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## Integrated approach to analysing the relationship between factors, working conditions, and performance indicators in the foreign market entry of Russian SMEs

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#### **Abstract**

The article discusses the decision-making strategies of Russian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) when entering foreign markets entry and analyses the factors and conditions that influence the effectiveness of their export activities. It focuses primarily on the analysis of internal and external factors, including sanctions restrictions, access to financial resources, production capacity, marketing skills, digital technologies, and others. Different approaches to factor and condition analysis are discussed, such as the rapid start model, the traditional market entry model, and capture and expansion strategies. It also examines methods for assessing export efficiency, both quantitative and qualitative. The result is a landscape of quality models linking factors and working conditions to the performance of Russian export-oriented SMEs, comprising four primary models, is created.

**Keywords:** internationalisation, foreign market entry, quick start model, expansion, capturing territory strategy, small and medium business, SMEs' operational efficiency.

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## 俄罗斯中小企业进入外国市场:分析因素和条件与绩效参数 之间关系的综合方法

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#### 简介

文章介绍了俄罗斯中小企业在进入国外市场时的决策战略,分析了影响其出口活动效率的因素和条件。文章的重点是分析内部和外部因素,包括制裁限制、获得财政资源、生产能力、营销能力、数字技术等因素。讨论了各种分析因素和条件的方法,包括快速启动模式、传统退出模式以及前沿捕捉和扩张战略。还审查了评估出口绩效的方法,特别是定量和定性方法。因此,形成了俄罗斯出口导向中小型企业的因素和条件与业绩之间关系的定性模型,包括四个主要模型。

**关键词:** 国际化、进入外国市场、快速启动模式、扩张、前沿占领战略、中小企业、中小企业绩效。

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#### Introduction

The modern world requires small and mediumsized enterprises (hereinafter referred to as SMEs) to participate actively in the global economy, which implies entering foreign markets. However, success in this endeavour depends on many factors and conditions, ranging from the internal organisation of the company to external economic and political realities.

The article presents a literature review on the topic of SME foreign market entry, with the aim of identifying the characteristics of the strategy and decision-making mechanisms of Russian SMEs when entering foreign markets, and analysing the influence of various factors and conditions on the effectiveness of their export activities. The analysis was conducted on the basis of publications in leading international management and business journals in the period from 2000 to 2023.

The scientific novelty of the study lies primarily in the generalisation and systematisation of knowledge on the influence of internal resources of SMEs, such as innovative products, entrepreneurial spirit and unique resources and competences, and external conditions, including sanctions restrictions and the development of digital technologies, on the efficiency of SMEs in foreign markets. As a result of the literature review, the main approaches to analysing factors and conditions were identified, including fast-start models, the traditional entry model, and frontier capture and expansion strategies. The comparison of the methodological features of the works devoted to the study of the entry of SMEs into foreign markets helped to formulate general recommendations on the internationalisation concept development, as well as to outline the landscape of qualitative models of the relationship between the

factors and conditions of work and the efficiency of Russian export-oriented SMEs, including four main models. The results obtained are of practical relevance to researchers whose attention is drawn both to the study of the internationalisation of SMEs and to useful tools for improving the strategic planning and decision-making of SMEs when entering foreign markets, thus helping to increase their competitiveness and sustainability in the global economy. Methods for assessing the effectiveness of export activities, particularly in quantitative and qualitative terms, are also discussed.

# 1. Comparative study of approaches to analysing the factors and conditions influencing SME export activity

The efficiency of SMEs in foreign markets is influenced by both external and internal factors. The internal environment of SMEs plays a key role in the efficiency of their export activities. For example, the works [Budkova, 2015; Volkova, Karachev, 2016; Bodyagin, Balanova, 2019; Bereza, Bereza, 2022] describe such factors of the internal environment as:

- unique products and technologies SMEs with unique products or technologies may have a competitive advantage in foreign markets. These can be innovative products, patents or other forms of intellectual property;
- staff skills highly skilled staff, especially those with experience of international markets, can significantly increase an SME's chances of export success. This can include knowledge of foreign languages, cultural specifics and international standards and regulations;
- production capacity having modern production infrastructure and equipment can facilitate the production of high quality goods, which is important for successful exports;
- marketing and logistics processes well-organised marketing and logistics processes can contribute to the efficient delivery of goods to foreign markets and the establishment of mutually beneficial relationships with customers and partners.

These internal environmental factors are closely linked and together form the basis for successful SME export activities.

The external environment also has a significant impact on the efficiency of SMEs' export activities. For example, the following external environmental factors are considered in the works [Mazilov, 2015; Malysheva, 2019; Ivanov, 2023; Koroleva, 2023; Voskresensky, 2024; Repnikova, Dmitrieva, 2024]:

government support for SMEs and exports
 Government policies to support SMEs and

- exports can provide additional resources and incentives to enter foreign markets. This can include financing, tax incentives, assistance in establishing contacts with foreign partners and other support measures;
- development of digital technologies and platforms - Digital technologies and platforms can significantly simplify and speed up export processes, including e-procurement systems, online sales, participation in global value chains and business ecosystems;
- Favourable economic and political situation in partner countries - A stable economic and political situation in partner countries can help improve export conditions and reduce risks.

Today, one of the key factors influencing exports of Russian companies, including SMEs, is the introduction of sanctions restrictions. According to a survey conducted by the National Research University Higher School of Economics, among representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises [Adaptation of Russian industrial companies..., 2023] the main negative consequences of sanctions were difficulties in importing raw materials and supplies, an increase in their cost, a decrease in domestic demand, disruption of supply chains, difficulties with payments, disruption of transactions and the termination of business relations with foreign partners. Similar findings, with an emphasis on the problems associated with the substitution of software and telecommunications equipment, have been reported in other studies. However, it is worth noting that sanctions can have a dual effect on SMEs, acting both as an obstacle and a catalyst for their development [Spartak, 2023]. Some studies show that sanctions have provided SMEs with the opportunity to develop new niches, expand their product range and find new markets. With many foreign companies leaving the Russian market, SMEs have an opportunity to attract qualified staff. Some SMEs are adapting to the domestic market, while others are adopting a strategy of entering markets in friendly countries.

The analysis of foreign sources [Imran et al., 2017; Jean, Kim, 2020; Knight et al., 2020; Haddoud et al., 2021; Kalinic, Brouthers, 2022; Kasema, 2023; Higón, Bonvin, 2024; Obadia, Vida, 2024] complements and extends the factors considered by Russian researchers. Factors influencing the efficiency of SME export activities include human capital skills and management skills, innovation and technology, marketing skills, general experience of SMEs in international markets, knowledge of foreign markets and networking. It is also shown that the export performance of SMEs is influenced by organisational, entrepreneurial, production and market factors. The efficiency of activities is achieved through a combination of these factors.

Internal determinants that determine the results of export activities include the resources and capabilities of the firm, including experience and diversification of export activities, management characteristics with emphasis on export orientation, customers, innovation and technology, as well as an export marketing strategy that includes the adaptation of products and services to the characteristics of the foreign market. the development of pricing policies and advertising campaigns, and the choice of distribution channels [Sukhikh, Katz, 2015]. There is a strong relationship between export performance and the use of export channels, as well as the entrepreneurial orientation of the firm. In addition, the presence of a Total Quality Management (TQM) system in SMEs is an important factor influencing the competitiveness of products in international markets [Calheiros-Lobo et al., 2023; Elsharnouby et al., 2024].

Key factors for increasing the export efficiency of modern SMEs include access to networks and the availability of employees with networking skills, effective supply chain management, external market analysis and monitoring, product diversification and the use of digital technologies. However, a strategy of specialisation or differentiation can carry high risks in a global high-tech environment, so decisions on the feasibility and direction of diversification for SMEs require careful analysis and assessment.

With the growing instability of the macroeconomic situation, it is necessary to increase the attention and the range of external factors analysed. In recent years, special attention has also been paid to factors related to the development of digital technologies, which allow for the expansion of network cooperation, increased opportunities for obtaining information about foreign markets and the use of online formats in export activities.

# 2. Research on the relationship between external market factors and conditions and the results of SME export activities

The following are identified as trends in the development of research in the area of the relationship between factors and conditions with the outcomes of SME export activities:

 noticeable and growing interest in knowledge management in SMEs. This is determined by the expansion of opportunities and the increasing role of network interactions and network cooperation [Sukhikh, Katz, 2015; Malysheva, 2019; Faruk, Subudhi, 2019]. The ability to create new knowledge increases the attractiveness of SMEs as potential partners. Well-established knowledge transfer processes ensure the effectiveness of network interactions. The issues of knowledge preservation and protection, on the one hand, and

Fig. 1. Landscape of qualitative models of the relationship between factors and working conditions and the efficiency of Russian export-oriented SMEs

	,	1	
Internationalisation	Quick	Quick (M1)	Taking the objective (M3)
strategy	Gradual	Traditional model (M2)	Expansion (M4)
		Entering the foreign market	Successful activity
		Internationalisation stage	

Source: compiled by the author.

Fig. 2. Generalised framework for the development of qualitative models of the relationship between factors and working conditions and the efficiency of Russian export-oriented SMEs

	Internal resources (RS)	Managed processes (PR)	Results:
External factors and conditions (uncontrollable): - positive (VS); - negative – risks (RK)			- final (RZ1); - leading (RZ2)

Source: compiled by the author.

Fig. 3. The 'Quick start' model framework (M1)

#### **Internal resources (RS):**

- innovative products (RS1);
- entrepreneurial spirit (RS2);
- unique resources and skills (RS3);
- geographical location (RS4); - limited resources and opportunities (RS5)

#### Managed processes (PR):

- search for foreign markets (PR1);
- gathering information on markets (PR2);
- choosing the export strategy (PR3); - finding partners (PR4):
  - entering a new market (PR5)

#### Results Final (RZ1):

- growth in export sales volume (RZ1-1) Leading (RZ2):
- access to strategic resources (RZ2-1);
- leadership experience knowledge of advanced technologies and business models (RŽ2-2):
  - network collaboration (RZ2-3);
  - online distribution (RZ2-4);
  - diversification of risks (RZ2-5)

#### **External positive factors and conditions (VS):**

government support for SMEs (VS1); government support for exports (VS2); digital technologies and platforms (VS3) External risks (RK): sanctions (RK1), other risks (RK)

Source: compiled by the author.

its joint creation, on the other, largely determine the competitiveness of SMEs in domestic and foreign markets [Faruk, Subudhi, 2019; Jean, Kim, 2020; Calheiros-Lobo et al., 2023];

increasing attention to the human capital aspects of SMEs. A high level of human capital is recognised by many researchers and practitioners as a primary factor in the effective internationalisation of SMEs. The components of human capital related to the foreign economic activity of SMEs are considered to be the export and entrepreneurial orientation of managers and employees, the motivation to work in foreign markets, the availability of the necessary knowledge and competencies in various areas: unique knowledge and technologies as a basis for creating and protecting the competitiveness of products and services promoted in international markets,

Fig. 4. A model of the relationship between factors and working conditions and the efficiency of Russian export-oriented SMEs 'Quick start' (M1)

Source: составлено автором.

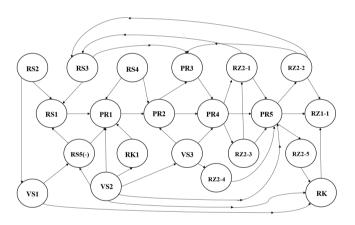


Fig. 5. The framework of the traditional model (M2)

#### **Internal resources (RS):**

- competitive products (RŚ1);
- human resources and management experience (RS2);
  - production capabilities (RS3);
  - geographical location (RS4); - marketing and logistics (RS5)

#### Managed processes (PR):

- search for foreign markets (PR1);
  - gathering information on markets (PR2);
- choosing the export strategy (PR3); - finding partners (PR4);
  - entering a new market (PR5)

Final (RZ1): - growth in export sales volume (RZ1-1);

Results

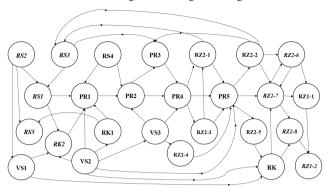
- growth in export profitability (RZ1-2) Leading (RZ2):
- access to strategic resources (RZ2-1);
- leadership experience knowledge of advanced technologies and business models (RZ2-2);
  - network collaboration (RZ2-3);
  - online distribution (RZ2-4);
  - risk diversification (RZ2-5);
  - strengthening image (RZ2-6);
  - expanding the customer base (RZ2-7); - cost reduction (RZ2-8)

**External positive factors and conditions** (VS):

government support for SMEs (FS1); government support for exports (FS2); digital technologies and platforms (FS3) External risks (RK): sanctions (RK1), limited domestic market (RK2); other risks (RK)

Source: compiled by the author.

Fig. 6. The traditional model of the relationship between factors and working conditions and the efficiency of Russian export-oriented SMEs at the stage of entering the foreign market (M2)



Source: compiled by the author.

developed digital competencies, knowledge and understanding of the characteristics of promising foreign markets, etc. [Imran et al., 2017; Dabić, 2020; Elsharnouby et al., 2024];

- expanding the opportunities and formats of export activities based on the use of digital technologies [Denicolai et al., 2021; assessing the integration processes of the EAEU.., 2023; Rosyidah et al., 2023];
- redirecting geographical attention. This aspect is particularly important for Russian SMEs in the context of sanctions restrictions [Dolgov et al., 2023; Spartak, 2023; Repnikova, Dmitrieva, 2024].

The approaches presented consider both the internationalisation process as a whole and export activity as one of its components from different angles,

i.e. they are mutually complementary. The essence of this complementarity lies not only in the diversity of factors, but also in the fact that they are not static and isolated. Therefore, the model of the impact of factors and working conditions of Russian SMEs on the efficiency of their export activities should be dynamic in nature and take into account the interrelations and interaction of various groups of factors.

# 3. Development of qualitative models of the relationship between factors and conditions of work and the efficiency (effectiveness) of the activities of Russian export-oriented SMEs

The analysis conducted showed that the strength and nature of the impact of certain factors on the efficiency of SME export activities depends, firstly, on the stage of internationalisation (entering a foreign market or continuing successful activity in it) and, secondly, on the strategy of entering a foreign market (gradual, according to the Uppsala model [Boguslavskaya, 2023], or a strategy of rapid internationalisation) (Fig. 1).

Since the number of different factors and conditions influencing the effectiveness of SME export activities is quite large, before constructing the models we will group them according to the logical chain 'resources - processes results'. In this case, a distinction is made between internal (controllable) and external (uncontrollable) factors, as well as between two levels of results: final or lagging (mainly financial), and leading or results-generating factors (increased customer satisfaction, creation of network relationships, strengthening of the company's

Fig. 7. The framework of models for consolidating and operating in the foreign market (M3, M4)

#### External resources (RS):

- competitive products (RŚ1);
   human resources and management experience, including in foreign markets (RS2);
  - production capabilities (RS3);
  - marketing and logistics (RS4)

#### Managed processes (PR):

- monitoring market conditions (PR1);
   strengthening relationships with key clients and partners (PR2);
  - product development (PR3);improving production efficiency (PR4);
- risk management (PR5); - diversification of international activities (PR6) for the M4 model

### Results *Final (RZ1):*

- growth in export sales, including online sales (RZ1-1);

- growth in export profitability (RZ1-2).

#### Leading (RZ2):

- network cooperation (RZ2-1);image strengthening (RZ2-2);
- customer base growth (RZ2-3); - cost reduction (RZ2-4)

External positive factors and conditions (VS): rgovernment support for SMEs and exports (VS1); development of digital technologies and platforms (VS2)

External risks (RK): risks of changes in legislation, sanctions and customs regulations and conditions, currency risks, cybersecurity threats, etc.

Source: compiled by the author.

image, etc.). A generalised framework for developing high-quality models of the relationship between factors and operating conditions and the efficiency (effectiveness) of Russian export-oriented SMEs is presented in Fig. 2.

The theoretical and methodological basis for the development of models are cognitive maps, which allow a visual representation of the multiple (usually indirect) relationships between factors and outcomes, as well as taking into account the mutual influence between the factors themselves. The approach to the construction of cognitive maps and their use as a basis for the subsequent development of simulation models and quantitative analysis of the processes under study is presented in the article [Katalevsky, 2015]. It is recommended to use causal and factor analysis [Glebkova, Kachanova, 2015; Kochemasova, 2018], as well as statistical methods of data processing [Burtseva, 2021] as methods for identifying and evaluating relationships.

In accordance with the adopted framework, the factors and conditions influencing the effectiveness of export activities at the stage of entering a foreign market for Russian SMEs using a rapid internationalisation strategy are presented in Fig. 3. Figure 4 shows a qualitative model of the relationship between the factors and conditions of work and the efficiency of such SMEs, corresponding to these conditions, in the form of a cognitive map - model M1 'Quick Start' (see Fig. 1).

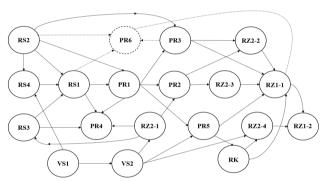
Figures 5 and 6 present a framework and model for the situation of foreign market entry of Russian SMEs using a gradual entry strategy (traditional model - M2).

The main stages and external factors in the M1 and M2 models are virtually identical, the differences being mainly in the availability of internal resources and capabilities (for the quick start model these are an innovative product, entrepreneurial spirit and unique resources and competencies; for the traditional or gradual model these are competitive products, human resources and management experience, existing production capabilities, well-established marketing and logistics) as well as the expected results. The names of the elements of the M2 model, which differ in content from the M1 model presented earlier, are highlighted in italics in Fig. 6.

The analysis of specific factors and the adoption of specific decisions in export activities are mainly associated with the stage of entering the foreign market [Zhang, 2024]. At the stage of consolidation in the market and ensuring successful activities, it is necessary to carry out more general actions: continuous monitoring of the market situation, improving the quality of products (services) and production efficiency, product development, strengthening relations with key customers and partners, including in a network format. Particular attention should be paid to the analysis and management of external risks, including the risks of changes in legislation, sanctions and customs regimes and conditions, currency risks

and cybersecurity threats. Therefore, the models of the relationship between the factors and conditions of work and the efficiency of the activities of Russian exportoriented SMEs at the stage of ensuring successful activity (M3 and M4) do not have many differences. They concern, on the one hand, quantitative characteristics in terms of the availability of certain resources and opportunities and the breadth of market coverage, which are not reflected in the qualitative models. Second, at this stage, SMEs that started their activities by establishing themselves on the domestic market and are developing according to the model of gradual internationalisation (M4) can consider issues of further diversifying their activities and entering new foreign markets. Therefore, for the M4 model, an additional process (PR6) will appear in comparison with M3. The framework of the models of consolidation and activity in the foreign market (M3, M4) is shown in Fig. 7, the corresponding cognitive model in Fig. 8.

Fig. 8. A model of the relationship between factors and working conditions and the efficiency of Russian export-oriented SMEs at the stage of activity in the foreign market (M3, M4)



Source: compiled by the author.

An additional opportunity for the M4 model to diversify international activities is indicated by a dotted line in Fig. 8.

#### Conclusion

Entering foreign markets offers Russian SMEs great opportunities for development. However, their limited resources mean that decisions must be carefully justified. Within the framework of this work, two tasks of such justification were solved: identification of factors and conditions influencing the efficiency of export-oriented Russian SMEs, and a model study of the relationship between such factors and export efficiency indicators.

Within the framework of this work, two tasks of such justification were solved: identification of factors and conditions influencing the efficiency of export-oriented Russian SMEs, and a model study of the relationship between such factors and export efficiency indicators. The increasing role of human capital skills and related organisational factors such as entrepreneurial spirit,

digital literacy and networking experience of managers and employees is noted. The main external conditions that determine the export opportunities of Russian SMEs are sanctions restrictions and digital technologies that open new formats of foreign economic activity for SMEs (electronic procurement systems and the development of online sales, participation in global value chains and business ecosystems, as well as a significant expansion of opportunities to obtain up-to-date information about new markets). Under these conditions, more and more companies are beginning to adopt a rapid internationalisation strategy to enter foreign markets.

The sets of factors and conditions associated with the strategies of traditional (gradual) and rapid internationalisation have certain differences. Taking this into account, as well as the differences in the tasks solved at the stages of entering a foreign market and subsequently

ensuring successful activity on it, a landscape of highquality models of the relationship between the factors and conditions of work and the efficiency of Russian exportoriented SMEs has been formed, combining four basic models which include a quick start, a traditional entry model, capturing borders and expansion.

Taking into account the existence of cross-links between different factors, their direct and indirect influence on the efficiency of SME export activities, cognitive maps were chosen as a method for constructing qualitative models. The developed models systematise the composition and visualise the mechanism of influence of key external and internal factors and conditions on the results of export activities. Such a presentation is the basis for obtaining quantitative estimates and increasing the validity of decisions of Russian export-oriented SMEs to enter foreign markets.

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