reported measures of export performance relating to the Vietnamese seafood industry. Objective measures of export performance (Aulakh*et al*., 2000; Carneiro*et al*., 2006) could be used to increase the generalizability of the study.

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