Export performance: a comprehensive bibliometric overview

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Abstract
Purpose – This study aims to present a bibliometric overview of the academic research on export performance (EP) in the business and management areas.

Design/methodology/approach – A bibliometric overview of 1,463 papers from 1968 to 2021, including performance analysis, science mapping analysis and graphical mapping, was conducted using the Scopus database. SciMAT software was used for thematic analysis and conceptual evolution mapping of the EP domain, and VOSviewer software was used for graphical visualization.

Findings – This study shows that EP research experienced spectacular growth, especially between 1998 and 2003, and the interest in this field continues to increase. Also, the USA and the UK appear to be the absolute leaders in EP research, with the best indicators of productivity and influence in all dimensions analyzed. The findings from the analysis through SciMAT indicate that “capabilities” and “R&D” are the main Motor themes that have contributed the most to the EP literature, whereas “global value chain” and “start-up” are emerging themes as new areas of interest.

Research limitations/implications – This study develops a baseline for representing certain and exhaustive insights in the EP field and specifies trends over a period. Using a single database and excluding book chapters/conference papers are limitations of this study.

Originality/value – EP is a research field that has gained wide acceptance in the academic community and international marketing literature. To the best of the authors’ knowledge, no bibliometric overview has analyzed the EP literature. This study presents the first systematic quantitative analysis of academic research on EP in the business and management areas.

Keywords Export performance, Bibliometrics, Performance analysis, Thematic analysis, Science mapping analysis, SciMAT, VOSviewer

Paper type Literature review

1. Introduction

Today’s cruel competitive environment has made internationalization a necessity for firms. Therefore, it has become inevitable for them to open up to foreign markets to sustain their existence. Generally, export is regarded as the first and most attractive step of the internationalization process (Albaum et al., 2016, p. 280; Leonidou et al., 2002). In addition to sustaining their existence, firms tend to export for several economic and strategic reasons. The indicator of the extent to which the companies achieve these financial (e.g. sales, profit and cost) and strategic (e.g. market expansion, competitive response, gaining a foothold in a foreign market or increasing the awareness of the product/firm) goals by exporting a product to foreign markets is expressed as “export performance” (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994).

Sousa et al. (2008) stated that the export performance (EP) literature might be one of the most researched but least understood topics in international marketing. The fact that the findings of the studies in the literature are often contradictory and that a common definition cannot be developed is an example of the complexity of conceptualization and definition of EP (Bonoma and Clark, 1988). Nevertheless, research on EP is of great importance:

- for public policymakers who see foreign exchange reserves as an important way to increase employment, productivity and, thus, social welfare (Czinkota, 1994);
- for executives, as it accelerates growth, increases the capacity utilization rate, improves financial indicators, increases competitive advantage and ensures the sustainability of the business in competitive market conditions (Kumcu et al., 1995; Samiee and Walters, 1990); and
- for marketing studies who consider as a field for building theory in international marketing (Katsikeas et al., 2000).

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As a result of the increasing trend toward economic integration and competition around the world, the efforts of enterprises to survive in globally competitive environments are getting increasingly intense. Eventually, it is becoming gradually critical for firms to seek more trade opportunities in foreign markets to maintain their position (Leonidou et al., 2002). Therefore, interest in research on EP continues and is lively discussed today as it was in the past (Aaby and Slater, 1989; Axinn, 1988; Bilkey, 1978; Cavusgil and Zou, 1994; Godinez et al., 2021; Haddou et al., 2019; Jongwanich, 2010; Safari and Saleh, 2020). Thus, the field has become a growing body of literature in international business and marketing. Furthermore, authors have synthesized the literature on EP topics, taking different systematic reviews and narrative reviews (Aaby and Slater, 1989; Zou and Stan, 1998; Sousa et al., 2008; Ruppenthal and Bausch, 2009).

As highlighted by Paul et al. (2021), deficiencies observed in earlier reviews can serve as catalysts and reinforcement for the emergence of new review studies. While literature reviews can be conducted using various methods, the most recent three significant reviews within the EP field have all used the vote-counting approach (Chen et al., 2016; Sousa et al., 2008; Zou and Stan, 1998). The shared objective among these related studies is to identify studies that designate EP as a dependent variable and subsequently amalgamate the findings regarding the positive or negative associations with its determinants. However, the vote-counting approach is well-suited for research investigations characterized by a small sample size and a relatively narrow focus, as Newbert et al. (2014) outlined. While the studies mentioned earlier have made valuable contributions toward comprehending the development of EP research, their limitations in terms of sampling and temporal constraints hinder their ability to offer a comprehensive overview of the field as a whole. Hence, a necessity exists to systematically structure and compile all available knowledge within this research domain.

According to Snyder (2019), literature reviews prove to be highly beneficial in such circumstances, and the selection of the review method should be contingent upon the specific objectives of the review. Our review encompasses a broader range and represents a notable advancement compared to the current body of literature, as it seeks to enhance the understanding of the role of EP within the context of international business and marketing. Accordingly, a bibliometric analysis is deemed more appropriate in cases when the review scope is extensive and the data set is large (Donthu et al., 2021).

Bibliometric analysis uses statistical techniques to systematically examine and assess a substantial body of work, typically comprising hundreds to thousands of articles, in an unbiased fashion, as demonstrated by Donthu et al. (2021). This analytical approach can validate and enhance the conclusions drawn in prior literature reviews while also offering an objective and comprehensible depiction of the research landscape regarding EP through visualization methods. Even for scholars specialized in international business and marketing, it could be challenging to measure, without bias, which subthemes are highly developed, mature, declined, isolated and emerging or how the field has evolved in recent decades. Hence, this study aims to directly address this gap in the literature and pursue a better insight into the state of the art and how it has evolved thematically since its origins. Thus, this study endeavors to fill the gap in the extant literature by investigating the progression of EP research, the present status of the field and future directions for EP research through the use of performance analysis and

**Figure 1** Evolutionary timeline of the export performance field

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**Source:** Authors’ own work
science mapping methods. Furthermore, to the best of the authors’ knowledge, given the dearth of bibliometric studies that address the subject of EP and the remarkable significance of this notion, the present study is the first systematic quantitative analysis of EP research that applies a bibliometric approach using performance analysis and science mapping analysis. Therefore, we propose the following research questions that we will answer throughout this paper and that also serve as an index and shed light on the scope of the study:

RQ1. What are the present publication trends in export performance in terms of years, journals, authors, affiliated countries and universities?

RQ2. Which are the most productive and influential studies, authors, journals, countries and universities in this field?

RQ3. What were the main research themes related to the export performance in each period studied?

RQ4. What is the scholarly nature of export performance research? How has the conceptual evolution of the export performance field changed? What themes are emerging and promising for future research?

Through the attainment of responses to these inquiries, this research offers three primary contributions:

1. Based on performance analysis, this study demonstrates the evolutionary process of the knowledge structure of EP.

2. It maps the evolutionary path of the EP field by quantitatively assessing, combining and prioritizing significant themes, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of its intellectual framework.

3. It identifies emerging subjects that are presently under investigation and could serve as a roadmap for future researchers in the field of EP and international marketing.

The rest of the study has been organized as follows. The following section presents the methodology used, followed by a discussion of the findings under the purpose of this study. Finally, conclusions and recommendations for future research are presented.

2. Historical development of the export performance field

The escalation of global competition has prompted a growing number of firms to explore international markets to attain their objectives and secure their market position and survival, particularly after the 1980s. Among the various modes of international market entry, exporting has traditionally been the preferred option, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises (Leonidou et al., 2002). Therefore, investigating the factors influencing the EP has constituted a significant area of study within the domain of international marketing research for more than six decades (Bilkey, 1978; Aaby and Slater, 1989).

EP is regarded as the dependent variable (Katsikeas et al., 2000) and is operationally defined as the results of a firm’s activities in export markets (Shoham, 1996). Accordingly, the research goal since the 1960s has been identifying factors affecting export behavior and performance.

In his pioneering research, Bilkey (1978) collated 43 studies on firms’ export behavior encompassing 11 nations. Drawing on relevant research, the author highlighted that exporting is a dynamic process influenced by various factors at different stages and suggested using export profiles alongside behavior models to identify and support firms with export potential.

After the 1980s, during the era of rapid globalization, examining the factors influencing EP has emerged as a significant avenue within the domain of international marketing research. Despite a growing body of research in this area, regrettably, much of the understanding pertaining to effective export practices remains fragmented. As Aaby and Slater (1989) pointed out, as of the late 1980s, a definitive formula for crafting a prosperous export program remains elusive. However, their seminal work highlighted several general conclusions (Aaby and Slater, 1989). Firm characteristics such as size, commitment to export, effective management systems and export experience are crucial, with competencies often outweighing inherent firm traits. Also, an international vision, consistent export goals and favorable attitudes toward exportation are essential for export success, and addressing management misperceptions and beliefs through pre-export programs could benefit non-exporting firms.

A common feature of research conducted on EP during the period spanning from the 1960s to the early 1990s was the prevalence of simplistic relationships involving a sole independent variable and a single dependent variable, with a predominant focus on internal factors (Aaby and Slater, 1989). Moreover, recommendations emerged during this era to enhance the EP field by shifting the measurement of EP from sales to profit-based metrics and by adopting more longitudinal research methodologies instead of cross-sectional approaches. These proposed improvements aimed to reduce the potential for perplexing or contradictory findings within scholarly research, notably concerning variables like firm size and its impact on EP (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994).

Later on, Cavusgil and Zou (1994) expanded the scope of EP beyond internal factors to encompass a more comprehensive perspective that integrates both economic and strategic dimensions, considering both internal (firm and product characteristics) and external factors (industry and export market characteristics). In their seminal work, the unified theoretical framework of export marketing strategy and performance and the proposed advanced methodology have inspired future research in the EP field.

Although previous reviews were conducted over a period of 20 years, because of the increasing number of studies, Zou and Stan (1998) covered a period of 10 years. During this period, scholars agree that evaluating EP requires a dual-level analysis, encompassing both internal and external environmental factors. Subsequently, Zou and Stan (1998) suggested two more dimensions to classify various determinants of EP, namely, controllable and uncontrollable variables. Despite this distinction, a prevailing perspective among scholars is that the firm and its management exert significant influence over the EP, as internal factors such as export marketing strategy and management’s attitudes/perceptions remain the most studied variables after the 1990s (Zou and Stan, 1998). Within the same period, despite the existence of various advocated methods, there remains an absence of consensus regarding the methodology for assessing EP. Researchers persist in using distinct nomenclature for their respective measures of EP, thereby yielding a multitude of terminologies (Zou and Stan, 1998).
Similar to previous periods, the main challenge in the EP field pertains to the absence of a coherent theoretical framework or a systematic rationale to inform the selection of independent variables. However, as Katsikeas (2003) aptly remarked, having a substantial and comprehensive theory is crucial to gaining a deeper comprehension of the factors that influence the achievement of exportation. Nevertheless, compared to the previous periods, an increasing number of studies have integrated theoretical and methodological rationales when formulating their research inquiries and hypotheses, such as industrial organization theory (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994), market-orientation (Atahene-Gima, 1995) and structural modeling (Holzmuller and Stottinger, 1996).

In the following years, critics of the export marketing literature have voiced concerns yet again about its propensity to offer only fragmented findings and its inability to construct a widely recognized EP model (Leonidou et al., Leonidou et al., 2002; Morgan et al., 2004). Despite the positive progress regarding the conceptualization of the EP, an ongoing prominent challenge facing researchers is the absence of consensus regarding the relevant determinants that contribute to EP, as well as the methods used to measure these variables. For instance, Sousa et al. (2008) discovered as many as 40 different determinants of EP in 52 studies covering 1998–2006. Nevertheless, the same authors have highlighted some improvements in the EP field, such as the level of sophistication of methodologies and the use of control and moderating variables. Also, within this period, scholars have suggested that EP should be recognized as a multi-faceted concept, necessitating the use of a variety of indicators (e.g. export intensity, export sales, export profits and market share) for a dependable evaluation of this construct (Sousa, 2004).

Notwithstanding, several authors (Cavusgil and Zou, 1994; Sousa et al., 2008) have criticized researchers within the EP literature for failing to consider the consistent measurement of EP. The same authors stated that the proper unit of analysis in EP research should be the export venture; however, the export venture may fail to capture latent firm-level variables (Oliveira et al., 2012). According to previous work, defining the domain of EP represents a key obstacle in the field, as it presents a primary challenge.

Since the 2000s, the integration of theoretical foundations within the domain of EP has experienced growing prevalence (Chen et al., 2016). This process was tackled through several theoretical lenses, including the resource-based view (Westhead et al., 2001; Dhanaraj and Beamish, 2003), contingency theory (Morgan et al., 2004; Aulakh et al., 2000), institutional-based view (Peng et al., 2008) and organizational learning theory (Lages et al., 2008). At present, integrating several theoretical perspectives yields a valuable synthesis of the viewpoints, as the complexity of EP cannot be fully accounted for by any single theory alone (Chen et al., 2016).

In sum, state-of-the-art research singles out that, despite numerous advancements in the domain of EP, similar issues persist (Chen et al., 2016). Present research endeavors and results continue to exhibit fragmentation, diversity and incongruence. Furthermore, while numerous new variables influencing the subject are explored, developing a comprehensive framework capable of fostering a comprehensive and general conceptual structure remains unrealized. Specifically, the under-study of external factors, the limited availability of longitudinal investigations, the absence of data gathering from emerging economies, the concentration on particular industry sectors and the disparity between units of analysis present potential avenues for future research (Chen et al., 2016). Over the past 70 years, the EP field has devoted significant efforts to developing theories that facilitate the investigation of the EP variable. Figure 1 provides a timeline of the evolution of EP studies, from their origin to the present day.

3. Methodology
3.1 Bibliometric analysis: data collection and analysis
Bibliometrics is defined as “a set of methods to quantitatively analyze academic literature and scholarly communication” (Das, 2015). Bibliometric research measures scientific progress, academic performance and organizational performance in several disciplines. Various indices are used in the bibliometric analysis, such as the number of publications, number of citations, impact factors, h- and c-indices and annual average citations (Davidson et al., 2014; Elaheh et al., 2018; Etemadifar et al., 2018; Ghanbari Baghestan et al., 2019). Through bibliometric research based on these indexes, it is possible to determine the influence of various journals and schools of thought in the field (Baumgartner and Pieters, 2003; Ghorbani et al., 2022) to determine the weight of leading academics (Portugal Ferreira, 2011), to discover new trends and latest developments (Shafique, 2013) and to direct future research opportunities.

In this study, publications in the field of EP were classified through bibliometric records obtained from the Scopus database. Citation search engines such as Google Scholar, Microsoft Academic Search and CiteSeerX and databases such as Elsevier-Scopus and Thompson Reuters Web of Science are frequently used to obtain bibliometric data (Andres, 2009; Das, 2015; Guz and Rushchitsky, 2009). However, it is noted that Scopus covers more journals than WOS (Aghaei Chadegani et al., 2013) and is the most extensive database containing research publications, abstracts and citations of peer-reviewed journals (Dunakhe and Panse, 2021). According to Scopus data (www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus/content), 21,500 scientific journals and more than 5,000 international publishers are registered in its database. Moreover, bibliometric studies are typically deployed in just one database to reduce data homogenization issues when working with multiple databases (Mariani et al., 2022). Therefore, the Scopus database was used to obtain data for this bibliometric review.

The search was used in the abstract, title and keyword areas. The search terms are the following keywords: “export performance; export performance; export effect; export intensity; export sales; export profits; export success; export property; export growth.” The reason for using multiple keywords is that there are different concepts in the EP field. For this reason, keywords were selected by examining previous studies (Baldauf et al., 2000; Ruppenthal and Bausch, 2009). The number of documents obtained in the first search was 4,633 (as of 13.10.2021). Then, the document type is limited to only articles and reviews. We have preferred to depend on articles published in an academic journal instead of the book chapters and conference papers as sources, as peer-reviewed articles can be considered as “certified knowledge”
Bibliometric methods are performed using two main approaches: performance analysis and graphical mapping (Noyons et al., 1999). In performance analysis, scientific productions of different actors interacting in a particular research field are evaluated. These actors include countries, universities, departments, funding sources and researchers. The most important indicators are the number of articles and citations. The number of articles published is generally associated with an author’s productivity. In contrast, the number of citations related to an article indicates its impact on the academic community (Merigó and Yang, 2017).

In addition to the methods used in the research, the h-index was also used. The h-index was first introduced by Hirsch (2005), becoming one of the leading bibliometric indices to evaluate a researcher’s scientific performance. Although the h-index was initially designed to measure the scientific performance of researchers, it has also been used to measure the performance of journals (Braun et al., 2006). Combining a measure of quantity and impact in a single indicator is the main superiority of the h-index (Costas and Bordons, 2007). As an exhaustive result was sought, the publications were analyzed according to their number of citations and classified according to their h-index.

Cobo et al. (2011) emphasize the importance of using multiple scientific mapping software tools to perform a deep scientific mapping analysis rather than using a single tool for all the key elements (data retrieval, preprocessing, network extraction, normalization, mapping, analysis, visualization and interpretation) in the science mapping workflow. Therefore, we used two complementary tools, SciMAT and VOSviewer, for thematic analysis and visualization.

To enable the study of the evolution of the EP field, a co-word analysis (Callon et al., 1983) was applied using SciMAT with scientific field mapping. The current research conducted a longitudinal framework analysis of co-word following Cobo et al. (2011). To identify the foremost theme in each cluster, we used a clustering algorithm on the co-word networks developed for each of the chosen periods. SciMAT generates strategic diagrams for each period using two metrics, namely, centrality and density, as outlined in Callon et al. (1991). Centrality assesses the degree of network interaction with others, whereas density gauges the internal network strength. Thematic networks are categorized into one of four quadrants based on their centrality and density values. These quadrants are (Figure 8):

- **Top right quadrant**: this typically comprises highly developed and essential themes in the research field. These themes are characterized by strong centrality and high density and are commonly referred to as “motor themes.”
- **Top left quadrant**: this depicts highly developed and isolated themes. These themes refer to specialized topics that exhibit strong internal links but weak external links.
- **Bottom left quadrant**: this represents the themes that are emerging or declining in the research field. These themes are underdeveloped and marginal, having low centrality and density.
- **Bottom right quadrant**: this encompasses themes pertinent to the research domain, yet they lack sufficient development and may represent potential future research directions.

These are known as basic and transversal themes.

Finally, graphic mapping was done using VOSViewer in this study. Vosviewer is software that allows analysis of networks such as co-citation, bibliographic matching, co-keywords and co-authorship (van Eck and Waltman, 2010). The Vosviewer (van Eck and Waltman, 2010) has been used to visualize co-citations of journals cited in the EP field, co-citation of authors cited in the EP field, bibliographic coupling of countries that publish in the EP field and co-occurrence of authors’ keywords of documents published in the EP field.

Because of the long period of 54 years, the distribution of the number of articles, the number of citations and the authorship characteristics are shown in the figures at five-year intervals. In the tables, 2017 and before are shown collectively, focusing on the past five years. In summary, the annual distribution of articles, citation numbers, most cited articles, most productive and influential authors, most productive and influential journals and, finally, the most productive and influential countries and universities were included in bibliometric analysis.

### 4. Results and discussion

#### 4.1 Annual distribution of articles

To respond to RQ1, the annual distribution of publications in the research area from 1968 to 2021 is illustrated in Figure 2. The number of publications associated with EP has increased rapidly over time. The publications were examined in nine periods, and different trends were observed in these periods. In the first two periods from 1968 to 1979, EP publications were no more than three per year. Although there was an increase in the annual number of publications from 1980 to 1991, it reached a maximum of ten papers. As the first publications related to EP appeared, the first milestone observed in the EP field related to EP appeared, the first milestone observed in the development of the publications is the sixth period, covering the years 1998–2003. The number of publications (167) in only the sixth period was even more than the total number of papers (141) in the first five periods supports this view. This significant growth of EP publications, mainly since 1998,
implies that this emerging research field attracts increasing attention from scholars. The increases in the total number of publications continued in the seventh and eighth periods. In the seventh period, covering the years 2004–2009, the total number of publications reached 201, and an increase of 20% was observed compared to the previous period. In the eighth period, from 2010 to 2015, the total number of publications increased by 78% compared to the seventh period and reached 358.

The second milestone observed in the development of EP publications occurred in the last period (2016–2021). The number of publications per year was reached the maximum in 2020, and 119 papers were published. In this period, the total number of publications reached 596, but as the search time of the literature collection ended in October 2021, the number of papers from 2021 is incomplete. Nevertheless, considering 95 papers have been published by October 2021, despite this incomplete data, it is clear that the publication trend is still growing.

4.2 Articles and citation frequency
To answer RQ1, another way to highlight the impact of work in a particular research area is to investigate the number of citations. The publication and citation patterns generated for nine specified periods between 1968 and 2021 are shown in Figure 3. Over this period, 42,320 citations for 1,463 papers, including self-citations, have been recorded, with an average number of 28.92 citations per paper. As the number of publications, the distribution of citations has shown a stunning development trend during the period under review.

In the first three periods, the total number of citations to the publications was 120 citations to 2 papers, 148 citations to 10 papers and 560 citations to 18 papers. In the fourth and fifth periods, citations increased significantly and reached 2,418 and 2,633 citations. Nevertheless, we do not consider this high acceleration as a milestone. As in the number of publications, the milestone in the number of citations occurred in the sixth period. With 12,947 citations to 167 papers, the sixth period, spanning 1998–2003, represents the heyday of the EP research area. The fact that 2003, with 2,745 citations to 36 published papers, is in the sixth period also reveals the importance. In addition, 30.59% of 42,320 citations to papers published over 54 years belong to this period. One reason is that the papers published in the sixth period included 14 of the 30 most cited articles in the EP field during the entire period, as shown in Table 1.

Complementing these data, the average citations per paper during each period were 60, 14.8, 31.1, 54.95, 39.30, 77.53, 49.32, 24.51, 8.06 and 28.93. The distribution of citations fluctuated during the first five periods, with the average citation per cited paper between 8.06 and 60. In the sixth period, it peaked with 77.73 average citations per paper. However, this average rate of citation distribution has started to decrease in the past three periods (between 2004 and 2021). Reasons for this may include a year-over-year increase in the number of papers published and papers typically cited only after a particular time has passed from publication.

As seen in Table 1, between 1968 and 2021, there were 463 papers (31.65%) with 20 or more citations, 229 papers (15.65%) with 10–20 citations and 581 papers (39.71%) with 1–9 citations, while 190 (12.99%) of 1,463 papers were not cited yet. Only nine of these 190 uncited papers were published in the first five periods (i.e. in the first 30 years). Similarly, only 41 of 463 papers with 20 or more citations were published within the first 30 years. Among the papers published since 1998, those (422 papers) with 20 or more citations cover 91.14% of the papers (463) with 20 or more citations published during the entire publication period (1968–2021). As mentioned before, this date (1998) is the beginning of the sixth period, which represents the heyday of the EP research area.

4.3 Most cited articles
Over the decades, numerous articles have been published in various fields. One method to see the big picture when
reviewing these publications is to analyze the number of citations that reflect the article’s popularity and attention received by the academic community (Baier-Puentes et al., 2019; Merigó and Yang, 2017). In this section, regarding RQ2, we analyze the most-cited articles in the fields of business, management and accounting journals of Scopus. Table 2 demonstrates the 30 most-cited papers in the EP research area of these journals.

According to Table 2, the five most-cited papers exceed the threshold of 500 citations (Aaby and Slater, 1989; Aulakh et al., 2000; Morgan et al., 2004; Westhead et al., 2001; Zou and Stan, 1998). It is important to note that the most-cited paper is Aaby and Slater (1989), which has 674 citations and is considered the EP research area’s starting point. The second paper on this list with more citations is Westhead et al. (2001), which examines the internationalization of new and small firms based on a resource-based view. The third most-cited paper belongs to Zou and Stan (1998), which reviews 50 studies on the determinants of EP from the empirical literature between 1987 and 1997. The fourth most-cited paper is that of Morgan et al. (2004). They propose a theoretical model that includes the antecedents of EP, such as available resources and capabilities, competitive strategy decisions and competitive intensity. Finally, the last of the five papers on the list to exceed the 500 citation threshold is Aulakh et al. (2000) study. They developed a framework for examining the export strategies of firms in emerging economies and their performance in foreign markets.

However, it is important to mention the studies that draw attention to the average annual citation, even though the total number of citations is less than 500. The seminal paper International venturing by emerging economy firms: The effects of firm capabilities, home country networks, and corporate entrepreneurship by Yiu et al. (2007) ranks first regarding the average annual citations, with 31.33 citations per year. It is followed by Westhead et al. (2001) with 30.71 citations and Morgan et al. (2004) with 29 citations per year.

Not surprisingly, 14 of the papers published in the sixth period (from 1998 to 2003), which marked the milestone in the total number of citations and considered the heyday of the EP, dominate almost half of the list of most-cited articles. Also, it should be noted that this list only includes academic publications such as articles and reviews.

On the other hand, according to Wang (2013), a publication may need three to seven years to reach the highest number of citations. Therefore, we assume that only four of the publications in the eighth and ninth periods are listed because of this time interval between publication and reference.

4.4 Most productive and influential authors

Since its inception, the EP field has been characterized by continuous growth and the participation of many researchers. Therefore, determining the most productive and influential authors in the research area is one crucial issue when obtaining an overview of EP research. To respond to RQ2, this section aims to present these authors regarding the number of articles published and the number of citations received, according to the information available in Scopus. For this purpose, Table 3 lists the 20 most popular authors in EP. Thus, some well-known authors do not appear because of the specific ranking algorithm. However, it is important to note that many other authors may also emerge according to different parameters.

Considering the total number of papers, Diamantopoulos is the most productive author in EP, with 18 articles and an h-index of 13. Then, Sousa, with 17 papers and an h-index of 13; Katsikeas and Lages, with 14 papers and an h-index of 13 h-indexes, are on the list. Regarding the total number of citations, Katsikeas is the most influential author with 2,054 citations, Leonidou with 1,300 citations and Lages with 1,088 citations. According to the TC/TP, the most influential authors are Katsikeas, with 146,71 citations per article; Leonidou, with 144,44 citations; and Filatotchev, surprisingly, with 115,14 citations but only seven papers.
4.5 Most productive and influential journals

In total, our data set comprised articles published in several journals. **Table 4** presents the 20 business and management journals with the highest total papers to provide a general overview of the most productive and influential journals. Along with the total number of publications in each journal's EP, **Table 4** presents more information, including the h-index in EP and the total number of citations in EP.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total citation</th>
<th>Total citation per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Export strategies and performance of firms from emerging economies: Evidence from Brazil, Chile, and Mexico</td>
<td>Aulakh P.S., Kotabe M., Teegen H.</td>
<td>Academy of Management Journal</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>22.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Sectoral patterns of small firm innovation, networking and proximity</td>
<td>Freel M.S.</td>
<td>Research Policy</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>21.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Born global or gradual global? Examining the export behavior of small and medium-sized enterprises</td>
<td>Moen Ø., Servais P.</td>
<td>Journal of International Marketing</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>18.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Innovative capability and export performance of Chinese firms</td>
<td>Guan J., Ma N.</td>
<td>Technovation</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>19.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Mapping the institutional capital of high-tech firms: A fuzzy-set analysis of capitalist variety and export performance</td>
<td>Schneider M.R., Schulze-Bertrop C., Paunescu M.</td>
<td>Journal of International Business Studies</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>27.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Firms’ degree of born-globalness, international entrepreneurial orientation and export performance</td>
<td>Kuivalainen O., Sundqvist S., Servais P.</td>
<td>Journal of World Business</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>313</td>
<td>20.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Innovation and export performance: Evidence from the UK and German manufacturing plants</td>
<td>Roper S., Love J.H.</td>
<td>Research Policy</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>15.05</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>The export orientation and export performance of high-technology SMEs in emerging markets: The effects of knowledge transfer by returnee entrepreneurs</td>
<td>Filatotchev I., Liu X., Buck T., Wright M.</td>
<td>Journal of International Business Studies</td>
<td>2009</td>
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(continued)
Table 2

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>Partner Selection and Venturing Success: The Case of Joint Ventures with Firms in the People’s Republic of China</td>
<td>Luo Y.</td>
<td>Organization Science</td>
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<td>The impact of technological innovation on international trade patterns: The evidence reconsidered</td>
<td>Soete L.</td>
<td>Research Policy</td>
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<td>On the green and innovative side of trade competitiveness? the impact of environmental policies and innovation on EU exports</td>
<td>Costantini V., Mazzanti M.</td>
<td>Research Policy</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>200</td>
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Source: Authors’ own work
According to Table 4, the most productive and influential journals in EP research are the *Journal of International Marketing*, *International Business Review*, *International Marketing Review* and *Journal of Business Research*. They all have the highest h-index in the discipline, not necessarily because they have published the most papers on EP but because they have more citations for what has been published.

### 4.6 Most productive and influential countries

As a precursor to economic development and growth, research is undoubtedly one of the most essential elements determining knowledge advancement. Countries are increasingly getting involved and investing in these activities (Becker, 2015; Harris, 2001; Wang, 2010). From this point of view, the purpose of this section is to analyze the geographical origin of EP research. This analysis highlights the importance of moving researchers from one country to another on publication performance (Merging et al., 2015). Therefore, an author may have two or more publications from different countries. In this sense, the analysis by country refers to the country where the author worked when the article was published. Table 5 presents a ranking of the 20 leading countries in EP research.

The USA (H-index: 57; TP: 257; and TC: 12794) and the UK (H-index: 56; TP: 234; and TC: 10673) are the leading countries in the list of the most productive and influential countries in EP research (Table 5). Note that the countries are far superior to others regarding the H-index, the total number of papers and citations. Such a pitch that the two countries together have published 33.56% of the papers in the EP field and received more than 50% of the citations, indicating their vast enthusiasm in the research field. Some of the reasons that may explain the ranking of the USA and UK are the size of the country, the number of researchers, language opportunities and investments in R&D. Besides, the UK data are lower than the US data but are much higher than the third and fourth positions, occupied by Spain and Australia, respectively.

Consider that European countries represent 40% of the list (eight countries). Likewise, we observe that 25% of the list is Asian (five countries), with China being the region’s most productive and influential country (H-index: 21; TP: 73; and TC: 1944). Finally, it is interesting to note that Latin American and African countries are not included in the list, so their participation in this field is relatively scarce both in quantity and influence.

### 4.7 Most productive and influential universities

Many universities around the world have made important contributions to knowledge and understanding of EP. To identify the most productive and influential ones, Table 6 presents a list of the top 20 universities on EP, sorted by the number of publications. Note that many other indicators (such as total citation and h-index) are also used to create a complete picture, considering each university’s strengths and weaknesses.

In this analysis, several universities stand out firmly in different indexes. Loughborough University is the most productive university in EP. According to the total paper, the other universities that form the top five are Leeds University, the University of Nottingham, Durham University and Cardiff University. However, Cardiff University is the most influential one, according to citations. Surprisingly, the University of Cyprus rose to 4th place on the list with 1,563 citations, while Durham University, the 4th most productive university, dropped to 12th place with 503 citations (Table 6).

Another interesting result is that although the USA is the most productive and influential country and the seminal authors are from the USA, there is no US university in the list of the 20 most productive and influential universities. In addition, the top five universities on the list are in the UK, the most productive and influential country after the USA (Table 6).
4.8 Visualizing bibliometric networks of the export performance field using VOSviewer

Next, to answer RQ3 and RQ4, this section provides a graphical visualization of publications in the EP field with VOSviewer to expand on the bibliometric results in previous sections. VOSviewer creates visual maps regarding co-authorship, co-occurrence, citation, bibliographic coupling and co-citation.

First, we examine the co-citation of journals cited in the EP field. The most productive and influential journals in the EP field are presented in Table 5. However, this analysis allows for a more detailed view and visualization. Co-citation is defined as the frequency with which two documents or journals are cited...
Figure 4 shows the most cited journals, and the links show the journals cited together between 1968 and 2021 with a citation threshold of 300 and the 33 most illustrative co-citation networks. Figure 4 demonstrates the clustering of the journals following their orientation centered mainly on the fields of International Business, International Marketing, Economics and Entrepreneurship. *Journal of International Business Studies, International Marketing Review, International Business Review and Journal of International Marketing* are the leading journals in the EP field with the largest number of citations and, therefore, a more comprehensive network of connections. This status makes sense, as these journals are among the most productive and influential. However, it is possible to observe other essential journals, such as the *Journal of Marketing* and the *Strategic Management Journal*, as they have several of the most cited articles in the EP field.

Another interesting subject to analyze is the co-citation structure of authors in the EP field. The most cited authors and connections are represented in Figure 5. Similar to the previous analysis, an author’s minimum number of citations is determined as 300. As a result, 22 meet the threshold, as shown in Figure 5. As stated above, Figure 5 confirms the essential role played by Katsikeas, Diamantopoulos and Lages in the EP field, as they are listed as the most productive and influential authors. Also, this map highlights the importance of Cavusgil and Zou for the EP field. Also, there are other authors strongly connected in the field, such as Morgan, Zahra and Johanson, among others.

Next, we examine the map of the most productive countries with the bibliographic coupling method. Bibliographic coupling
analysis suggests scientific research creates bibliographic couples by citing similar sources (Kessler, 1963). Figure 6 shows the results of 118 countries; 27 meet the threshold. Note that a country’s minimum number of documents is determined as 20. Again, as highlighted earlier, the dominance of the USA and the UK is evident. They are positioned in the center of the map and strongly linked to the rest of the countries. In addition, there is a solid European presence on the map, along with several emerging countries such as Turkey, Brazil, China and India.

Finally, the leading keywords of the EP field are analyzed (Figure 7). The co-occurrence of author keywords defines the most frequently used keywords and the documents they are more commonly used (Merigo et al., 2018). The minimum number of occurrences of a keyword is assigned as 15, and 34 meet the threshold. EP, export, internationalization, innovation, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and international trade were the most common.

4.9 Science mapping analysis of the export performance field using SciMAT

We used the SciMAT tool to comprehensively analyze the topics and thematic areas of the 1,463 papers included in this study. To investigate the evolutionary trajectory of the EP field, we segmented the coverage period into three distinct intervals, namely, from 1968 to 2009, from 2010 to 2015 and from 2015 to 2021. Although we initially contemplated analyzing the data in nine time periods by dividing it into equal intervals, akin to the performance analysis, this approach yielded a somewhat uneven sample because of the differing number of articles published in each period. Specifically, the number of articles published between 1968 and 2009, constituting the first seven periods, is nearly equivalent to those published in the subsequent six years (as demonstrated in Figure 2). As such, we divided the data into three intervals based on the number of articles, resulting in 509 articles for the first period, 358 for the second period and 596 for the third period.

The documents entered into SciMAT underwent a keyword standardization process that aimed to cluster those with similar meanings. This process involved an initial search for plurals, grouping words that referred to the same concept, recorded in singular and plural forms. Additionally, the authors manually consolidated comparable keywords based on their meanings, such as “export market orientation,” “export orientation” and “EMO,” which were considered to represent the same construct. Initially, the articles generated 3,444 keywords, but after the standardization and grouping process, 1,750 unique keywords were identified, spanning the three periods.

Finally, to respond to RQ3 and RQ4, an overview of the science mapping and the hidden relationships between key themes in the main research fields associated with EP is provided. This overview is structured into two complementary parts: a thematic analysis and a conceptual evolution map. The first one helps to reveal the themes emerging from the EP literature, its main concepts and its role in the building of the EP field for each period, while the second one shows both the development of these themes and the relationships between them for the whole period of analysis.

4.9.1 Thematic analysis: subthemes of export performance

The research themes examined in three periods were identified by SciMAT based on centrality and density. Various strategic diagrams are presented in Figure 8 to analyze the most highlighted themes of the field of EP for each period. Furthermore, the research topics within the strategic diagrams are portrayed as spheres, with their size in proportion to the number of publications linked with each research theme.
4.9.1.1 First period (1968–2009). In total, 11 major themes emerge from the SciMAT analysis, among which the Motor themes are CAPABILITIES, TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT and EXPORT COMMITMENT [see the top right quadrant of Figure 8(a)]. The themes are considered important because of their contribution to the growth of the field of EP. The performance measures indicate that TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT (TQM) was the main motor theme, with seven published papers, 417 citations received and an h-index of 6 (Table 7). As seen from its cluster network (Table 7), TQM has been studied from different subthemes: developing-countries, resource-based-view, certification, international-standards and technology. For example, at the end of this period, Lages et al. (2009) adopted a resource-based perspective to understand how organizational learning, relationship and quality capabilities influence product strategy and EP.

The second quadrant represents highly developed and isolated themes with high density but low centrality.
“TRANSITION-ECONOMIES” represents the concept with the highest degree of intensity (18.06) among both highly developed and isolated themes. Other prominent themes in this quadrant are EMERGING-MARKETS, INDUSTRIAL-PERFORMANCE (Table 7). In the third quadrant, which represents low intensity and low centrality, RELATIONSHIPS and FOREIGN-DIRECT-INVESTMENTS are emerging or declining themes in the first period.

Finally, in the fourth quadrant are the basic and transversal themes with low intensity but high centrality: R&D, EXPORT-MARKETING-STRATEGY and SME. These cross-cutting themes have high internal coherence with other research topics but are internally underdeveloped. It is essential to highlight the EXPORT-MARKETING-STRATEGY cluster, as this theme had the highest number of documents (14), total citations (1,115) and h-index (10) overall. EMS has been studied from the point of view of INTERNATIONALIZATION, STANDARDIZATION, COMPETITIVENESS, DEVELOPING-COUNTRIES and RELATIONSHIP (Table 7).

Directing our focus toward the upper left quadrant depicted in Figure 8(b), we can discern various densely clustered but isolated themes, including RESOURCE-BASED-VIEW, INTERNET and SPILLOVER-EFFECT. The quadrant located in the lower left section reveals either underdeveloped, emerging or declining themes, such as EMERGING-MARKETS, PERFORMANCE-ASSESSMENT and PROFITABILITY.

Compared to the first period, the Motor themes retain only one theme and include three new themes. These themes are subthemes of the motor and transversal themes that made the

4.9.1.2 Second period (2010–2015). During the second period spanning from 2010 to 2015, a total of 13 research themes pertaining to the EP were identified, as displayed in the strategic diagram in Figure 8(b). Regarding this matter, seven research themes are deemed significant in their contribution to the development of the field of EP, hence considered as the main themes. These include Motor themes (Q1) and Basic and transversal themes (Q4): TECHNOLOGY, EXPORT-COMMITMENT, INTERNATIONALIZATION, STANDARDIZATION, COMPETITIVENESS, DEVELOPING-COUNTRIES and RELATIONSHIP (Table 7).

Figure 8 Strategic diagrams and an example of cluster networks


Source: Authors’ own work
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<th>Period no.</th>
<th>Quadrant</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Cluster networks</th>
<th>Centrality</th>
<th>Density</th>
<th>No. of documents</th>
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<td>Q1</td>
<td>TOTAL-QUALITY-MANAGEMENT DEVELOPING-COUNTRIES; RESOURCE-BASED-VIEW; CERTIFICATION; INTERNATIONAL-STANDARDS; TECHNOLOGY</td>
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<td>Q3</td>
<td>ECONOMIC-GROWTH</td>
<td>FOREIGN-DIRECT-INVESTMENTS; CULTURE; SPECIAL-ECONOMIC-ZONE; REFORM; DISTRIBUTION-CHANNELS</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>GLOBAL-VALUE-CHAINS</td>
<td>SUPPLY-CHAIN; GLOBAL-PRODUCTION-CHAIN; ORGANIZATIONAL-LEARNING; EXPORT-GROWTH</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL-ENTREPRENEURSHIP</td>
<td>NETWORKS; FIRM-EXPERIENCE; IMMIGRANT; EXPORT-VENTURES; INTERNET</td>
<td>11.36</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>INTERNATIONALIZATION</td>
<td>ENTRY-MODE; EXPORT-PROMOTION; EXPORT-MARKETING-STRATEGY; PERFORMANCE-ASSESSMENT; RISK-TAKING</td>
<td>10.65</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>EXPORT-INTENSITY</td>
<td>COMPARATIVE-ADVANTAGES; FAMILY-FIRMS; ENVIRONMENTAL-ISSUES; EXPORT-DIVERSIFICATION</td>
<td>9.27</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>RESOURCE-BASED-VIEW</td>
<td>TRADE-SHOW; RELATIONSHIP; PROFITABILITY; INSTITUTIONAL-THEORY; BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS-MARKETING</td>
<td>7.57</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>6</td>
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Source: Authors’ own work
most significant contribution to the development of the field in the previous period.

Table 7 presents each theme’s performance indicators and subthemes in the second period. EXPORT-COMMITMENT continues to be one of the motor themes [top right quadrant of Figure 8(b)], with a decrease in intensity but an increase in centrality compared to the first period, achieving a total of 9 published articles, 416 citations and an h-index of 8. INTERNATIONALIZATION, the most related subtheme to EMS among the transversal themes in the first period, appears as the main motor theme with the highest density, the most documents, the most citations and the highest h-index in this period. The cluster network for internationalization shows it to be connected with topics like BARRIERS, EXPORT-INTENSITY and FAMILY-FIRMS (Calabrò et al., 2011; Cerrato and Piva, 2010; Kahiya et al., 2014).

Likewise, COMPETITIVENESS, which was the subtheme of R&D from Basic and transversal themes in the previous period, appears as the theme with the highest centrality (30.53) and the highest number of documents (16) in this period, contributing the most to the development of the field (Table 7).

4.9.1.3 Third period (2016–2021). The final period (2016–2021) witnessed a diversification of research topics and resulted in 15 main themes [Figure 8(c)]. Notably, eight of these themes were newly introduced. The remaining seven themes were carried over from the previous two periods. Table 7 presents the performance indicators of the period themes.

The motor themes of this period are CAPABILITIES as the central node of export market orientation and knowledge management, R&D focusing on innovation, technology and patents, DEVELOPING-COUNTRIES where research focuses on export success and competitiveness, and TRUST, which is closely related to export commitment and is the central node of research on psychic distance, social media and ICT [top right quadrant of Figure 8(c)]. These results are in line with the evolution of the EP field, as research has focused more on these topics in recent years (Bosso et al., 2018; Durmaz and Eren, 2017; Edoh et al., 2020; Guarascio et al., 2016; Ipek and Tanyeri, 2020; Mahmoud et al., 2020; Navarro-Garcia et al., 2016).

Besides the Motor themes, four research themes are considered critical because of their contribution to the growth of the EP field in the past six years (Basic and transversal themes): INTERNATIONAL-ENTREPRENEURSHIP, INTERNATIONALIZATION, EXPORT-INTENSITY and RESOURCE-BASED-VIEW [see bottom right quadrant Figure 8(c)]. It is pertinent to elucidate certain aspects in this context. First, EXPORT-INTENSITY, a subtheme of the main themes in the previous two periods, emerged as one of the main themes with the highest number of citations (286) and the highest number of documents (18) in this period. Similarly, INTERNATIONAL-ENTREPRENEURSHIP was a subtheme of one of the emerging themes in the previous period. Finally, compared to the second period, the RBV theme seems to be on the decline (considering its centrality and density), having changed position and no longer being in the “highly developed them” quadrant (Table 7).

4.9.2 Conceptual evolution map
SciMAT was used to visually map the development of themes in the EP domain and their connections between the periods over the three periods investigated. Figures 9 and 10 present the transition map and the main thematic evolution of the EP perspective.

The transition map (Figure 9) generated through the inclusion index indicates strong thematic cohesion, with most themes originating from the preceding period’s themes. Therefore, the research field is robust and well-established. In the first period, 87 keywords were identified; 92% of these (80 keywords) were collected again in the second period; and 18 new keywords were added in this second period, resulting in 98 keywords. In the third period, 89 (91%) of the keywords from the second period were collected again, and 21 new keywords were added, resulting in a total of 110 keywords.

SciMAT presents a longitudinal evolution map (Figure 10). To interpret the map correctly, we should take into account that the size of the spheres is proportional to the number of documents of each theme. Additionally, it is crucial to recognize that each column on the map represents a different period and differentiate between the various types of lines connecting the themes. Thematic nexus is indicated by solid lines, which means that the linked themes share either the same name or that one theme is part of the other. On the other hand, a dotted line indicates that the less strongly linked themes share keywords that are not identical to the themes’ names. The correlation between the two topics is reflected in the thickness of the lines, with a stronger association being represented by thicker lines (Murgado-Armenteros et al., 2015).

Considering the evolution of the keywords, we now analyze the evolution of the thematic areas in the EP research field (Figure 10). As shown in Figure 10, EP research represents moderate cohesion between periods. Some clusters, such as “BARRIER,” “START-UP,” “TRUST” and “SPILLOVER-EFFECT,” appear only in a single period. In contrast, the clusters such as “CAPABILITIES,” “EXPORT-COMMITMENT,” “R&D” and “RELATIONSHIPS” are observed in more than one period.

Certain thematic areas such as “EXPORT-COMMITMENT,” “RELATIONSHIPS” and “EMERGING-MARKETS” are present in the first two periods, while “RESOURCE-BASED-VIEW,” “INTERNATIONALIZATION” and “DEVELOPING-COUNTRIES” span the past two periods. In these two periods, the importance of “EXPORT-COMMITMENT” as a Motor theme is evident. This theme has a high degree of co-occurrence because of the sharing of the main themes with “TRUST” of the third period. Another theme that should be mentioned is “EXPORT INTENSITY,” which,

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**Figure 9 Transition map**

![Transition map](image)

**Source:** Authors’ own work
despite appearing for the first time in the third period, has a high number of documents and strong evolutionary trajectories with the themes of the previous period.

“CAPABILITIES” and “R&D” are of particular interest as they have become the main Motor themes that have contributed the most to the EP literature and have attracted a large number of authors. By contrast, “GLOBAL-VALUE-CHAINS” and “START-UP” can be considered emerging themes in the literature in the last period (Montalbano et al., 2018; Stucki, 2016).

Table 7 shows in more detail the most notable themes that characterize the research on EP for each period, with performance indicators and cluster networks.

5. Discussion

The authors have conducted a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of 1,463 scientific papers published between 1968 and 2021 using the Scopus database. The study includes performance evaluation, science mapping analysis and graphical mapping techniques, intending to understand the research trends and patterns in the field comprehensively.

RQ1 and RQ2 were concerned with identifying publication trends in the EP field and influential studies and themes over the years. From a general perspective, this study shows that EP research, which has been going on since 1968, experienced spectacular growth, especially between 1998 and 2003, and the interest in this field continues to increase. The most cited article, with 674 citations, is entitled Management Influences on EP: A Review of the Empirical Literature 1978–88, co-authored by Aaby and Slater (1989). Among all authors, Adamantios Diamantopoulos is the most productive (18 articles, 13 h-index and 819 citations), and the most influential author is Constantine S. Katsikeas (14 articles, 13 h-index and 2,054 citations). The seminal paper, International venturing by emerging economy firms: The effects of firm capabilities, home country networks, and corporate entrepreneurship by Yiu et al. (2007), ranks first regarding the average annual citations, with 31.33 citations per year.

Considering authors, Diamantopoulos, Sousa, Katsikeas and Lages are the most productive authors in EP. Katsikeas, Leonidou and Lages are the most influential ones. However, according to TC/TP, the first two most influential authors remained unchanged; the third is Filatotchev, interestingly. Although the author has very few papers, the high number of citations per article explains this situation.
Export performance

Beyza Aksoy, Ayhan Akpmar and Çağatay Ünüşan

With respect to journals, the Journal of International Marketing, International Business Review, International Marketing Review and Journal of Business Research are the most productive and influential journals in this field. It is also observed that the Top Marketing and Business journals, in general, are the most productive and influential, given their high volume of citations.

Regarding the countries, the USA and the UK are the absolute leaders in EP research and have the best indicators of productivity and influence in all dimensions we analyzed. The leading country position of the USA was generally expected, as it was the absolute dominion of research in many other scientific fields. However, the UK has also shown considerable influence in EP, surpassing the USA in citations, especially since 2019.

When it comes to the universities, Loughborough University is the most productive university, and Cardiff University is the most influential one in the EP field. However, even though the USA is the most productive and influential country and has leading authors in the field, there are no universities from the USA on the list of the most productive and influential universities. Also, the top five universities on the list are located in England.

Regarding our RQ3 and RQ4, a sequence of diagrams that depict the main research themes that have emerged during each of the examined periods (1968–2009, 2010–2015 and 2016–2021), along with their longitudinal evolution, was generated through scientific mapping analysis. In this section, the study's primary outcomes are synthesized, providing a concise overview of noteworthy contributions, significant issues and potential directions for future advancements. The key findings of this research can be summarized as follows:

- **In all, 32 major themes addressed in the EP field over time include, such as “TOTAL-QUALITY-MANAGEMENT,” “CAPABILITIES,” “EXPORT-COMMITMENT,” “TRUST,” “R&D,” “INTERNATIONALIZATION,” “DEVELOPING-COUNTRIES,” “TECHNOLOGY” and “STANDARDIZATION.”**
- The themes of “GLOBAL-VALUE-CHAiNS” and “START-UP” have garnered considerable focus in recent times, suggesting a potential for sustained interest in the future. Before 2016, the Global Value Chain theme was not well-explored in the EP literature. However, since 2016, there has been a significant increase in publications on this theme. Additionally, the theme of “START-UP” has recently gained attention in the field and has been the subject of recent studies, such as Joo & Shin (2020) and Faroque, Morrish and Ferdous (2017). Conversely, interest in “EXPORT-COMMITMENT,” “RELATIONSHIPS” and “EMERGING-MARKETS” appears to be declining.
- Core themes that have matured over the previous period comprise “CAPABILITIES,” “R&D” and “TRUST.” Additionally, specialized themes such as “BARRIERS,” “TOTAL-QUALITY-MANAGEMENT,” “FIRM-SIZE” and “START-UP” have also undergone significant development. Over the years, certain themes have been identified as the driving forces behind the most significant advancements in the field of EP literature. The enduring relevance of the “CAPABILITIES” theme in the field of literature has been demonstrated by several studies, including those conducted by Yiu et al. (2007) and Rua, Franca and Ortiz (2018). These studies indicate the theme’s continued prominence since the early days of research in this area.

6. Future research agenda

The current bibliographic analysis establishes a robust foundation for discerning potential avenues for future research. As delineated in Section 4.9.2, we have outlined the transformation of research themes from the initial to the subsequent periods. Finally, we recommend the following areas for future development in particular:

- **Global value chains:** Global value chains are characterized as a production framework that relies on the division of labor, wherein distinct companies located in diverse countries assume specific tasks (Grossman and Rossi-Hansberg, 2008). Recent studies in international trade highlight that firms aim to increase their participation in global value chains and, thus, increase their EP by improving the quality of their exported commodities (Bustaman et al., 2022; Isnawangsih and Lu, 2018). As Olasehinde-Williams and Oshodi (2021) remarked, despite the rapid expansion of data availability, studies remain scarce examining the impact of integration into global value chains on EP.

- **Barriers:** Export barriers encompass a range of factors, including structural, attitudinal, operational and environmental elements, which impede or discourage firms, particularly SMEs, from engaging in, expanding or sustaining export activities (Leonidou, 1995). In this research stream, scholars fundamentally addressed the same question over the years: “What are the common barriers encountered, and how do they influence international activities?” (Kahiya, 2018). However, future studies should examine different topics, such as superior technological capabilities, immigrant effects, global mind-sets and protectionism, as new areas of interest.

- **Knowledge management:** The notion of knowledge management processes is intricately intertwined with the realm of marketing activities (Day, 1994). Although scholars have acknowledged the impact of specialized marketing capabilities within export markets, there is a lack of understanding regarding how higher-level dynamic marketing capability strategies enable exporters to effectively leverage knowledge-based resources for enhancing customer value in the internationalization process (Hoque et al., 2022).

7. Managerial implications

This bibliometric analysis emphasizes the need to include recently emerging topics such as global value chains, knowledge management and barriers in future studies and reveals that the contribution of academic research to practice is also important. Therefore, collaboration between industry and academia will further revitalize this research area and facilitate its progress.

As is well known, information asymmetry between parties (exporters and importers) in international trade can be eliminated or reduced if they are better informed about issues...
that can be export–import barriers of destination countries, such as tariffs, quotas and international standards (e.g. product quality and insurance). To tackle these obstacles, international trade professionals should prioritize knowledge management and conduct extensive research on the subject of export–import barriers. This action would require a deep understanding of the technical details involved and a commitment to staying up-to-date with the latest developments in the field. By doing so, trade professionals can better navigate the complexities of international trade and ensure that their organizations remain competitive in the global marketplace.

8. Limitations

Based on the findings of this study, it is possible to identify some of the most productive and influential ones in the field of EP in terms of authors, journals, countries and universities. Also, in response to calls for more literature reviews for advancing theory (Breslin and Gatrell, 2023), the EP field’s main research themes and conceptual evolution over the years are investigated. However, a significant limitation is that they provide only general guidance, and much good research in EP has not been included in this research. Some primary considerations limit the study. First, we used only a single database (Scopus) because of data homogenization issues when working with multiple databases. Consequently, we suggest a prospective avenue for further investigation, which involves employing diverse databases to compare the acquired outcomes, such as Web of Science or Google Scholar. Second, we excluded book chapters and conference papers because they are no longer substantial in promotion and tenure decisions, giving authors little incentive to write them (MacInnis, 2011). In future research endeavors, including such publications is possible; however, it should be acknowledged that they pose a challenge because of the potential absence of a double-blind peer review system, which ensures a specific level of scientific rigor and quality. Third, using SciMAT creates an opportunity to extend present research by using different software tools such as CiteSpace or Bibexcel. Finally, other bibliometric techniques, such as co-authorship analysis or different clustering techniques, such as hierarchical clustering, could be used. Nevertheless, these limitations suggest directions for future research.

9. Conclusion

The objective of this study is to present an overview of the EP field through an exhaustive bibliometric analysis. The analysis used three main bibliometric approaches: bibliometric performance analysis, scientific mapping analysis (SciMAT software) and graphical mapping (VOSviewer software) of the EP field. Through this analysis, it will be possible to understand the present publication trends in EP, how the literature has developed in this research area and what themes have been established or have been declining and/or developing in the EP field. To the best of our knowledge, this study presents the first effort within the bibliometric analysis to offer a panoramic view of academic research in the EP field.

References


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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Export performance</strong></th>
<th><strong>Journal of Business &amp; Industrial Marketing</strong></th>
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Further reading

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