

Investigating the Impact of Strategic Brand Management on Export Performance in the B2B Context.

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Presentations & Publications

Parts of this thesis have been presented and published in various Academic events during the development of the research (2014-2016).

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Abstract

Despite an upsurge of interest in the potential benefits of Business to Business (B2B) branding, research in the area within the context of international trade is practically non-existent. This study focuses attention on B2B strategic brand management in overseas markets, using data collected from 34 qualitative interviews and a survey of 208 UK international B2B goods and service suppliers. Drawing on Resource Based Theory (RBT) and the Structure Conduct Performance (SCP) framework, this study advances previous models and presents an innovative new framework which positions strategic brand management as a fundamental deterministic factor in explaining B2B firm performance in export markets. Findings show certain organisational resources (financial) and capabilities (market information, branding, marketing planning) are advantageous antecedents to the employment of superior strategic brand management in foreign markets which, in turn, leads to increased financial and market performance internationally. The findings also demonstrate that certain external environmental conditions (macro enabling, micro precipitating, foreign market competitiveness) can both positively and negatively directly influence a B2B firm's strategic brand management which consequently will impact performance. In addition, there was not found to be a significant positive moderating effect from Country of Origin (COO) on the influence of superior strategic brand management on international firm performance.

Keywords: B2B, Strategic Brand Management, International Branding, International Marketing, Export Performance, Resource Based Theory, Structure Conduct Performance, Country of Origin.

I dedicate this thesis to my amazing wife Debs:

this is all for you and our wee family

Chapter 1- Introduction and Overview of the Thesis

1.1 Introduction

Branding is a fundamental element of the marketing discipline, yet relatively little consideration has been given to the implications a successful branding approach has within the context of ‘Business to Business’ (B2B) literature. This is particularly the case in relation to a firm’s international trade efforts, which remain one of the most significant drivers of economic growth (WTO, 2014). This is probably because brand management related academic investigation has traditionally focused on the impact brand management has on the success of ‘Business to Consumer’ (B2C) companies’ marketing strategy, while suppliers of business customers frequently appear to place less strategic importance on branding (Homburg et. al. 2010), despite the fact that brand management is equally important for success in the B2B context (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). The fact that seven of the top seventeen world’s most valuable brands in 2016 are earning substantial revenue from B2B markets; Microsoft, IBM, Samsung, General Electric, Intel, Cisco and Oracle (Interbrand, 2016) attests to the importance brand management has in the B2B context. These brands operating in a B2B context are truly international, so it is surprising to find there is a near void of academic research investigating international strategic brand management specifically within a B2B setting.

This chapter will outline the background and context to the research, clearly identify gaps within the literature and subsequently explain the originality of this study. The main aim, objectives and scope of the research will then be presented, the methodological approach described and the thesis framework clarified.

1.2 Background and Context

The rise of globalisation has rendered international expanding actives increasingly important for the survival, growth and success of modern firms (Spyropoulou et al. 2011). It has been identified that internationalisation provides intangible reputational and cost benefits to firms and their brands from geographic diversification (Thams et al. 2016). However, “As a scholarly discipline, international marketing is still unsuited to address the theoretical, and methodological challenges brought about by globalisation, and this incongruity is especially acute in the area of branding”. (Cayla & Arnould, 2008).

1.2.1 The Importance of Branding

Branding has traditionally been treated as only a contributing part of the central marketing concept; however, there is a growing movement towards placing branding as the key strategic component. The field of brand management is becoming increasingly important over time as brands have become recognised as key drivers for business success (Morgan, 2011; Aaker, 2014). One of the twentieth century’s foremost marketing scholars and founders of brand theory, Professor Sidney Levy, challenges the notion that branding is a function of marketing, instead arguing that marketing is actually a function of branding (Levy, 2016), and that branding is the central concept of marketing (AMA, 2017). Increasingly, there are practitioners who also hold this belief: speaking at the AMA summer conference (2016) Dick Lynch, global brand officer (former CMO) at Popeye’s Louisiana Chicken stated “we un-apologetically put our brand first, even ahead of customers which would have been unthinkable a few years ago”. Mr Lynch went on to convey “a company can make its branding the centre of its universe” (AMA, 2016). This approach brought the company unparalleled success and subsequently it was purchased at the beginning of 2017

for \$1.8 billion, well above the current share valuation. The CEO from Popeye's new owner - 'Restaurant Brand International' stated "We look forward to taking an already very strong brand and accelerating its pace of growth (Forbes, 2017).

1.2.2 International Trade

According to the World Trade Organisation (WTO, 2014), global international trade accounted for more than \$18.8 trillion per year in 2013, 2% higher than 2012 and set to continue to rise. There are considerable benefits accruing from this activity for the government, private organisations and society alike. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) classifies international trade as comprising of trade in exports and imports. Their quarterly international trade statistics present and discuss trends and indicators for exports and imports from OECD countries (OECD, 2017). Trade in goods and services is defined as "the projected value of change in ownership of material resources and services between one economy and another" (OECD, 2017). The indicator comprises sales of goods and services as well as barter transactions or goods exchanged as part of gifts or grants between residents and non-residents. It is measured in million USD and percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for net trade and also annual growth for exports and imports (OECD, 2017). For the purposes of this study exports will be the focus, when international marketing, international branding, international capabilities and other similar terms are referred to, this is only in relation to exports. Previous research often refers to international trade; by which they implicitly mean exports but this is not always clearly stated.

1.2.3 UK International Trade

While it remains a source of great debate whether the contracting of the economy is a function of the current economic policy, the recent recession in the EU, the Brexit vote or a combination of these factors, one fact is certain: the outcome of the UK's international trade continues to worsen. The worsening UK international trade balance is displayed in Fig.1.1; clearly there has been a deterioration in recent years of the account balance nominal figure as a percentage of GDP. Germany, which is Europe's best performing exporter and Ireland which had a nearly identical negative international trade balance to the UK in 2011 but has since performed well, have been included along with the EU and OECD averages to provide points of comparison for the UK's dire situation.

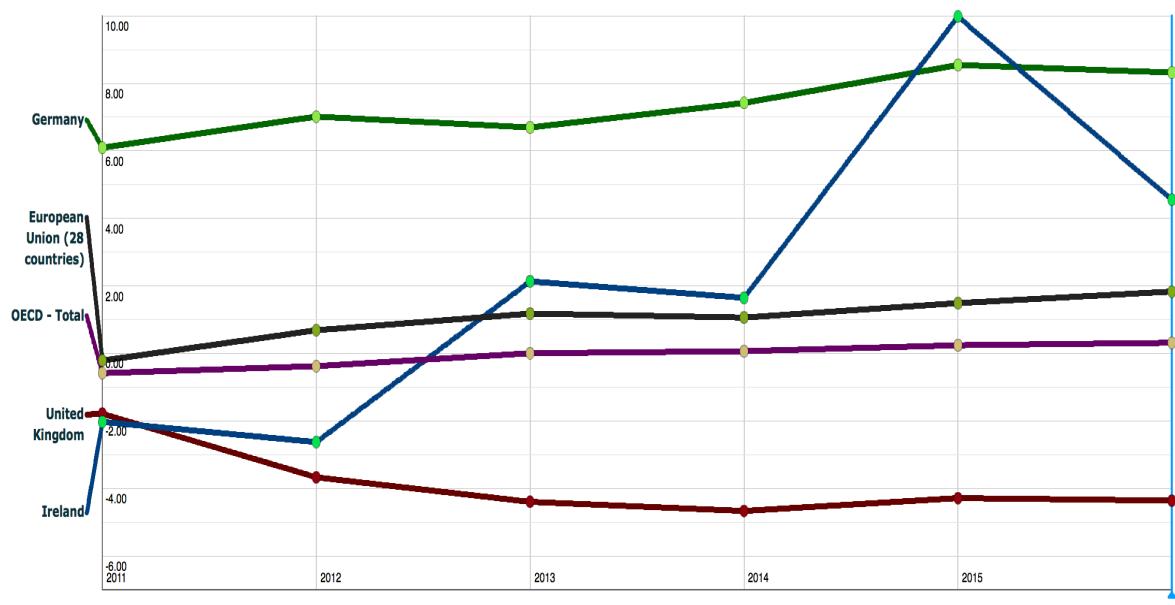


Fig. 1.1 UK International Trade Balance 2011-2016 (OECD, 2017)

As illustrated in Fig 1.1 a country's current account balance is measured as a percentage of its GDP. As such, it is an important economic indicator and an essential macroeconomic statistic (OECD, 2017). "It shows whether the country is a net exporter or importer and

therefore whether the country needs to finance a current account deficit or is running a balance of payments financial surplus. Putting the current account balance in terms of GDP provides an understanding of the longer-term sustainability of the balance, in particular if the country is running ongoing deficits" (OECD, 2017).

Fig 1.2 shows that three out of the G7 economies (the seven largest economies in the world including the UK) have experienced worsening current account balances relative to 2007; yet the UK recorded the largest current account deficit among these economies in 2015 at 5.4% of GDP. This also represented a deteriorating position relative to 2014. In contrast, Germany who are recognised for their strength in exporting, experienced the largest current account surplus in 2015 (8.5% of GDP). The economies of Germany, Italy, France and the USA all experienced an improvement on their current account balance as a share of GDP in 2015 relative to 2007. These figures do not take into consideration UK firms which establish operations abroad to serve international markets; however, there isn't evidence to suggest that UK firms are using this approach more than firms from other countries, therefore this does not explain the performance gap.

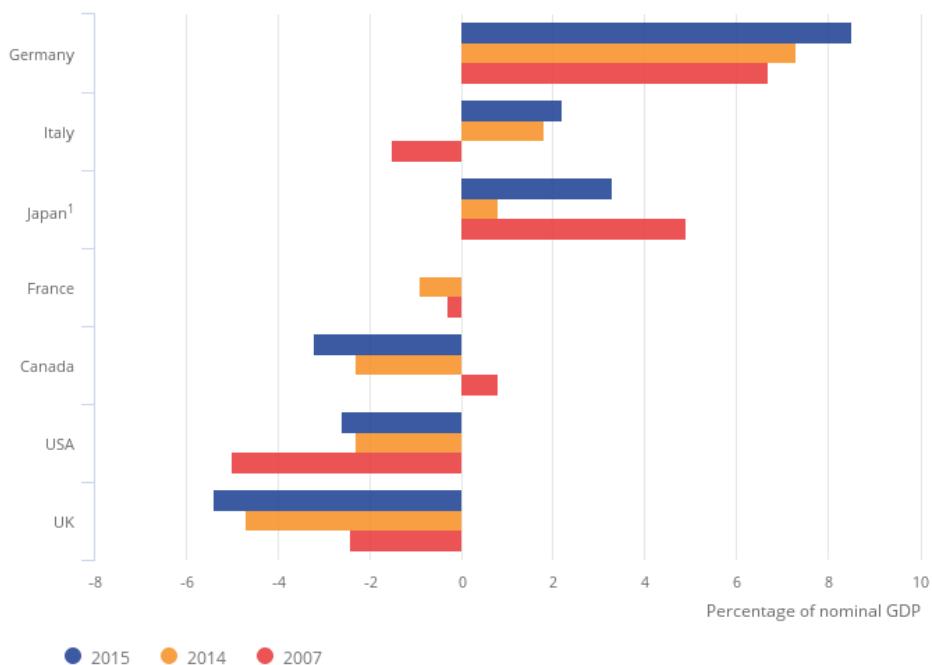


Fig 1.2 Current Account Balances of the G7 Economies, 2007, 2014 and 2015 % of Nominal GDP ('Office for National Statistics' ONS, 2016)

UK Trade is a key economic indicator due to the importance of international trade to the UK economy ("Office for National Statistics", ONS, 2017). It is also a very timely statistic, providing an early indicator of what is happening more generally in the economy (ONS, 2017). The implications of the current predicament are severe for both the economy and the society. Economically, in very simple terms, this means that the UK needs to secure more than USD 150 billion per annum to sustain the standards of life to which Britons are accustomed to.

As displayed in fig 1.3 The UK's trade balance – the difference between exports and imports – has been in deficit (imports higher than exports) since 1998 (ONS, 2016). However, it is important to take notice and differentiate between the exporting of UK goods and services when looking into the total trade balance. The UK has had a goods deficit for most of the

last 40 years (“Confederation of British Industry” CBI, 2011a). However, conversely the UK has had a positive balance of trade in services for decades which offsets the large deficit in goods (ONS, 2016). The UK Government assert that service exports currently make up for around 25% of all UK international trade (UKGov, 2012). The UK total trade balance and historical trade balances for goods and services is presented in Fig 1.3. Recent data for 2015 suggests that the goods deficit widened to 6.9% of nominal GDP from 6.7% in 2014, while the surplus in services remained broadly unchanged at 4.7% over the same period.

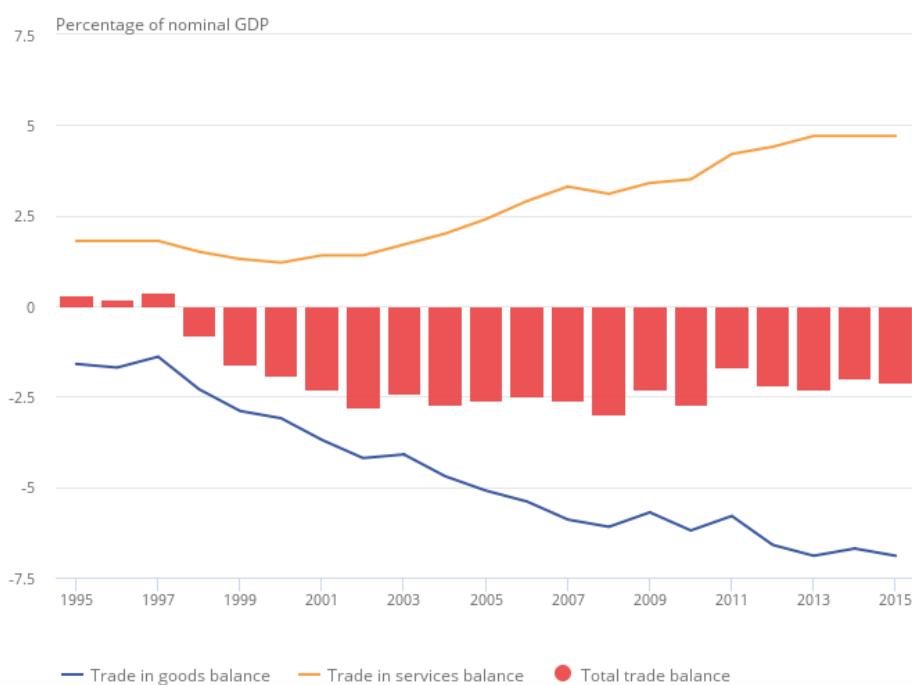


Fig. 1.3 UK Trade in Goods and Services Balance, Current Prices, 1995 to 2015, Percentage of Nominal GDP (ONS, 2016).

While the EU has been traditionally the main trade partner for the UK, as imports surge from Emerging Markets, UK exports to these destinations and other non-EU locations have failed to keep pace (CBI, 2011a). Hence the widening trade deficit arises in particular from widening and rapidly growing trade imbalance with non-EU regions. The UK has missed opportunities to target exports to high growth economies such as Brazil, Russia, India, China

“BRIC” (CBI, 2011a). Along with BRIC, other countries such as Indonesia, Turkey and Mexico are also currently offering lucrative opportunities for UK businesses – making it clear that there is no better time to export. The UK government Department for International Trade (DIT) has recently identified opportunities in over twenty sectors spanning over fifty countries for UK firms to consider supplying into (UKGov, 2017). Fig 1.4 provides an interesting comparison between the shares of UK exports going to specific countries against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) GDP growth forecast for these countries 2011-2016. It is abundantly clear from Fig 1.4 that the UK is doing most of its exporting to countries which have the lowest growth and hence the most difficult to increase exporting to.

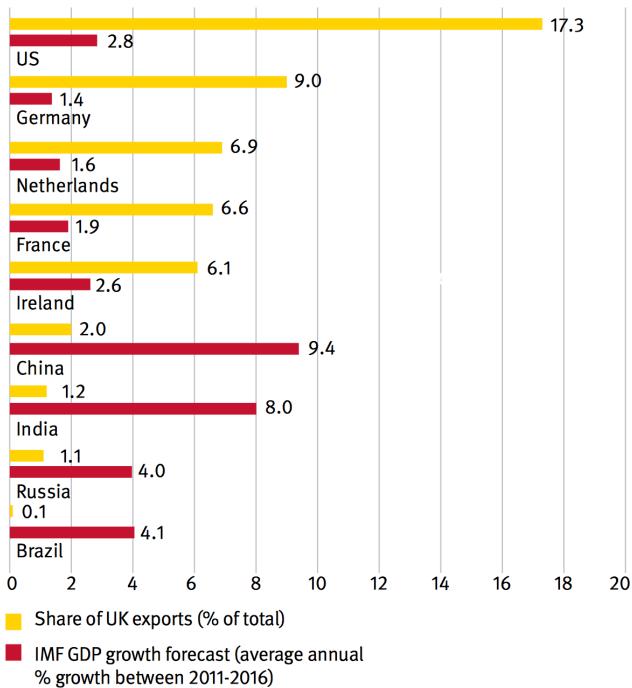


Fig 1.4 Destination of UK Exports Compared with GDP Growth Forecasts (CBI, 2011b)

There is evidence to suggest that well managed international B2B brands provide a powerful form of competitive advantage when exporting to the highest growth economies. A recent piece of research by McKinsey (2015) which surveyed 700 corporate decision makers uncovered B2B international buyers in India (which is the world’s second highest growing economy as displayed in Fig 1.4), consider the brand central rather than a marginal element

of a supplier's proposition. The research also revealed that, in India, brand related factors are perceived as especially important and therefore an international B2B supplier's brand is considered on a par with sales as an influencing factor within the purchase decision making process (McKinsey, 2015). Therefore, to increase exporting to high growth economies it is vital that UK B2B exporters consider the importance of effective strategic brand management practices.

1.2.4 Business to Business (B2B) Exporters

Almost nine out of every ten exporters (86%) in the UK do all or a large proportion of their trade by supplying to businesses in a B2B capacity (FSB, 2016a). These figures relate to businesses with less than 250 employees or under £50 million turnover which account for the majority of UK businesses supplying goods and services overseas. Therefore, due to the majority of exporters conducting trade in a B2B capacity, there should be due focus put on researching firms which operate internationally in the B2B domain. Due to the complexity and high-risk associations with regards to B2B purchase decisions, branding plays a vital role in B2B markets (Keller, 2013. p.40); for example, by reducing the uncertainty associated with the purchase decision making process (Mudambi, 2002). It follows reason that B2B branding should therefore be a priority when considering investigations into increasing international trade and subsequently rectifying the international trade balance deficit reported in the previous section.

1.2.5 Reducing the International Trade Balance Deficit

There are three principal methods which can be utilised in an attempt to reduce the deficit from international trade including; increased borrowing, a reduction in imports and increasing exports (ONS, 2012; Hollensen, 2011. p.206-2010; Baldwin, 2009. p.25).

Increased borrowing has detrimental implications for the economy and society as a whole since increasing the debt will increase the risk of higher inflation and interest rates which in turn will stifle prospects for economic growth and development (IMF, 2012). An attempt to reduce imports by using restrictions or tariffs can interrupt and hamstring the operations of established industries (Hollensen, 2011. p.207). It could be further suggested that a reduction in imports could harm the general standard of living for the population since the magnitude of imports indicates the demand for the imported goods (Fisher et al. 1994). Therefore, arguably the only practical solution to remedy the inequity in international trade is to increase exporting. This raises the question of what may be discouraging UK companies from exporting, particularly as exporting is seen to be one of the fastest growing economic activities worldwide and already accounts for a great amount of money. Since the technological superiority and economic strength of a country can influence its image (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009), UK exporters could also inherently benefit from favourable country image perceptions over competitors based in developing countries. Given the current situation it would be advantageous to identify new ways of looking at exporting for UK firms. A brand is reflected in everything that a company does; therefore, a complete branding approach requires a strategic perspective (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). Strategic brand management encompasses the design and implementation of marketing programs and activities to build, measure and manage brand equity (Keller, 2013. p.58). By investigating effective strategic brand management as the focus for B2B exporters, this study is intended to provide a new research stream which can benefit scholars and practitioners alike. The next section will discuss a number of gaps in the literature this thesis will address in order to advance this new research stream.

1.3 Research Gaps

This section will present and discuss a number of important gaps in the extant literature which this study will address.

1.3.1 International Brand Management Gap

It has been suggested that brand management theory and practices are “the most neglected or under-developed topic in branding” (Merrilees et al. 2013). There has been some limited coverage of branding issues such as ‘management of the brand’ and the ‘strategic benefits of a brand’; however, the major limitation of the literature is the lack of consideration to the international context (Wong & Merrilees, 2007). Given, brand management teams have the most control and influence over the development and management of brand meaning (Urde, 2016), previous findings indicate that firms with an established brand management system in place achieve superior performance (Lee et al. 2008). However, research into strategic brand management and performance in an international context is scarce, and absent within the international B2B domain. The lack of research is more surprising given brands are frequently among the first components of a firm’s marketing strategy to be extended internationally (Chabowski et al. 2013). There have been a number of studies which examine the effects of marketing capabilities on international performance as revealed by a recent Journal of Marketing meta-analysis study (Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2009) but none that look at the effect of internal environmental resources and specific marketing capabilities on strategic brand management. Future studies should look at marketing capabilities in relation to benefits of international branding and firm performance (Spyropoulou et al. 2011). There has also yet to be a study which investigates the influence of external environmental factors on strategic brand management.

1.3.2 International B2B Branding Gap

The sparse literature on international branding in any context (B2B or B2C) co-exists with the international literature instead of finding a place within it (Whitelock & Fastosa, 2007). Given branding is a central method of improving business performance, a logical question should be how can B2B firms develop and manage powerful brands (Zhang et al. 2015). Although brand management has been a central tenet of consumer marketing (Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017), “only a limited number of studies have been conducted … to investigate the phenomena of brand equity in business markets” (Kim & Hyun, 2011), and few address the role of capabilities in developing a strong B2B brand (Kim & Hyun, 2011). Extant knowledge from B2C cannot readily be extended in the B2B context since the fundamental differences between B2C and B2B customers are only accentuated by the more functional manner of B2B buying behavior (Mudambi, 2002; Morgan & Slotegraaf 2012) and the distinction between corporate or product branding (Ohnemus, 2009, Keller, 2015). Hence a clear and important gap in the literature is evident.

Most international marketing research has adopted the export venture (i.e. a specific product or product line) as the unit of analysis for study (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994; Spyropoulou et al. 2011; Chen et al. 2016). However, when specifically investigating B2B branding it is more appropriate to use the corporate / company brand since an important differentiating characteristic of the architecture of B2B brands is their focus on the corporate brand as the main brand over underlying product or service brand lines (Mudambi, 2002). Industrial B2B firms that do not emphasise the corporate brand reputation and instead focus on product reputation soon become aware of their error when it comes to a stock market valuation and the inevitable undervaluation due directly to the absence of a brand (Kapferer, 2012. p.84).

This study will therefore focus on the firm as the unit of analysis for branding at the corporate level.

It is suggested that a favourable ‘Country of Origin’ (COO) image is one of the information cues that can make exporters and their offerings more attractive to overseas buyers within a B2B context (Bradley, 2001; Knight et al. 2007; Durand et al. 2016). Yet, there has been insufficient studies when considering branding (Chen et al. 2011), and this has not been examined with regards to strategic brand management. Therefore, a further gap this thesis will address is whether the effect of strategic brand management on export performance is moderated by country of origin in the B2B domain.

1.3.3 Conceptual Developments of Brand Management as the Central Determinant of a B2B firm’s International Performance Gap

The role of academic marketing is to both 1) enhance contributions in the theoretical and methodological domain 2) address strategic issues (Reibstein, 2009; Kumar et al. 2017). This thesis serves both purposes by making an important theoretical contribution concerning international B2B branding, while addressing the significant role strategic brand management has on fostering superior international firm performance.

It has been found that most research into export performance in the international marketing literature lacks depth and too often concentrates solely on the direct links between certain antecedents and performance (Chen et al. 2016), as can be seen with research into the link between marketing capabilities and export performance (Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2009). There has been a tendency to ignore the interacted and nested relationships (Chen et al. 2016). Therefore, to build and test a framework in relation to the effects of superior strategic

brand management on export performance, it is essential to also investigate the antecedents of strategic brand management along with the key moderators which can affect its influence on performance. As identified by Leek & Christodoulides, (2012), focal branding models created in a B2B context by leading B2B branding scholars such as Mudambi et al. (1997) and Kuhn et al. (2008) have not included external environmental factors within their models, therefore leaving an unexplained and unexplored path as to the effects and importance the external environment could have on a firm's strategic brand management. Despite their importance within the literature, Country of Origin effect has not been used together in any previous frameworks investigating the effects of international branding on export performance. Delivering this contribution and filling this conceptual gap is particularly timely since there is a necessity to advance theoretical understanding of complex phenomena in marketing (Macinnis, 2011).

1.4 Originality and Contribution of the Study

The previous section discussed gaps this study addresses and subsequently by filling these gaps supports the originality and contribution of this thesis. This study aims to help ignite the effort to fill these gaps by addressing the role of the brand and specifically strategic brand management in driving B2B exporters performance. With this in mind, this study seeks to inspire further interest in this area by conceptualising the key constructs, investigating key relationships by conducting exploratory fieldwork and testing the framework by collecting empirical data and using structured equation modelling. Kumar et al. (2017) discusses that although 'rigor' is important in academic studies, scholars should also provide careful judgment that rigor in the name of method sophistication should not eliminate the originality of an idea of strategic importance and/or neglect the practical implications of the study (e.g. Houston, 2016; McAlister, 2016).

This thesis puts forward, investigates and rigorously tests a new framework by synthesising the two opposing approaches of Resource Based Theory (RBT) and Structure Conduct Performance (SCP) into one theoretical model that assesses the impact of effective international B2B brand management on a firm's key performance outcomes. Therefore, providing a theoretical addition to the broad domains of both B2B and international marketing literature. Specifically, enriching, advancing and bringing together B2B branding and international branding literature. It also provides a valuable original methodological contribution and practical managerial insights for executives involved in B2B international brand management. It is noteworthy that the majority of B2B branding research has been conducted from the buyers' perspective (e.g. Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Juntunen et al. 2010; Zablah et al. 2010) and there has been little undertaken from the supplier standpoint. Another key element of originality within this study is the unit of analysis is at the firm level which is the most appropriate for examining B2B corporate brands (Mudambi, 2002), but differs from most prior international marketing research which use the export venture as the primary unit of analysis (Chen et al. 2016).

Filling the aforementioned gaps is required given the importance of strategic brand management in both academia and industry alike. Sidney Levey and Wilson Bastos (2012) noted in a recent paper looking at the history of branding that the ubiquity of the strategic brand management concept is evident in the creation of thousands of brand manager jobs (Glassdoor.com, 2017), and most business schools now teach courses about brand management (Bastos & Levey, 2012). Hence, by filling the gaps this thesis addresses it is possible to contribute to the knowledge of the growing number of brand managers working in industry and the teaching of strategic brand management in Universities around the globe.

1.5 Aim, Objectives and Scope of the Thesis

The overall aim of the study is to:

**Investigate international strategic brand management as a deterministic factor
in superior firm performance within a B2B context.**

The wider aim is designed to explore the relevant internal factors which influence strategic brand management within a B2B context and also address what external elements might affect the influence of these factors on both strategic brand management and the subsequent performance outcomes for exporters. Therefore, research addressing the following research objectives can lead to an important expansion of international branding research, specifically in a B2B context. For instance, which resources and capabilities contribute most to superior strategic brand management? Which external environmental enabling and precipitating stimuli and competitive environmental factors positively and negatively influence the creation and sustainment of superior strategic brand management? Which components constitute strategic brand management in a B2B domain and have the most profound impact on international firm performance? Does this impact remain the same when potential effects of country of origin factors are also taken into consideration? The research aim is explored through the following five research objectives:

Objective 1: Develop a comprehensive model founded on pertinent theoretical perspectives which incorporates external and internal environmental variables influencing strategic brand management practices affecting international firm performance in a B2B domain.

Objective 2: Uncover the impact of exporters' resources and capabilities on international strategic brand management practices in a B2B context.

Objective 3: Clarify the impact of external environment factors on international strategic brand management practices in a B2B context.

Objective 4: Evaluate the extent to which successful UK B2B exporters benefit from improved international firm performance through effective strategic brand management practices

Objective 5: Investigate the significance attached to a B2B exporters' country of origin as manifestation for achieving improved export performance through effective strategic brand management practices

By addressing these issues this thesis makes a significant contribution to the extant literature in three ways: 1) Enables future researchers to guide their efforts towards addressing the impact of international B2B branding to improve both the academic investigation and the resulting understanding of export performance. This is achieved by demonstrating the effects of external environmental factors and international resources and capabilities: specifically, financial resources, market information capabilities, branding capabilities and marketing planning capabilities on a firm's strategic brand management and consequently the international performance of B2B firms. This will also improve the relevance of this research stream. (2) As such, this manuscript puts forward a vigorous and relevant framework that could underpin future research efforts in this field. (3) Allows UK suppliers of overseas B2B customers to derive a more comprehensive understanding of the brand related variables affecting export performance, which in turn helps them realise how they can improve their export performance through appropriate brand management strategies.

1.6 Thesis Overview

Following the introduction chapter the remainder of the thesis is organised as follows.

Chapter 2. This chapter provides a review of the literature associated with international B2B branding for the background, development and debate surrounding the concept. The concept, structure, current agenda and evolution of B2B marketing and specifically branding is discussed. Strategic brand management is defined and the importance of having a strong B2B brand and B2B brand management system in place is described. Then follows a review of the most influential and significant studies within both B2B brand management and international marketing literature, consequent gaps that this study addresses are highlighted.

Chapter 3. In this chapter, the theoretical foundations are described followed by justifications for advancing previous frameworks. This chapter is divided into two main sections, firstly the theoretical basis for the framework is presented and secondly the rationale for each measurement variable within the framework model is explained and justified.

Chapter 4. This chapter provides discussion and rationale with regards to the philosophical underpinnings of this thesis and introduces the research methods and design of the study. Firstly, the main philosophical assumptions within the field of marketing are characterised and the major paradigms of social science are discussed. The pragmatist view adopted for this thesis is outlined as a philosophical basis for research. Different research methods for data collection, analysis and interpretation are then presented and the strengths and weaknesses of the mixed methods approach used within this study are outlined. The six main

research design strategies are then characterised and the chosen research design *sequential exploratory design* is justified. Lastly, ethical considerations are discussed.

Chapter 5. This chapter provides the methodology and presents the results of the qualitative study which investigated the inter-relationships between the focal variables identified within the conceptual model. The results of 34 exploratory in-depth interviews indicated both internal and external environmental factors influence a B2B exporters strategic brand management practices. The results also provided support for the model by highlighting effective strategic brand management practices will influence export performance, COO was found to have a positive effect on this influence. The qualitative stage of the research assisted with ensuring the model is parsimonious and in the formulation of specific research hypothesis which are tested in this study.

Chapter 6. This chapter presents the quantitative study findings which employed a survey design. The methodology is first presented, with an overview of the sampling process, followed by t-tests for non-response bias and a profile of the sample. Then follows the development of the measurement instrument, the pilot questionnaire is reported and the measurement scales which were employed are defined. Subsequently, the quantitative data preparation and analysis are reported using a number of statistical techniques including reliability and normality analysis, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, MANOVA's and tests for common method bias. Lastly, the hypotheses are tested and an assessment of the structural model validity is conducted using structured equation modelling (SEM).

Chapter 7. This chapter discusses the findings from both the qualitative and quantitative stages of the study. The first section of the chapter is structured in relation to exploring the implications of the findings for the research aim and objectives. Key findings are identified and reported. Discussions encompass theoretical and practical contributions which will benefit both academic scholars and B2B managers of firms with an outlook to initiate or expand and improve their exporting activities. Limitations of this study and future avenues for research, followed by a summary of the key theoretical contributions conclude this thesis.

Chapter 2 – Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature associated with international B2B branding for the background, development and debate surrounding the concept. First, the concept, structure, current agenda and evolution of B2B branding is discussed, inclusive of the key differences between B2C and B2B branding which are presented and justified in terms of their importance to this study. In addition, B2B strategic brand management is defined and the importance of having a strong B2B brand and B2B brand management system in place is described. Then follows a review of the most influential and significant studies within both B2B brand management and international marketing literature, consequent gaps that this study addresses are highlighted.

Branding is a mature area of research; however, the differentiation between B2B and B2C branding is not as highly developed an area of study and there has been a lack of research focused specifically on international branding in a B2B context. This is somewhat surprising given as far back as 1985, Hamel & Prahalad asserted that the key to a successful global strategy is brand dominance. In the era of globalisation whereby buyers have access to many more goods and services, branding is considered pivotal for successful internationalisation of emergent market firms (Erdogmus et. al. 2010).

Firms that can successfully develop their brand internationally will experience benefits such as worldwide recognition, access and penetration to new markets and industries, a reduction of dependence on contract manufacturing, a reduction in costs, increased value, secure long-term profits and growth, an ability to endure hard times, break parity and an ability to stand out from competitors (Temporal, 2001). Continual changes and developments in the B2B market environment are eroding geographical barriers; therefore, it is now practically

imperative for B2B firms to pursue international branding in their market offerings (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006. p.88). There is increasing interest in how effective brand management can affect the performance outcomes of firms (Farris et al. 2010). Yet scholars' current understanding of the antecedents and influence strategic brand management can have on B2B firm performance has not been empirically tested in an international context.

2.2 B2B Marketing & the Management of the Brand

2.2.1 The Structure and History of B2B Marketing Within Academia

What is now known as B2B marketing used to be called industrial marketing (Webster, 1978). Over the past forty years the broader term B2B marketing has developed and its meaning has grown to encompass the activity of building mutually value generating relationships for both products and services between organisations and the many individuals within them (Lilien & Grewal, 2012). In contrast, B2C marketing is primarily focused on the final transaction concerning the firm and/or retailer and the consumer (Lilien & Grewal, 2012). To make the distinction between B2B and B2C a simple question can be asked to discriminate between them: “Is the demand for a product or service derived (driven by the demand of some subsequent customers—B2B) or primary (driven by the specific tastes or preferences of the buyer—B2C)?” (Lilien, 2016). The key factor that distinguishes B2B and B2C transactions in the purpose for which they are sold (Malhotra & Birks, 2007 p.769). In B2B transactions products are purchased for resale or for the production of other goods, and services are purchased to facilitate the resale and production of goods (Littler, 1994). In B2C transactions, products and services are generally purchased for oneself, the household or as gifts (Littler, 1994). Examples of B2B relationships include those between manufacturers and both wholesalers and retailers; between agribusiness firms and farmers; and between

pharmaceutical firms and both hospitals and physicians. However, they exclude relationships between firms (manufactures who sell direct or retailers) and consumers, the domain of B2C (Lilien, 2016).

Reid and Plank (2000) provided a comprehensive review of the history of B2B marketing within their 185-page journal article. They traced the earliest origins of B2B marketing to early publications in the Journal of Marketing (JM) in the 1930's, including the very first edition of JM (e.g. Lester, 1936; Frederick, 1939) and it was not until the 1960's (e.g. Webster, 1965) and 1970's (e.g. Webster & Wind, 1972; Sheth, 1973), that scholars began to take notice of the area. Backhaus (2011) asserts this was the beginning of the most dynamic period of B2B marketing and it continued through to the 1980's. Webster (1978) conducted an early review of the literature and unearthed that B2B marketing accounted for around half of the economy but the vast majority of top marketing journal articles are focused on B2C, this somewhat surprising fact still stands today (e.g. LaPlaca & Katrichis, 2009; Seyedghorban et al. 2016). The department of US commerce statistics demonstrate that B2B transactions account for the same dollar value as B2C transactions; however, research into B2C within the top tier marketing journals far outweighs B2B (Lilien & Grewal, 2012. p.4).

There have been various reviews of B2B marketing articles and findings show an unexplained lack of attention by top tier journals (e.g. LaPlaca & Katrichis, 2009; Seyedghorban et al. 2016). Reid and Plank (2000) investigated B2B marketing appearing in both articles and book chapter from the period 1978 to 1997. They found B2B publications in top tier journals are rare, appearing in JM at a frequency of around five per year, Journal of Marketing Research (JMR) at a frequency of around two per year, Marketing Science

(MS) at a frequency of under two per year and the Journal of Consumer Research (JCR) is entirely dedicated to B2C matters. Given the economic importance of B2B trade there is a pressing need to redress the balance of top tier marketing publications providing focus on the B2B context.

Reid and Plank (2000) found there are various specialised journals which focus on B2B issues and these make up for the majority of papers published. For example, Industrial Marketing Management (IMM), Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing and the Journal of Business to Business Marketing. A recent update to this line of enquiry by LaPlaca and Katrichis (2009), discovered not much had changed, since each top tier journal found, JM had published only 6.8% of articles in a B2B context, JMR 2.5%, MS 1.3% and 0% in JCR. Most recently Backhaus et al. (2011) have taken a slightly different approach with their bibliographic analysis, findings are slightly improved; for example, JM around 10% and JMR around 5%. They did report an influx in B2B publications and citations in recent years. Yet, overall their findings were consistent with previous reviews, in that there is an inexplicable lack of B2B research published within what are considered the top tier of Marketing journals. On a positive note, increasing numbers of prominent scholars are leading B2B research endeavours; V.K. Kumar (editor in chief of JM) was the winner of the 2016 Institute for the Study of Business Markets (ISBM) –Wilson-Sheth Foundation Award for “Long Term Impact in B2B Marketing” (Kumar, 2016).

2.2.2 The Current B2B Agenda and a Look Ahead

In 2013 IMM published an important article providing an assessment of the current B2B agenda and the future outlook (Wiersema, 2013). This article surmised a project conducted by ISBM. The ISBM has been in existence for more than three decades and is recognised

globally as offering a centre of excellence for the B2B domain. It has a wide database of corporate member's firms and deep connections with top academics worldwide, its handbook of B2B marketing (Lilien & Grewal, 2012), includes articles by leading scholars such as V.K. Kumar, Neil Morgan, Robert Palmatier, Kevin Keller, Philip Kotler, Stanley Slater and Arch Woodside, to name just a few. Therefore, for practitioners and academics alike this article is relevant and useful and will be heavily referred to for this section.

Wiersema, (2013) identifies several key findings: firstly, that corporate expectations from marketing are mounting, the stakes are increasing and therefore these are defining times for B2B marketing. Next, they found areas where potent developments are shaping B2B marketing including 1) the importance of the global market place and 2) B2B marketing role is becoming much more strategic. Of particular note for this thesis is the fact international B2B marketing and strategic B2B marketing are deemed to be key developments; one respondent reinforced this by asserting:

“Building a powerful global footprint is our number one imperative”

Branding fits within the description of the transitions taking place, B2B firms are seeking enterprise wide buy in to embark on major change initiatives or 'journeys' with marketing and branding occupying a central position – "often referred to as the designated driver of the expedition" (Wiersema, 2013). The next key finding was that to advance B2B practice, the biggest challenges to marketing are companywide challenges. What is required is firstly, building stronger strategic and tactical interfaces between marketing and other functions and secondly, extract and leverage more customer and market knowledge, therefore improving their marketing capabilities.

A further relevant key finding was B2B marketing must demonstrate marketing's contribution to business performance, which is very relevant to this thesis and especially important as a focus for B2B branding within an international context. A key statement by one respondent of the Wiersema (2013) project and article when asked to discuss B2B marketing strategic role:

"I am focused on the broader issues of managing brands (corporate as well as business brands)"

This sentiment lends weight to the critical need for this study and consequent thesis. Another example of the important role branding plays was demonstrated by a different respondent:

"We potentially derive more impact from standardising certain marketing practices across SBUs and from rationalising our brands than from a fixation on measuring individual programs."

So, there are a number of pertinent issues within the B2B agenda and future outlook including an increased focus on B2B marketing and the strategic role of B2B marketing, and particular issues this thesis will address in terms of B2B branding; specifically, B2B brand management and a global outlook with international marketing at its core. The next section will concisely report the development of B2B branding.

2.2.3 The Evolution of Business to Business Branding

Over the past four decades there has been an accumulation of valuable work exploring branding and five key thematic areas of research have developed; brand image, brand positioning, brand reputation, brand equity and strategic brand management (Keller & Lehmann, 2006; French & Smith, 2013).

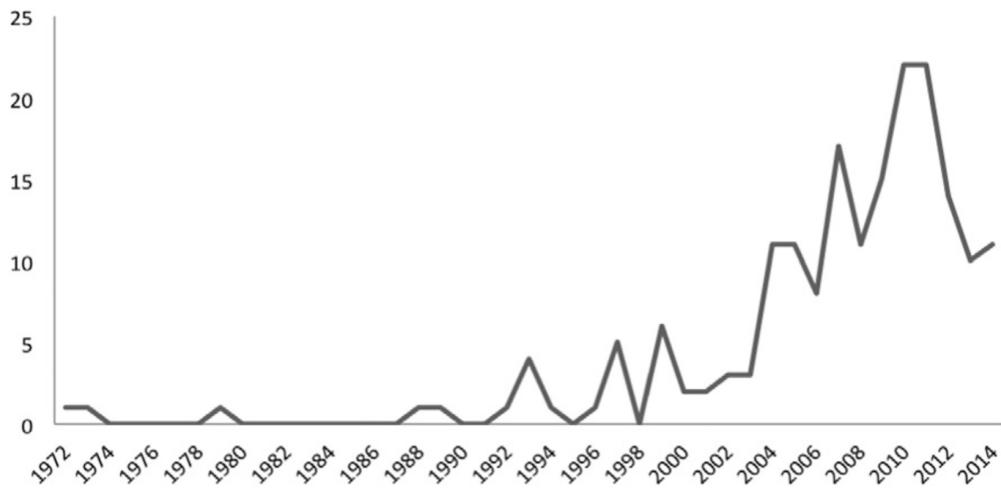


Fig. 2.1 Number of B2B branding articles (1972 – 2015) Seyedghorban et al. (2016)

However, the large majority of this discussion has been framed within the B2C domain. That is not to say there hasn't been research within B2B, in fact, as a recent meta-analysis has shown (cf. Seyedghorban et al. 2016), it is a common misconception that branding research within the B2B domain is scarce, fig 2.1 clearly illustrates the theme of increasing amounts of B2B research in recent decades. Leek & Christodoulides, (2011) and Glynn, (2012) both provide a comprehensive overview of previous B2B branding literature. Nonetheless, most previous studies of branding in the B2B context could be considered rather "myopic" (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011) as most past efforts have implicitly or explicitly attempted to extend and apply frameworks and constructs originally developed to reflect how consumers

interact with the branded products or services they purchase (cf. Aaker 1991; Aaker and Keller, 1990, Aaker 1997).

2.2.4 Key Differences Between B2B and B2C Branding

Although basic branding theory applies to B2B marketers, the differences between such markets and consumer markets (e.g. fewer and larger B2B customers who don't purchase on an impulse) warrant the need to adapt and not merely extend the existing body of knowledge on brand management to account for instance the added emphasis B2B customers place on the functional benefits of the brand (Keller 2013). The distinction between B2B and B2C includes differences in the nature of markets, the demand for products and services offered, and most significantly the motivations and the purchasing behaviour of organisational buyers compared with the motives and buying behaviour typified by individuals (Webster, 1978; Avlonitis & Gounaris, 1997). Table 2.1 shows some clear differences between Industrial (B2B) markets and consumer (B2C) markets. Given these differences it should not be assumed that successful brand strategies utilised in consumer markets would also display the same level of effectiveness in B2B markets. The following sub-sections introduce and explore key differences between brands in the B2B and B2C context.

Consumer Markets	Industrial Markets
Emphasis on the tangible product and intangibles in the purchase decision	Emphasis on tangible product and augmented services in the purchase decision
Standardised products	Customised products and services
Impersonal relationships between buyer and selling company	Personal relationships between buyer and salesperson
Relatively unsophisticated products	Highly complex products
Buyers growing in sophistication	Sophisticated buyers
Reliance on mass market advertising	Reliance on personal selling

Table 2.1 Differences Between B2B and B2C Markets (Mudambi, 2002)

2.2.4.1 Brands in B2B Markets

B2B markets are characterised by fewer, larger customers and long-term business relationships, involving a greater deal of co-operation and in some cases collaborative innovation, central to the success of the organisation (Cawsey & Rowley, 2016). In addition, purchases are often preceded by an extended decision process by professionals with a comprehensive understanding of their products / services and are highly knowledgeable about the sector within which they operate. B2B brands take time to build through an accrual of experiences a purchasing firm has with a supplier firm. This encapsulates the performance of both products and services which are offered, relationships developed between employees and marketing communications sent and received, these all cumulate within the mind of the purchasing firm to form the brand (Lilien & Grewal, 2012). A big difference which can be identified to B2C is, in consumer markets, many of the core offerings in a market are close to identical, real functional differentiation may be hard to see or distinguish and the real differentiating factor is in the brand and brand experience (Lilien & Grewal, 2012).

2.2.4.2 B2B Brand Architecture – Product versus Corporate Branding

Another important consideration surrounding B2B branding is the distinction between corporate or individual product branding (Ohnemus, 2009) and the approach B2B companies have towards the architecture of their branding strategy (Beverland et. al. 2007; Keller, 2015). Unlike B2C companies, B2B suppliers are more likely to employ a ‘branded house’ strategy using a corporate umbrella brand for all of the products they offer (Keller 2015). This difference in the brand management approach is important for two reasons. First, corporate brands are held to be more important than product brands (Aspara & Tikanen, 2008) because of the profound effects that; for example, a brand failure may have on a large number of products the supplier may be offering to the market. Consequently, brand architecture skills and capabilities for the supplier of B2B customers are, arguably, far more important than they are for the manufacturer of B2C products or services.

Secondly, a large proportion of the extant literature in export performance pertaining to the management of the brand has been carried out using the product as the primary unit of analysis (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994; Morgan et. al, 2004; Leonidou et. al 2010; Spyropoulou et. al. 2011), which would then imply a “house of brands” strategy. As such, it is debatable whether this body of the literature reliably reflects the unique challenges associated with the management of the B2B brands and the supplier’s export performance. This again exposes a gap in the literature relating to international branding in a B2B context. Therefore, albeit past research has looked at B2B branding and although this has become a growing area of branding research interest (Glynn & Woodside, 2009), the effect of B2B branding on export performance clearly lacks the empirical examination that sufficiently reflects the idiosyncratic nature of brand management in this specific context.

Regarding the international marketing literature, Sousa et al. (2008) found in their review looking at determinants of export performance, 54 out of 124 studies used export venture as the unit of analysis which concerns a specific product or line (product-level) exported to a particular foreign market (Cavusgil & Zou, 1994). The number of studies utilising a product venture approach was seen to increase by the follow up review looking at 2008-2014 (Chen et al. 2016). This means there are less studies using the export firm level of analysis, which entails investigations which focus on the overall export performance attained by the entire exporting entity (e.g. Dhanaraj & Beamish, 2003; Cadogan et al. 2009; He et al. 2013). It is recognised that there are both benefits and drawbacks to using firm level and venture level approaches. By adopting a venture level analysis is can be possible to identify and isolate specific antecedents of export performance (Morgan et al. 2004). This may be more difficult to achieve using a firm level unit of analysis since invariably they do not capture differences in the strategies executed by export ventures that face various market place requirements (Morgan et al. 2004). To ensure variation in export venture performance different versions of a survey can be developed which ask participants to respond in relation to one of their successful export ventures, an average venture or a less successful venture (e.g. Morgan et al. 2004; Hultman et al. 2011). However, there are a number of main concerns raised about venture-level studies (Oliveira et al. 2012). Firstly, the use of export venture may fail to capture firm-level variables and secondly, venture-level measurements of export performance are unsuitable in certain cases. For example, studies that measure export venture performance utilising export function instruments may lead to the suggestion of managerial implications which are invalid (Oliveira et al. 2012). Oliveira & Cadogan (2018) advocate the use of multi-level models if the export venture is going to be used; therefore, investigations should consider multiple export ventures within a given firm to avoid a potentially biased picture of export performance being formed. There is a higher risk of

drawing invalid conclusions when scholars incorrectly match up levels of theory and measurement (Sousa et al. 2008), so it is vital that measurement equates to the level at which the theory has been developed (Cadogan et al. 2009). According to Chen et al. (2016) the decision upon which unit of analysis to use should be dependent on the research objectives, and venture level analysis does not work for all. Given that for this study of international B2B branding the theory is developed at the level of the firm using a branded house approach, it is therefore justifiable that the corporate firm will be used as the unit of analysis.

2.2.4.3 B2B Branding as a Method of Reducing the Perceived Risk in the Transaction Process

The majority of B2B transactions contain a high level of risk, their cost will contribute to the end price of a product or service, but more significantly, in many cases, their reliability will affect the reputation of the brand end clients are in contact with (Kapferer, 2012). The extant literature determines that there is great importance for strong brands in providing value to industrial buyers by improving their confidence during the decision-making process (Low & Blois, 2002), therefore reducing risk (Ohnemus, 2009). Additionally, B2B brands play a significant role by reducing uncertainty for buyer's and contribute to the decision-making units reaching a consensus (Mudambi, 2002; Wise & Zednickova, 2009). Lilien & Grewal (2012) provide a simple example to illustrate the difference of risk in B2B markets: if a consumer purchases a tube of toothpaste to try it out then the risk is minor; however, if a B2B toothpaste manufacturing firm is considering the purchase of hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of chemicals to use in its toothpaste product, then understandably the potential complications and associated risks are far higher. In summary, “strong B2B brands

“fill the gaps” of uncertainty that reside in every B2B buying situation” (Lilien & Grewal, 2012. p.29).

2.2.4.4 Inter-Firm Relationships in B2B Markets

A key dimension of B2B is that buyers engage in relationships, not simply transactions (Kapferer, 2012). B2B buyers are characterised as putting greater emphasis on establishing long term supplier relationships (Webster & Keller, 2004). Snehota and Hakansson (1995) argue that buyer seller relationships are far more predominant and widespread in B2B markets compared with B2C, and these relationships are more complex, balanced and expected to be of a lengthier duration. According to Kuhn et al. (2008), these relationships are far more important in B2B than in a B2C setting. Previous research has found that 88% of B2B relationships are more than five years old (Ford et al. 2002). This is not specifically in relation to an international setting; however, there is no reason to suggest that an international setting wouldn't also be expected to be a similarly high figure. Relationships of this length are multi-layered and involve not only the relationship with the brand but also the relationship with the company and its employees (Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). The salesperson is a vital link in the B2B brand relationship with the buyer, salespeople are the organisations front line and are vital in both establishing and maintaining effectual connectivity, communication and relationships with business customers (Lilien & Grewal, 2012).

2.3 Defining Strategic Brand Management

Prior to specifying a definition of brand management, it is expedient to refine what characterises a brand. Definitions evolve over time and there have been many incarnations of the most suitable brand definition over the past decades. An early definition is provided by the American Marketing Association (AMA), a brand is a “name, term, sign, symbol, or design or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition” (AMA, 1960). According to Aaker (1991) “A brand is a distinguishing name and/or symbol intended to identify the goods or services of one seller from those of competitors”. These earlier definitions are arguably too simplistic and a more appropriate classification for this study is provided by ISBM by defining a brand as “A relationship with a market or a market segment that has an economic impact in the marketing of an offering” (Lilien & Grewal, 2012. p.28). That economic impact can involve a variety of factors including higher prices, faster uptake, lower cost of sales, more willingness to try new offerings and the prevention of competitive advances (Lilien & Grewal, 2012. p.28). The accumulation of these factors and the aggregate economic impact of a brand can be viewed as ‘brand equity’ (Netemeyer et. al. 2004; Kumar et al. 2006) The variety of benefits a strong brand can bring both to the supplier and the buyer can be seen in Fig .2.2

Strong B2B Brand

Benefits for Buyers	Benefits for Suppliers
Higher Confidence	Quality
Risk / Uncertainty Reduction	Differentiation
Increased Satisfaction	Higher Demand
Greater Comfort	Premium Price
Identification with a Strong Brand	Brand Extensions
	Distribution Power
	Barrier to Entry
	Goodwill
	Loyal Customers
	Customer Satisfaction Referrals

Fig. 2.2 Benefits of B2B Branding for Suppliers and Buyers (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011).

Clearly there are benefits to having a strong B2B brand; however, the creation of a brand is not an end in itself, it needs to be strategically managed as a business tool - an instrument for company growth and profitability (Kapferer, 2012). Since a brand is reflected in everything that a company does, a complete branding approach requires a strategic perspective (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). Strategic brand management encompasses the design and implementation of marketing programs and activities to build, measure and manage brand equity (Keller, 2013. p.58). According to Keller (2013. p.58) There are four principal stages to successful strategic brand management

- 1) Identifying and developing brand plans
- 2) Designing and implementing brand marketing programs
- 3) Measuring and interpreting brand performance
- 4) Growing and sustaining brand equity.

Morgan et al. (2009b), measured brand management as a capability, relative to competitors as 1) Using customer insights to identify valuable brand positioning, 2) Establishing desired brand associations in customer's minds, 3) Maintaining a positive brand image relative to competitors, 4) Achieving high levels of brand awareness in the market, 5) Leveraging brand equity into preferential channel positions, 6) Tracking brand image and awareness among target customers. Similar dimensions were used in an implicitly B2B study by Santos-Vijande et al. (2013) with a strong focus placed on strategic brand management, they measured investment in the management of a firm's brand, investment of resources in brand management, co-ordination of multidisciplinary teams to manage the firm's brand, development of all marketing actions in line with the desired brand image and the management of the brand over the medium to long term perspective. Although Morgan et al. (2009b) and Santos-Vijande et al. (2013) measures are not exactly the same, these items of strategic brand management are comparable to each other and broadly consistent and can be seen to fit within Keller's stages mentioned above. Successful strategic brand management requires "a corporate long-term involvement, a high level of resources and skills to become the referent" (Kapferer, 2012).

Brand management theory and practices have recently been referred to as "the most neglected or under-developed topic in branding" (Merrilees et al. 2013). Though areas such as brand identity and brand visioning have received substantial attention in the literature (de Chernatony, 2010; Balmer, 2012), meticulous formulation and development of brands will not fulfil their potential impact without appropriate, effective and strategic management of the brand (Merrilees et al. 2013).

It is important to acknowledge that there are distinctive identifiable differences between B2C and B2B brand management (Table 2.2). B2B brand management focuses on corporate firm level branding, risk-reduction with less importance placed on the self-expressive and emotional benefits of B2B brands and there are less brands to manage within a B2B firm.

Consumer Brand Management	Industrial Brand Management
Branding at the product level, with increasing emphasis on corporate level	Branding at the corporate level, with experimentation at the product level
Customer perception of functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits of brands	More customer emphasis on risk-reduction; less customer emphasis on self-expressive benefits of brands
Moves to reduce the number of brands within a company	Number of brands within a company increasing due to acquisitions

Table 2.2 Differences Between B2B and B2C Brand Management (Mudambi, 2002)

“Brand management for industrial goods and services represents a unique and effective opportunity for establishing enduring, competitive advantages” (Kotler & Pfoertsh, 2006). A definition is therefore “Brand Management is the organisational framework that systematically manages the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of the brand strategy” (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006. p.66). This section has discussed the importance of brand management and characterised what constitutes B2B brand management, the next section will provide a review of the most important B2B branding literature.

2.4 A Review of the B2B Branding Literature

Table 2.3 reports the most important and, in the majority of cases the most cited B2B branding research output over the past two decades. This time period was used since there has been a sustained upsurge in publications since the mid 1990’s as previously reported in Fig 2.1. As well as their key findings, journal publication, and method, also included is whether the study was set within an international context. What is clear is that although there

are journals focused entirely on B2B (Industrial Marketing Management, Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing), there are many other well-regarded journals which have published articles on B2B branding. As shown in Table 2.3 these include the Journal of Marketing, Journal of Marketing Management, Journal of Marketing Research, the European Journal of Marketing, International Journal of Research in Marketing, the Journal of Services Marketing and the Journal of Business Research.

Table 2.3 Review of Previous Important Prominent B2B Branding Studies

Study	Journal	Findings	Industry	Method	Intl Context
Mudambi (1997)	Industrial Marketing Management	Both intangible (especially company) attributes as well as tangible aspects of industrial brands are important.	B2B multi industry	15 in-depth interviews	No
Mudambi (2002)	Industrial Marketing Management	Findings shows to whom branding is important and in what situations. Three clusters of buyers are found: branding receptive, highly tangible and low interest.	B2B multi industry	15 in-depth interviews / Survey 116 firms	No
Bendixen et al. (2004)	Industrial Marketing Management	Brand equity plays an important role, but price and delivery are more important. However, a high price premium can be obtained when a company has high brand equity.	B2B Goods, single industry	6 in-depth interviews / 54 conjoint analysis experiment	No
Venkatesan & Kumar (2004)	Journal of Marketing	Marketing contacts across various channels influence customer lifetime value (CLV) nonlinearly. Customers who are selected on the basis of their lifetime value provide higher profits in future periods than customers selected on the basis of other customer based metrics.	B2B Goods	Database - customer data from large B2B manufacturer	No

Morgan et al. (2006)	Industrial Marketing Management	Resource inimitability and non-substitutability are directly related to export venture performance. Inimitability and non-substitutability mediate the resource to performance relationship for B2B goods export venture.	B2B goods Multi Industry	Survey, (218 Germany, 173 UK)	Yes
Cretu & Brodie (2007)	Industrial Marketing Management	Brand's image has a more specific influence on the customer's perceptions of product and service quality while the company's reputation has a broader influence on perceptions of customer value and customer loyalty.	B2B Goods, single industry	Qualitative interviews, Survey, 377 firms	No
Kotler & Pfoertsch (2007)	Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing	Long-term B2B branding strategies, brand performance and a firm's business performance are found to be positively correlated with stock increase. Current brand focus and guiding principles can lead to improved business performance.	B2B (non-specific goods & services)	qualitative pilot / quantitative survey	No
Lynch & Chernatony (2007)	Journal of marketing Management	Successful B2B brand communication requires sales strategies that incorporate brand values appealing to the emotional and the rational concerns of organisational buyers.	B2B (non-specific goods & services)	Literature review	No
Beverland et al. (2007)	Industrial Marketing Management	Identification of salient capabilities underpinning five B2B firms global branding programs.	B2B goods & services. Multi Industry	Multiple case study approach. 5 firms	Yes
Han & Sung (2008)	Industrial Marketing Management	Supplier competence directly affects purchasing value and customer satisfaction. This competence indirectly affects commitment, switching costs, brand trust and loyalty.	B2B goods Multi Industry	Survey, 279 firms	No

Lee et al. (2008)	Industrial Marketing Management	Brand Management Systems (BMS) enhance brand performance especially for B2B brands. Shows a link between market orientation, BMS and brand performance.	B2B goods & services. Multi Industry	Survey 1000 brand managers (770 B2C & 230 B2B)	No
Ghosh & John (2009)	Journal of Marketing Research	Firms choose branded component contracts when brands add differentiation and supplier has customised component.	B2B goods Multi Industry	Survey, 191 firms	No
LaPlaca & Katrichis (2009)	Journal of Business to Business Marketing	Without the introduction of journals whose specific focus is industrial marketing, the under-representation of B2B would have been even more severe today. Six general research areas were looked at to determine trends in industrial marketing research: buyer behavior, sales management, marketing relationships, innovation & NPD, marketing strategy, & channels of distribution.	B2B (non-specific goods & services)	Literature review	No
Roper & Davies (2010)	European Journal of Marketing	Customer satisfaction is predicted by corporate brand personality. The customer view correlates significantly with the employee view. The quality of training in turn helps predict the employee view and their satisfaction.	B2B Goods, construction industry	Survey (280 customers) and 367 employees of 2 firms	No
Persson, N. (2010)	Industrial Marketing Management	Relationship, product solution and service were most important in relation to a price premium. Distribution, company and familiarity were of lesser importance.	B2B Goods	12 In-depth interviews	No

Zablah et al. (2010)	International Journal of Research in Marketing	Four constructs (brand consciousness, brand preference, brand sensitivity, and brand importance.) represent a belief-attitude-intention-behavior Hierarchy of Effects (HOE) capable of explaining why the relative importance of B2B brands differs across purchase situations. The constructs have different levels of effects on brand importance dependent on the competitive intensity.	B2B goods & services. Multi Industry	Survey, 314 firms	No
Homburg et al. (2010)	International Journal of Research in Marketing	Brand awareness significantly drives market performance in B2B markets. The link is moderated by market characteristics and typical characteristics of organisational buyers.	B2B goods Multi Industry	Survey 310 firms	No
Marquardt et al. (2011)	Journal of Services Marketing	Managers should strive to develop compelling and differentiated value propositions associated with their B2B service brands, then invest in communicating their brands value to internal and external audiences. Finally commit resources to ensure consistent and favourable experiences with the brand.	B2B Services	5 in-depth interviews, Survey 144 firms	No
Backhaus et al. (2011)	Industrial Marketing Management	Applied bibliometric methods to B2B research. Findings show a highly dynamic discipline in the 1970's and 1980's, its slowed since then and diversified into a number of subfields. Still a lot of topics to be addressed.	B2B goods & services. Multi Industry	Literature review	No

Brown et al. (2011)	International Journal of Research in Marketing	Brand sensitivity is highest in relatively low or high-risk situations. The risk-brand sensitivity relationship is moderated by competitive intensity	B2B goods & services. Multi Industry	2 Stage surveys, (1) 208 firms (2) 238 firms	No
Merrilees et al. (2011)	Industrial Marketing Management	Two marketing capabilities; namely, branding and innovation, have major performance outcomes in the SME B2B context	B2B goods & services. Multi Industry	Survey, 367 firms	No
Chen et al. (2011)	Journal of Business Research	Main finding is that the country of origin of fasteners has not yet become an important antecedent of industrial brand equity in the case of the fastener industry in Taiwan	B2B Goods	Survey, 102 firms	Yes
Leek & Christodoulides (2011)	Industrial Marketing Management	Critical discussion, five themes B2B branding benefits, the role of B2B brands in decision making, B2B brand architecture, B2B brands communication / relationships and B2B brand equity	B2B (non-specific goods & services)	Literature review	No
Coleman et al. (2011)	Industrial Marketing Management	Development of B2B brand identity scale. five dimensions, employee & client focus, visual identity, brand personality, consistent communications and HR initiatives	B2B IT services sector	Survey, 421 Senior Marketing executives.	No
Glynn, (2012)	Journal of Business Research	Examination of empirical studies. Provides evidence of how brands create and deliver value for firms in inter-organisational transactions	B2B (non-specific goods & services)	Literature review	No

Leek & Christodoulides (2012)	Industrial Marketing Management	Framework providing brand value (emotional and functional) from supplier perspective. Value of brand in developing B2B relationship also highlighted	B2B goods & services. Multi Industry	Literature review and 10 exploratory interviews	No
Wiersema (2013)	Industrial Marketing Management	Literature review. Summary of the current state of B2B marketing and the outlook for future	B2B (non-specific goods & services)	Literature review	No
Coleman et al. (2015)	European Journal of Marketing	Brand personality, HR initiatives have a significant positive influence on B2B brand performance	B2B IT services sector	Survey, 421 Senior Marketing executives.	No
Zhang et al. (2015)	Industrial Marketing Management	Marketing & networking capabilities build brand equity directly and indirectly through value co-creation. Innovation capability has a positive indirect effect on brand equity	B2B goods & services. Multi Industry	Survey 212 firms	No
Seyedghorban et al. (2016)	Journal of Business Research	Identification and evaluation of the underlying structure and evolution of scholarly research in B2B branding	B2B goods & services. Multi Industry	Literature review	No
Kaleka & Morgan (2017)	Industrial Marketing Management	Findings are supportive of a more prominent role of marketing capabilities over recent market performance on future strategic intentions in export markets	Mainly B2B goods, 1/3 of survey respondent's dual (B2B & B2C)	9 interviews, Survey, 312 firms	Yes

Table 2.3 displays scholars have investigated various aspects of B2B branding over the past two decades. The majority of studies have used a multi-industry approach and though there have been studies solely investigating goods (e.g. Venkatesan & Kumar, 2004; Chen et al. 2011) and studies focusing entirely on services (e.g. Marquardt et al. 2011; Coleman et al.

2015), the majority have included both goods and services. Therefore, by investigating B2B goods and service suppliers across a multitude of industries this study uses an established approach. An early prominent study in Table 2.3 by Mudambi (1997) used the method of qualitative interviews; however, not many other studies have only relied on this method. Other methods which have been used include conjoint analysis experiment (e.g. Bendixen et al. 2004), case studies (e.g. Beverland et al. 2007), large scale surveys (e.g. Zablah et al. 2010; Homburg et al. 2010; Merrilees et al. 2011; Coleman et al. 2011), two stage surveys (e.g. Brown et al. 2011) and in recent years there has been a number of noteworthy literature reviews (e.g. Backhaus et al. 2011; Leek & Christodoulides 2011; Glynn 2012; Leek & Christodoulides 2012; Wiersema 2013; Seyedghorban et al. 2016). A mixed methods research design utilising first qualitative interviews followed by a large-scale survey has been widely adopted by scholars (e.g. Mudambi, 2002; Cretu & Brodie 2007; Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007; Marquardt et al. 2011; Kaleka & Morgan 2017), therefore providing support for the research design adopted in this thesis.

Studies have investigated a wide range of B2B brand related topic including brand personality (e.g. Roper & Davies, 2010; Coleman et al. 2011; 2015), brand equity (e.g. Bendixen et al. 2004; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011; Zhang et al. 2015), brand awareness (e.g. Homburg et al. 2010), brand architecture (e.g. Leek & Christodoulides, 2011) and branding capabilities (e.g. Merrilees et al. 2011; Kaleka & Morgan, 2017). However, it is significant that only four of the studies in Table 2.3 consider B2B branding within an international context (Morgan et al. 2006; Beverland et al. 2007; Chen et al. 2011; Kaleka & Morgan 2017) and these studies do not examine the antecedents of strategic brand management or the subsequent influence it has on performance. Only one study directly examines the effects of brand management on performance (Lee et al. 2008), however, this

investigates effects on brand performance domestically and not export performance. Just one study investigated COO effect (Chen et al. 2011), and this was limited to one type of good within one specific industry. Therefore, this review of previous important B2B brand literature provides support for the need for the research within this thesis to progress knowledge with regards to the antecedents and influence of international strategic brand management in the B2B context.

2.5 Managing the B2B Brand Internationally

Having established the importance of strategic brand management and branding practices for B2B companies, this section will address branding within international marketing through a review of the literature and subsequently highlight the relevant gaps which, in turn, reinforces the timely need for this study.

Exporting is the most common method for firms to enter international markets. This has attracted many business researchers since the early 1960's who have published numerous articles on the subject, establishing it as a legitimate and extremely important field of academic inquiry within the international business discipline (Leonidou et al. 2010).

Exporting is an economic activity that dates back centuries. This form of internationalisation theoretical roots was first addressed by leading economists such as the revolutionary work of Smith (1776) and subsequently theories of comparative advantage by Ricardo (1817).

Owing to the cumulative volume of research into exporting, various reviews have been published looking at the different streams taken by exporting research and in recent decades its effects on performance (see Bilkey, 1978; Aaby & Slater, 1989; Zou & Stan, 1988; Leonidou & Katsikeas, 1996; Katsikeas et al. 2000; Leonidou et al. 2002; Hult et al. 2008; Sousa et al. 2008; Leonidou et al. 2010; Chen et al. 2016).

Although domestic market branding literature has been rapidly developing over the past four decades international branding literature has been surprisingly scant. For example, branding was not even mentioned as one of the article topics analysed by Nakata & Huang (2005) within their wide-ranging review of over 600 papers within the international marketing literature for the decade 1990-2000. Leonidou et al. (2002) did attempt to look at branding within their comprehensive meta-analysis of marketing strategy determinants of export performance. However, Leonidou et al. (2002) surmised that studies that had attempted to investigate branding (e.g. Namiki, 1988, 1994; Kaynak & Kuan, 1993) took a broad approach to branding without reference to an explicit dimension; for example, branding capabilities or brand management which are investigated within this thesis. This lack of detailed analysis of branding within an international context was found to create an inherent problem when it comes to examining the association between branding and export performance since it is then difficult to identify which important aspects of branding, such as brand management skills, influence performance (Leonidou et al. 2002).

In recent years there has been an upsurge in scholarly interest looking at international branding however, rarely within a B2B context. Before proceeding it is necessary to provide a definition of what is meant by ‘international branding’ since there has been a distinct lack of specific definitions from most scholars working within the area. An expansive definition is: international branding refers to “the process of developing a firm’s brand equity that appeals to overseas target customer’s positive attitudes about the brand” (Bennett, P, 1995). This perspective is also shared and implicitly found in other studies (e.g. Steenkamp et al. 2003; Holt et al. 2004), suggesting that the strategic management of international branding refers to the entire process of brand development at an international level (Whitelock &

Fastoso, 2007) instead of just reductive views of branding such as focusing on only the brand name or logo (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007).

Within the international branding literature available some important streams of research have emerged under the term “global brands”. The use of this term was rare before 1980 (Chabowski et al. 2013), yet international or global brands have been around in one form or another significantly further back in time (Dyer et al. 2004; Richardson, 2008); for example, ancient Egyptian traders used to physically brand their animals which were shipped overseas. There is no explicit definition for how many international markets a brand must be sold in to be considered global or whether it is necessary for a given brand to be sold in all or many of the markets a firm has presence in (Chabowski et al. 2013).

The following table (Table 2.4) reports the most important and in the majority of cases the most cited international branding research over the past two decades, as well as their key findings, publication, context, country the study was conducted and method used. Table 2.4 shows very few studies have been conducted in the B2B context, therefore due to inherent differences discussed in previous sections the findings for B2C studies are not necessarily applicable within the B2B domain. Various methods have been utilised including focus groups (Ozsomer & Altaras 2008) and in-depth interviews (Davvetas et al. 2015), though the majority of research efforts have employed a survey method of data collection.

Table 2.4 Review of the Most Important International Branding Studies

Study	Journal	Findings	Context	Country of study	Method
Klein, Ettenson, and Morris (1998)	Journal of Marketing	Findings show animosity towards a foreign nation will negatively affect the purchase of brands of products from that nation independent of judgments of product quality.	B2C Products	China	244 surveys
Aaker and Joachimsthaler (1999)	Harvard Business Review	Editorial paper on "the lure of global branding". Discusses global brand planning, sharing insights, global brand responsibility and delivering brilliance.	non-specific	non-specific	no empirical research
Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra (1999)	Journal of Marketing	A new construct, Global Consumer Culture Positioning (GCCP) is proposed, operationalised and tested. Meaningful % of advertisements found to employ GCCP as opposed to being a member of local consumer culture or a specific foreign consumer culture.	B2C Goods & Services	7 countries, India, Thailand, Korea, Germany, Netherlands, France, USA	1267 National brand television adverts collected. Cluster analysis conducted
Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, and Ramachander (2000)	Journal of Consumer Psychology	In developing countries, a non-local brand Country of Origin serves as a "quality halo" or summary of product quality.	B2C Goods only	India	508 Structured survey, questions asked by interviewer
Douglas et al. (2001)	Journal of International Marketing	It is imperative for firms to establish a clear cut international branding strategy. A key element of success is the framing of a harmonious and consistent brand architecture across countries and product lines, which defines the number of levels and brands at each level.	B2C	Europe' (countries not specified)	Semi structured interviews with senior executives at consumer goods companies

Hsieh (2002)	Journal of International Marketing	This study links country clustering to brand globalisation. Countries are segmented in terms of brand image perceptions on a brand-by-brand basis and country characteristics such as economic development resulting in segments that are used to explain similarities in perceptions.	B2C	20 countries across Europe, Asia, North & South America	Survey 200 per country (300 Japan) (370 USA)
Steenkamp, Batra, and Alden (2003)	Journal of International Business Studies	Three pathways explain Perceived Brand Globalness (PBG) influence of purchase likelihood. PBG positively related to perceived brand quality and prestige. Better understanding of why some consumers prefer global brands to local brands.	B2C	USA, Korea	Survey 247 consumers USA. 370 Korea
Holt, Quelch, and Taylor (2004)	Harvard Business Review	Findings included a better understanding of why consumers buy global brands. Quality signal 44%, global myth 12% and social responsibility 8% were found to be 3 dimensions that explain 64% total global brand preference. Four global consumer segments identified.	B2C Goods only	12 countries	41 Qualitative Interviews. Large scale survey - 1800 consumers
Schuiling and Kapferer (2004)	Journal of International Marketing	First study gaining better understanding of local brand equity Identification of differences between local and international brands. Perceptions of prices, value, trust etc. were found to be stronger for local brands.	B2C	UK, Germany, France, Italy	Young & Rubicam database, re-analysis 1999-2000. 9739 structured interviews

Wong & Merrilees (2007)	International Marketing Review	Empirical examination of the inter-relationships between branding issues such as brand re-positioning, brand performance & international marketing issues such as international marketing strategy & financial performance. New constructs developed, significant relationships found.	n/a non-specific	Australia	Survey 315
Whitelock & Fastoso (2007)	International Marketing Review	An overview of 30 years of international branding, different understandings of international branding are brought together and definitions provided.	n/a (all included)	n/a (all included)	Literature Review
Ozsomer & Altaras (2008)	Journal of International Marketing	Perceived Brand Globalness (PBG) is positively related to local iconness in emerging markets, but negative in developed markets. Local iconness has different effects on brand quality perceptiveness depending on the industry sector.	B2C	Turkey, Singapore Denmark	Focus groups, survey
Cayla & Arnould, (2008)	Journal of International Marketing	conceptualisation foundations set for culturally relevant, contextually sensitive approach to international branding in which the construct of brand mythology is central.	n/a	n/a	Conceptual paper
Spyropoulou et al. (2011)	European Journal of Marketing	Financial and experiential resources and communication capabilities should be deployed to achieve branding advantage and enhanced export performance.	Manufacturing firms (SME) non-specific (B2B / B2C)	Greece	Survey 419 firms & 11 in-depth Interviews

Chen et al. (2011)	Journal of Business Research	The main finding is that the country-of-origin of fasteners has not yet become an important antecedent of industrial brand equity in the case of the fastener industry in Taiwan.	B2B Manufacturing	Taiwan	Survey 102 firms
Ozsomer et al. (2012)	International Journal of Research in Marketing	Roadmap and review of literature introducing the special edition on global brand management.	n/a (all included)	n/a (all included)	Literature Review
Matanda & Ewing (2012)	International Journal of Research in Marketing	Examination of new global brand management strategy at the firm Kimberley Clark (KC). Includes sharing information and best practices, implementing common brand planning processes, assigning responsibilities for global branding and creating and implementing brand building strategies.	not stated. KC mainly B2C but also B2B	6 continents	Extended case method. 3 rounds of semi structured interviews (6 continents)
Riefler (2012)	International Journal of Research in Marketing	The role of Globalisation Attitude (GA) and global brand origin. Favourable attitudes of consumer towards global brands is contingent on the attitudes of consumers towards globalisation.	B2C	Austria	Survey 440 consumers
Chabowski et al. (2013)	Journal of International Business Studies	The major research areas for global branding are international branding strategy, brand positioning, brand/country origin, brand concept/image & brand performance.	n/a (all included)	n/a (all included)	Literature Review
Steenkamp (2014)	International marketing Review	Creation of a global brand value model, set to inspire empirical papers. To aide managers in the development and evaluation of their global marketing strategies.	B2C (not explicit) B2B not mentioned, consumers discussed	n/a	Conceptual paper

Bahadir et al. (2015)	Journal of International Business Studies	findings show country market characteristics moderate the relationship between the complete set of marketing mix elements and brand sales performance asymmetrically. Different elements of the marketing mix have greater impacts on developed and emerging markets.	B2C products	14 countries - emerging and developed countries across the globe	access to a market research company's data - collected monthly in each market
Davvetas et al. (2015)	International Journal of Research in Marketing	Replication of the study by Steenkamp, Batra and Alden (2003) on perceived brand globalness. Consumer is willing to pay more for global brands providing their globalness leads to a more favourable brand attitude. Testing a set of consumer characteristics as moderators, findings show increased tolerance towards global price premiums is robust across consumer segments.	B2C	Austria	(4 complimentary studies) each using in-depth interviews
Sun et al. (2017)	Journal of International Marketing	Findings show foreign brands have an advantage on Intention-Behavior Discrepancy (IBD) relative to domestic brands, indicating that they have the dual advantage of higher evaluations and lower IBD's.	B2C	China	two round survey - intention then post purchase 520 consumers

Table 2.4 illustrates that within the international branding literature some important streams of research emerged within the past two decades, for example, Perceived Brand Globalness (PBG) (Steenkamp et al. 2003; Ozsomer, 2008; Davvetas et al. 2015), brand mythology (Holt et al. 2004; Cayla & Arnould, 2008), country of origin effect on international brands (Batra et al. 2000; Chen et al. 2011), Riefler, 2012), brand positioning (Alden et al. 1999) and branding strategy (Douglas et al. 2001; Wong & Merrilees, 2008; Matanda & Ewing

2012, Steenkamp, 2014). In each case, findings consistently demonstrate international branding is a worthwhile endeavour enabling competitive advantages over other firms. International brands are considered to generate more positive effects (Alden et al. 1999), advocate higher quality (Steenkamp et al. 2003), provoke attractive global myths (Holt et al. 2004) and generally have an advantage over local brands in terms of willingness to purchase (Davvetas et al. 2015). However, almost all studies have been within a B2C context or have not specified the context setting. Therefore, due to the previously identified differences between B2B and B2C markets and brand management requirements, the results are not necessarily directly applicable within a B2B domain. There have been a few recent studies that are directly relevant to this thesis and therefore worthwhile discussing further and identifying where this thesis extends previous international branding research efforts specifically in B2B context.

Matanda and Ewing (2012) take a firm perspective and suggest branding is a function of a firm's global/international brand management strategy. Using an extended case study method and drawing on both leadership and dynamic capability theory, they found brand management was integral to a firm's branding strategy globally and used a balance of global best practices, regional empowerment, standardisation and capacity building. They did not investigate external environmental antecedents to brand management strategy or the effects of effective brand management practices on export performance. COO was also not part of their investigations.

Wong & Merrilees (2007) progressed a new line of enquiry for international branding by linking key elements of branding literature such as brand orientation, brand re-positioning, brand performance and international marketing issues, for example, international marketing

strategy, financial performance, international commitment, control of international marketing activates and the macro marketing environment. Using a survey method and utilising Structured Equation Modelling (SEM) to test the inter-relationships between constructs, they established the pivotal role of branding in international marketing; however, their study was not B2B or B2C specific and did not examine the specific influence of strategic brand management, the influence of external environmental factors or COO effect.

Spyropoulou et al. (2011) advanced research within the international branding area by investigating internal environment antecedents (financial resources, experiential resources, communication capabilities) and performance implications of branding advantage in export markets. Their study was non-specific to B2B or B2C. However, by using the export venture i.e. specific product lines as the unit of analysis their study is more suited to B2C branding scholarly enquiry, since branding in B2B firms is more common at the corporate level (Mudambi, 2002). They proved the positive relationship between a firm's financial resources and their international capabilities, further, they demonstrated that certain international capabilities contributed to the achievement of export branding advantage, which in turn had a positive effect on export performance. Their study did not include strategic brand management, external environmental antecedents or the potential moderating effect of COO.

Batra et al. (2000) demonstrated COO can have an impact on the way brand quality is viewed in foreign markets and Riefler (2012) showed the impact of COO on favourable attitudes towards international brands is mitigated by customer perceptions. Chen et al. (2011) recognised the potential importance of COO to international B2B branding looking in particular at newly industrialised economies. They conducted research in Taiwan and

focused on one product line: fastener products. Although their findings were inconclusive and did not find COO was significant for Taiwanese fastener company's branding efforts within an international trade context, they did progress this stream of research allowing future research efforts to focus on B2B international branding in different ways. For example, future enquires in this area of research could include multi industry firms supplying goods and/or services. These COO studies did not address strategic brand management, the effect of internal or external environmental factors or the subsequent influence of brand management best practices on export performance.

Chapter 3 – Theoretical Framework & Conceptual Development

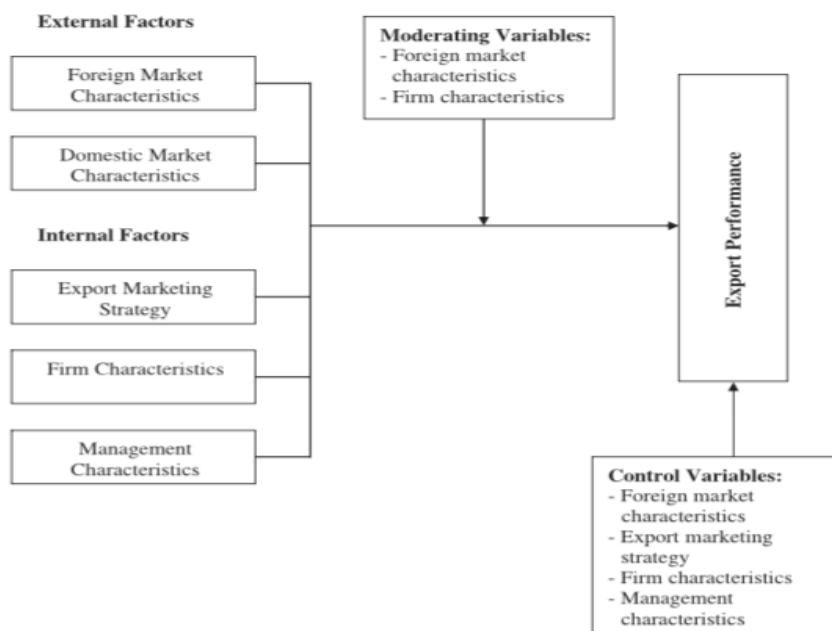
3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the theoretical foundations are described and the development of the conceptual framework is presented. This chapter is divided into two main sections: firstly, the theoretical basis for the framework presented and secondly, the rationale for each measurement variable within the framework model is explained and justified.

An organisation must be “organised to exploit the full competitive potential of its resources and capabilities” (Barney & Hesterly, 2012); a critical element in any given organisation is the way it is managed. Fundamental to a brand’s success in a given market is the role of a firm’s brand management (Vorhies et al. 2011). It therefore follows reason that strategic brand management is a deterministic factor linking a firm’s key capabilities and performance. Within management literature, many examples exist of key management practices playing a central role within conceptual models and research frameworks, for example, Flynn et al. (1995) make quality management central to their model and investigate the impact of quality management on performance and competitive advantage. While there are a vast array of models and frameworks that address particular topics in B2B marketing, there is no widely accepted, over-arching, B2B marketing framework (Hunt, 2011). Therefore, given there have been a number of relevant examples of international marketing models and frameworks, this study will draw more upon these accepted theoretical designs than any particular B2B model.

Sousa et al. (2008) conducted an in-depth evaluation into the most common approaches to export performance, this follows on from previous reviews (Aaby & Slater, 1989; Zou & Stan, 1998). Fig 3.1 displays a summary framework Sousa et al. (2008) created by

synthesising 52 well cited articles from 1998 to 2005 investigating determinants of export performance. Interestingly, they found the most widely investigated determinant was international marketing strategy, but there was no mention of brand strategy. Also found to be significant was managerial characteristics; research has indicated management is the main force behind the initiation, development, substance and success of a firm's international marketing efforts (Leonidou et al. 1998). Therefore, there have been previous studies looking at the importance of strategy and/or management on export performance, but there is yet to be a study that focuses on strategic brand management as the key deterministic factor in international firm performance. Foreign market characteristics, such as competitiveness, have been integrated into previous research models as external factors, moderating variables and control variables; Sousa et al. (2008) revealed their importance within previous research. Firm characteristics have also been used within previous studies as external factors and moderating variables but most commonly they are used as control variables.



(Fig 3.1) A Framework of Determinants of Export Performance (Sousa et al. 2008)

3.2 International Strategic Brand Management and Export Performance in the B2B Context: Theoretical Foundations

Two wide-ranging theoretical approaches, resource based theory and the structure conduct performance framework have come to dominate explanations of the differences in international marketing performance across firms (Morgan et al. 2004; Spyropoulou et al. 2011). There is a broad consensus in the literature (Kaleka 2002; Zou et al. 2003; Morgan et al. 2004) that resources and capabilities are fundamental drivers of competitive advantage and hence performance in overseas markets (Leonidou, et. al. 2010). This theoretical perspective has customarily been referred to as the Resource Based View (RBV) of the firm; however, in recent years it has been established to be a theory (Barney et al. 2011), so it is suggested to be more appropriate to refer to it as the Resource Based Theory (RBT) of the firm (Kozlenkova et al. 2014). It was found through a review of empirical research on RBT that emphasis should be put on capabilities rather than resources in terms of relevance and potential impact on performance (Newbert, 2007). Though certain resources are essential to the development of superior capabilities, resources cannot as such do anything; of greater relevance and importance is the capacity of capabilities to utilise and exploit resources effectively (Liao et. al. 2009; Merrilees et. al. 2011). Despite the strong theoretical background underpinning the RBT, the relationship between capabilities and export performance is contingent on external environment factors.

The Structure Conduct Performance (SCP) paradigm encapsulates Industrial Organisational (IO) theory and enables researchers to distinguish between different outcomes of the same variable(s) under alternative internal (e.g. structural and strategic) and external (e.g. environmental) conditions (Donaldson, 2001; Nemkova et. al 2012). The SCP approach posits there is no single strategy best related to performance due to the turbulent

uncontrollable impact the environment has (Hofer, 1975; La et al. 2009) and thus proposes export strategies should employ specialised capabilities to ally resources depending on particular export market conditions (Xu, Cavushil, & White, 2006). Hence, the two clearly work synergistically to explain the export performance of B2B suppliers. The following sections will present each theory and explore how they can be integrated and extended to incorporate international strategic brand management as a key parameter in a B2B firms international trade.

3.2.1 The Resource Based Theory (RBT)

The RBT offers an important framework for explaining and predicting the basis of an entire organisation's competitive advantage and performance (Penrose 1959; Makadok 2001; Barney et al. 2011; Kozlenkova et. al 2014). The use of RBT in marketing research has increased by more than 500% in the past decade (Kozlenkova et. al 2014) which indicates its growing significance as a framework for explaining and predicting competitive advantage and performance outcomes. Peteraf and Barney (2003) state that a firm achieves a competitive advantage when it is able to generate “more economic value than the marginal (breakeven) competitor in its product market”. It is widely accepted in the extant literature for its application in studies concerning international marketing (e.g. Homburg & Bucerius, 2005; Gao et. al. 2006; Kaleka, 2011) and subsequently the important role of internal determinants of export performance (Zou et. al. 2003, Hughes et al. 2010). In summary, RBT characterises a firm as a collection of heterogeneous physical and human resources and capabilities. This heterogeneity in a company's capabilities and how they are utilised to exploit available resources explains variations in firm performance (Makadok 2001; Barney & Hesterly 2012) with rare, valuable, inimitable and unreplaceable resources considered most beneficial (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991). Superior performance relative to other

firms in the same market is then possible through the acquisition and/or development of unique capabilities (Dhanaraj & Beamish 2003). Capabilities must be both hard to imitate and impossible to substitute, otherwise competitive advantage could be competed away over time Barney (1991). Therefore, the RBT typifies firms as idiosyncratic bundles of resources and capabilities that are available for deployment by the firm's business units (Morgan et. al. 2004).

Kozlenkova et al. (2014) provide a comprehensive review of RBT by compiling and synthesising previous marketing literature; their findings suggest there are different perspectives of RBT. One important perspective is grounded in market based resources, such as building brands, relationships and knowledge, which regularly differ from resource based studies in non-marketing contexts. This market-based resource perspective advocates that marketing research should increase focus on intangible, complementary resources, whose effects on the firm's Sustained Competitive Advantage (SCA) and performance may be greater than the effects of tangible resources (Srivastava et al. 1998). This is supported by the fact that up to 70% of a firm's market value can be from its intangible resources (Capraro & Srivastava 1997), and organisational performance is increasingly tied to intangible resources, such as customer relationships or brand equity (Lusch & Harvey 1994). There is evidence to suggest that the potential for benefits to firms is greatest when externally focused, market-based resources and capabilities are accompanied by internal resources (Moorman and Slotegraaf 1999), which is in agreement with the argument that to "exploit" outside-in capabilities, "there has to be a match" with inside-out capabilities (Day, 1994).

3.2.2 Structure-Conduct-Performance Paradigm (SCP)

The Structure-Conduct-Performance framework standpoint has been used to examine antecedents of export performance in a number of well cited studies (e.g. Aaby & Slater, 1989; Cavusgil & Zou 1994). According to the SCP, companies are reliant on their environments for resources (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) and try to manage this dependence by developing and maintaining appropriate capabilities which enable the development and implementation of appropriate strategies (c.f. Hofer and Schendel 1978; Donaldson, 2001). Clegg & Lardy (1999) assert that factors such as strategy, size and task uncertainty are organisational characteristics which reflect the influence of the environment in which the company is located. The SCP paradigm theorises there are principally two fundamental sets of antecedents that determine firm performance (Morgan et al. 2004). Firstly, the structural characteristics of the firm's markets that establish the competitive intensity that the firm faces. In the context of international marketing, competitive intensity relates to the extent competitors in target overseas markets have the ability and are prepared to respond to the actions of the firm's international marketing efforts (e.g. Porter, 1980; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993), subsequently high competitive intensity will mitigate the positive effects of strong branding efforts. The second antecedent involves the firm's successful execution of a planned competitive strategy co-alignment with the external environment to accomplish and preserve positional advantages (Porter, 1980; 1985; Venkatraman & Prescott, 1990). This perspective views positional advantage as the comparative superiority of the firm's international value offerings to buyers in the target foreign market and the cost of providing this attained value (Day & Wensley 1988; Porter 1985). This view downplays the prominence of factors distinctive to the firm, consequently resources and capabilities are seen to have a static position and do not play a decisive role in the firm's strategic choice

(Tirole, 1988). Effective exporters react to environmental conditions by evolving marketing strategies that create a cohesive link between the firm and the external environment (Samiee & Roth, 1992; Zou & Cavusgil, 2002). Accordingly, robust international strategic brand management can play a central role in alleviating the changeable effects from the external environment.

3.3 Advancing the RBT & SCP Framework: Addressing the Contribution of Strategic Brand Management in the Performance of B2B Exporters: A suggested Conceptualisation

Conceptualisation is a process of abstract thinking involving the mental representation of an idea, therefore, conceptual thinking is the process of understanding a situation or problem abstractly by identifying patterns or connections and key underlying properties (MacInnis, 2011). Zou & Cavusgil (2002) provide an early example of successfully incorporating both the competing approaches of RBT and SCP into their broad conceptualisation of international marketing strategy and its effect on firm's performance. Morgan et al. (2004) proposed a more dynamic view of business performance as a process, with identifiable stages and links between them. They then synthesised the two opposing approaches of RBT and SCP into one theoretical model of the antecedents of export performance. It is necessary to conceptualise a theoretical model regarding an integrative theory of export performance at the same level as the RBT and SCP theories on which it draws (Morgan et al. 2004). Evaluating relationships at this level of analysis allows for variables within the model to be treated as higher order constructs (Matsuno & Mentzer, 2000; Zou & Cavusgil, 2002). Therefore, it necessitates relevant dimensions of the constructs in the model suggested to be identified (e.g. Bagozzi, 1994).

Taking account of previous models, this study has extended their reach to include both the RBT and SCP approaches but also significantly firmly places strategic brand management as the deterministic factor on international firm performance. Therefore, this study allows for knowledge advancement by not only studying and developing previous constructs but also by conceptualising their theoretical relationship to other concepts (MacInnis, 2011). Although the strategic brand management construct has been previously assessed in terms of customer performance leading to firm performance (Santos-Vijande et al. 2013), it has not been examined in terms of direct effect on a firm's performance and, crucially, it has not been evaluated in terms of the international domain. MacInnis (2011) identifies the importance of conceptual developments within domains: "conceptual advances at the domain level are critical to marketing academics and practitioners, they contribute to a field's vitality by opening new and unexplored areas of study".

3.3.1 Conceptual Framework Summary

Fig. 3.2 displays the conceptual framework which has been developed for this study and will be referred to for the succeeding discussions. By integrating RBT and SCP projections in a conceptual model of international marketing performance, the central concept of the model (Fig. 3.2) is that B2B firms conducting international marketing activities can achieve positional advantages in foreign markets and, subsequently superior performance by employing suitable financial resources and higher order capabilities whilst pursuing the appropriate strategic management of their brand overseas. It is also theorised that external environmental conditions (macro and micro) and competitive intensity in foreign markets directly affects a firm's advantage gained through superior international strategic brand management and subsequent performance outcomes.

In addition, it is theorised that the effects of Country of Origin (COO) will decidedly moderate the positive effect of superior brand management on performance outcomes.

In brief, the conceptual framework (Fig 3.2) comprises of five sets of factors: (1) Internal environment antecedents including higher order marketing and branding capabilities which foster or diminish strategic brand management; (2) External environment antecedents including macro and micro stimuli, and competitive intensity which represent the SCP influence on the framework; (3) International strategic brand management which can both promote or deter international firm performance; (4) International firm performance which can be determined using different measures; (5) Moderating variable COO that can strengthen or weaken the inter-relationships within the model, specifically how COO influences the effects of strategic brand management on international firm performance.

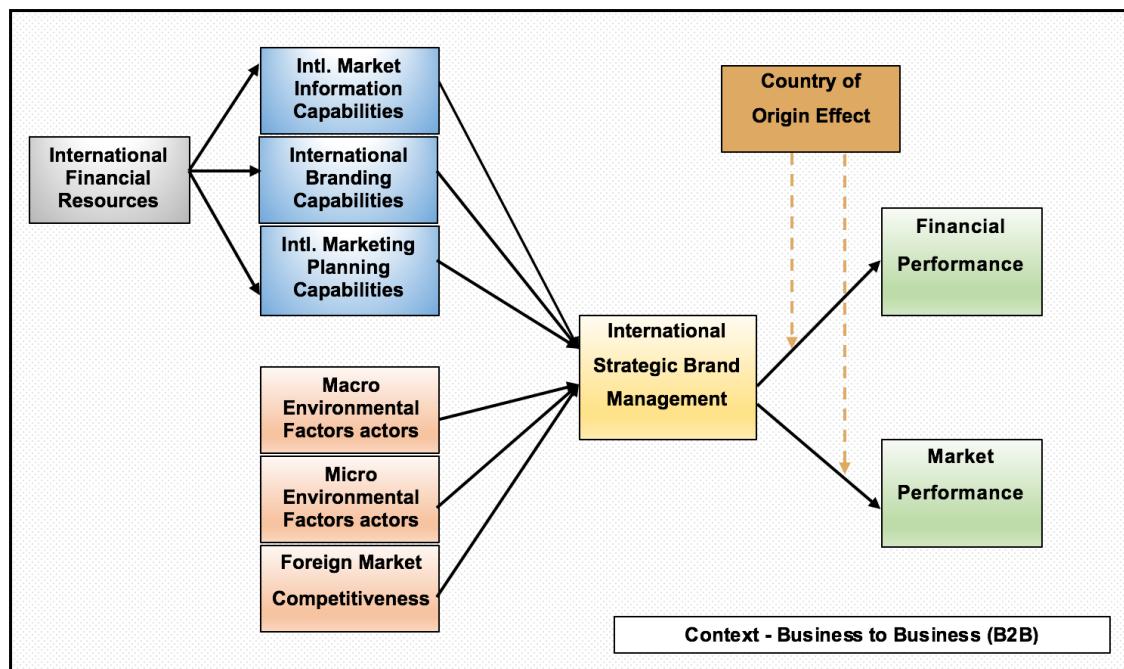


Figure 3.2. Conceptual Framework

Given that a review of the literature revealed empirical studies on the role of strategic brand management as a deterministic factor in a firm's international performance are lacking and absent within the B2B domain, it is therefore necessary to evaluate the appropriate measurement variables. The following section will provide some reasoning and the rationale for each of the variables to be examined through the first stage of empirical data collection within this study; namely, a set of qualitative interviews. These interviews will first examine relevant variables used in previous studies and produce a preliminary picture of the interrelationships between the variables presented within the conceptual framework ahead of empirically testing the model.

3.4 Rationale for Measurement Variables Selection

Though there have been previous studies identifying antecedents and effects of superior branding capabilities or investigating antecedents and effects of superior strategic brand management, there are very few that have looked at these areas specifically in a B2B context and there has yet to be a study that includes both of these important concepts.

Scholars have suggested that international branding literature remains relatively light and insubstantial, especially given most studies have looked only at consumers (B2C) and have been silent when it comes to a firm's strategy and competitive reaction (Ozsomer et al. 2012). This is despite the fact there has been a surge in studies addressing various facets of B2B branding (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011) and recognition of the importance of strategic brand management as central to firms' marketing activities (Keller, 2013). Having briefly overviewed the most influential studies in the area of international branding, it can be concluded that the extant literature acknowledges the role of financial resources and various capabilities as antecedents of different international branding undertakings. Further, several

international firm performance antecedents include branding advantage, brand performance, international marketing strategy, brand positioning, brand orientation and aspects of brand management. Yet, the international branding literature still remains somewhat underdeveloped with regard to how various capabilities interact with strategic brand management processes and how these processes affect international firm performance (Merrilees et al. 2013). The following section provides justification for the inclusion of specific variables from previous models that are both relevant and appropriate for this research.

3.4.1 International Financial Resources

A firm's resources can be defined as "tangible and intangible assets firms use to conceive of and implement its strategies" (Barney & Arik, 2001). The strategic process of internationalisation requires access to considerable financial resources and thus, financial resources are a key prerequisite. (Wright et. al. 2007; Banno et. al. 2014). The availability of financial resources has long been accepted to be a crucial requirement for successful exporting activity in targeted international markets (Ling-Yee & Ogunmokun, 2001; Morgan et. al. 2006; Spyropoulou et al. 2011); financial resources explain the capital available for a firm to develop export markets (Gomez-Mejia, 1988; Freeman et. al. 2012). Good international B2B brands need to be created and their formation is a complex practice involving a wide range of activities on behalf of the brand. For example, market research, planning, positioning and effective management that are predicted to lead to positive attitudes and perceptions towards the functional attributes of the brand (c.f. Aaker, 2004; Wong & Merrilees, 2007, Kuhn et. al. 2008). Owing to the substantial working capital and financial requirements of these activities the establishment and subsequent management of a solid international brand in any context is an expensive process (c.f. Boulding et. al, 1994;

Spyropoulou et al. 2011; Keller, 2013). For example, from a margin growth perspective, constructing and utilising the capabilities necessary to create, manage and leverage high levels of brand awareness and, positive, strong and unique brand associations in the minds of target buyers is expensive (Keller, 2003; Morgan et. al. 2009).

Consequently, a B2B supplier considering initiating or expanding their exporting activities, need substantial financial resources because there are fewer customers for B2B transactions and there is an emphasis on longer partnerships. Therefore, the decision by a business customer to make a purchase based on the supplier's brand can be vital for the enduring financial stability of the B2B supplier (Glynn, 2012). Specifically, international financial resources are: level of current financial resources available, access to capital, speed of acquiring and deploying financial resources, size of financial resources devoted to exporting activities and the ability to access additional financial resources when needed (Spyropoulou et. al 2011).

3.4.2 International Capabilities

An underdeveloped area of international branding research is the effect of differing marketing capabilities on branding and subsequently performance (Spyropoulou et al. 2011). Before progressing, a definition of what is meant by a capability is appropriate, a capability is defined as “a subset of resources, which represent an organisationally embedded non-transferable firm-specific resource whose purpose is to improve the productivity of the other resources possessed by the firm” (Makadok, 2001). Marketing capability is defined as “the integrative process, in which a firm uses its tangible and intangible resources to understand complex buyer needs, achieve product differentiation relative to competition, and achieve superior brand equity” (Day, 1994). A firm's marketing

capabilities are a vital element within the overall branding strategy (Madhavaram et al. 2005).

The extant literature demonstrates a high degree of consensus that a firm's resources and capabilities are key drivers of export performance (Prasad et al. 2001; Kaleka, 2002; Morgan et. al. 2003, 2004; Sousa et al. 2008; Spyropoulou et al. 2011) and a meta-analysis published in the Journal of Marketing in 2009 firmly established the important link between marketing capabilities and performance (Krasnikov & Jayachandran, 2009). However, the extant body of the literature lacks empirical studies that put any emphasis on the capabilities-branding link within an international B2B context (Zhang et. al. 2015). Indeed, the review of literature reveals only a handful of studies attempting to link B2B capabilities and branding (cf. Beverland et. al. 2007; Merrilees et. al. 2011),

Capabilities can be considered at different levels of the firm, many crossing different functional areas (e.g. Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000). Capabilities in relation to the utilisation of market resources are usually connected with the marketing function (e.g. Danneels, 2007). A number of studies have divided the contribution of marketing capabilities into two inter-linked approaches. One approach views marketing capabilities concerning individual marketing mix activities (4P's) elements, market management and market research (Vorhies & Morgan, 2005). A limitation of this stream is that it excludes any assessment of higher level integrative capabilities such as branding, innovation and customer relationship management (Merrilees et al. 2011), however, Hooley et al. (2005) did provide an assessment of several higher-level capabilities, including branding, innovation and customer relationship management.

Prior studies have looked at various different types of marketing capabilities as antecedents of many different outcomes, for example, antecedents to pricing strategies and their subsequent effect on performance (Myres et al. 2002) and antecedents to product strategies and their subsequent effect on performance (Hultman et al. 2009). The link between marketing capabilities and sustainable competitive advantage has been investigated (Vorhies & Morgan, 2005) and the link between marketing capabilities and firm performance supported (Morgan et al. 2009b), however, this was not in an international context and did not differentiate between B2B and B2C, further, little attention has been devoted to the influence of marketing capabilities on the strategic management of brands in any context.

The conceptual framework for this study progresses previous models and through marketing planning capability (strategy formulation) to market information capabilities (strategic market intelligence) and brand capabilities to strategic brand management. This framework follows prior conceptualisations of levels of marketing processes (Webster, 1992) and incorporates the conceptualisation of capabilities at both the strategy and tactical level in the hierarchy (Day, 1994), recognising the contribution of strategic brand management to B2B firm's international performance. With this approach, action can be seen to be focused on international firm capabilities such as marketing planning, branding and market information within B2B firms.

3.4.2.1 International Market Information Capabilities

Possessing capabilities in relation to marketing information processes are likely to positively influence strategic considerations for firms exporting and informational capabilities are the strongest drivers of shifts towards forms of differentiation in firm's competitive strategies

in export markets (Kaleka & Morgan, 2017), therefore it can be predicted that these capabilities will act as a strong antecedent to a firm's strategic brand management. This is regardless of whether firms wish to emphasise branding activities that accentuate differentiation of their products and services, or cost efficiencies which their brand can provide through the quality of their offering (Reimann et al. 2010; Vorhies et al. 2009). Through an understanding of what overseas B2B customers want and what competitors can offer and actually currently provide, the exporting firm can make adjustments to the amount of effort that is placed on efficiency-enhancing processes and differentiated marketing activities (Murray et al. 2011; Zhou et al. 2012), specifically how they strategically proceed with the management of their brand in foreign markets.

Morgan et al. (2009) provide a slightly different definition for marketing information capabilities, instead calling the capability 'market-sensing capabilities'; however, the items contained within the measure are closely related to items from previous measures (Vorhies et al. 2005). These include learning about customer needs and requirements, discovering competitor's strategies and tactics, gaining insights about the channel, identifying and understanding market trends and finally learning about the broad market environment (Morgan et al. 2009). They surmise that stronger market information/sensing capabilities allow a firm to identify underserved segments of the international marketplace and those markets whereby competitor's offerings may not be fulfilling customer requirements. For example, if quality is an issue in a given market then a B2B brand which embodies quality could use this market information to contend for a stronger position or initiate orders if it was a new market.

3.4.2.2 International Branding Capabilities

Branding is a higher-level marketing capability (Merrilees et. al. 2011) that is posited as an antecedent to superior strategic brand management. The importance of B2B branding has been discussed in the review of the literature, many scholars now agree on the benefits branding can also have in the B2B domain (Mudambi, 2002; Beverland et al. 2007; Leek & Christodoulides; Lilien & Grewal, 2012) The effect of brand capability development on brand performance has been considered by various scholars (e.g. Morgan et al. 2009; Merrilees et al. 2011; Odoom et al. 2017). There have been several studies within the international branding literature to compare performance between local and non-local brands (Steenkamp et al. 2003; Kumar et al. 2009), there has also been some exploration of the influence of brand concept-image on brand performance (Roth, 1995). Morgan et. al. (2009) investigated brand management capabilities alongside other capabilities in terms of potential links to a firm's profit growth. Other studies have looked at brand capabilities as a separate area to the way that those capabilities are then managed (Merrilees et. all 2009; Santos-Vijande et al. 2013).

Yet an all-encompassing evaluation of the relationships between key marketing and brand capability development and strategic brand management leading to enhanced firm performance has yet to be conducted. Further, not all studies have been specifically within a B2B domain and this presents the possibility that previous studies have utilised variables for measuring branding capabilities which are not specific to B2B markets. A thorough review of the literature has found that a potentially overlooked essential element within B2B branding capabilities is the ability for B2B brands to reduce uncertainty associated with the purchase making decision (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011; Lilien & Grewal, 2012), to the

authors knowledge this has not been included within any previous branding measurement variables

3.4.2.3 International Marketing Planning Capabilities

Marketing planning capabilities reflect a firm's ability to create and decide upon the optimal strategy among alternative courses of appropriate marketing and branding actions (e.g. Slotegraaf & Dickson, 2004). Planning is recognised to be an effective tool in dealing with the uncertainty created by frequent and quick changes in the environment (Gray & Mabey, 2005) which can be prevalent within the field of international marketing. Marketing planning capabilities also include the capacity to segment markets (e.g. Vorhies & Morgan, 2003) the identification of attractive markets to target, and appealing value propositions that will enable the firm to achieve its strategic objectives (e.g. Narver & Slater, 1990). Marketing planning capabilities encompass the firm's ability to envisage marketing strategies that elevate the linkage between a firm's resources and its marketplace (Morgan et al. 2003). Importantly, the link between marketing planning and strategic brand management in any domain has been an overlooked issue. Exporting firms demonstrating greater marketing planning will understand that investment is required (financial resources) in developing and managing their distinctive brand offering in overseas markets. Strategic brand management is a form of competitive strategy, competitive strategies are planned patterns of capability deployments that support options about how the international firm will compete for its target buyers and achieve its desired goals (Murray et al. 2011)

Firms which can demonstrate greater planning will have a better understanding of the investment and financial resources required to develop their marketing and branding capabilities. Therefore, enabling them to outperform international competitors by serving

overseas markets more effectively (Weerawardena & O'Cass, 2004; O'Cass et al. 2012). As such, this study contends that robust marketing planning capabilities will deliver firms a prerequisite co-aligned capability, suitably aligned to their strategic brand management in foreign markets.

3.4.3 Macro Environmental Stimuli - Enabling Conditions

The macro environment offers an accepted context to consider factors that could affect strategic export marketing outcomes (e.g. Zeriti et al. 2014). Therefore, investigating the influence of macro environmental stimuli on B2B firms' international strategic brand management is a suitable context for this study. A brand might be managed to respond to the uniqueness and special characteristics of foreign markets (Wong & Merrilees, 2007); the way brand is positioned and managed becomes critical in the international context. International brands need to take account of the macro-marketing environment, political, socio-economic and cultural environments in different foreign markets considered (Ganesh & Oakenfull, 1999).

The role of government interests in stimulating exporting trade has been widely reported (Mullen, 1993), with the main viewpoint being the nature and antecedents of export promotional policy and the subsequent effects on trade expansion (Kumcu et al. 1995; Singer & Czinkota, 1994), most countries use loans, subsidies or training programs to support export activities and domestic industries (Kotabe & Helsen, 2011). However, despite the policy interest that government agencies have in outward orientated export trade strategies, firms might still be subject to exporting issues attributable to these agencies such as regulatory functions that can cause problems. The extant literature emphasises some of these constraints normally associated with: unfamiliarity with government export assistance

(Albaum, 1983); lack of government incentives (Sharkey et al. 1989); bureaucratic government mechanisms for export trade (Schlegelmilch & Crook, 1988); protectionist policies of export market governments (Cateora, 2012); and, lack of awareness regarding government information sources on overseas markets (Bodur, 1986).

According to Cateora et al. (2012), a variation in exchange rates can either encourage or discourage exporting to different markets, an advantageous fluctuation of exchange rates could act as a stimulant and enable a B2B brand to strategically target and enter or grow a market due to the prospect of more favourable returns due to a change in value of a foreign markets currency. Other external enabling factors could include attractive profit and growth opportunities in new markets and the possession of unique products/provider of unique services which will be appropriate for serving the needs of new customers in export markets or strategically as an opportunity to increase the number of country markets which the firms brand operates (Katsikeas et al. 1996).

Along with macro environmental stimuli there is also micro environmental stimuli which should be considered, this will be discussed in the following section.

3.4.4 Micro Environmental Stimuli - Precipitating Conditions

The extant literature suggests that micro environmental stimuli within the domestic market influences a firm's involvement and commitment in exporting (Karafakioglu, 1986; Kaynak & Kothari, 1984). Additionally, a negative relationship has been found between the attractiveness of the domestic market and export growth (Madsen, 1989). For example, if the domestic market is becoming too competitive or saturated then this can provide stimulation to firms to expand their exporting activities and motivate them to seek to

establish a stronger long term competitive advantage in new markets by adopting a strategic approach to managing their brand (Matanda & Ewing, 2012). Therefore, precipitating conditions include: high degree of competition among domestic suppliers, need to reduce dependency on the domestic buyers, attractive opportunities to acquire new customers overseas, economies resulting from additional overseas orders (Kogut 1985. Cavusgil et al. 1993), further stimuli include production capacity availability and managerial beliefs about the importance of exporting (Katsikeas, 1996).

3.4.5 Foreign Market Competitiveness

A further important external environmental consideration is foreign market competitive intensity (i.e. the number of competitors/competitive moves in the overseas foreign market and the aggressiveness of the marketing tools they employ (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). Myers et al (2002) suggest a definition as the “degree to which competitors within the export market affect managerial decisions of the firm”. Competition is the most prominent and continuously examined component of the external environment within capability – performance theory since both capabilities and performance are typically assessed with competitors as the main reference point (Kaleka & Morgan, 2017). However, it is by monitoring competitive intensity that a prediction can be made as to how firms are expected to perform in foreign markets (Murray et al. 2011; Morgan et al. 2012; Kaleka & Morgan, 2017). For this study, the measures first put forward by Jaworski & Kohli, (1993) and adapted to be used in international markets by Morgan et al. (2012) were appropriate. These include whether competition is cut throat, if there are many promotion wars, is price a hallmark and whether new competitive moves occur regularly, the questions are set in the context of main export market. These measures are widely accepted and are used in previous

literature (c.f. Morgan et al. 2004; Vorhies & Morgan, 2005; Morgan et al. 2012; Leonidou et al. 2013; Kaleka & Morgan, 2017).

Within the B2B literature, Leek and Christodoulides (2012) include the competitive market situation as an environmental factor impacting internal elements within their B2B brand value framework, albeit this is not within an international setting. B2B branding may lead to barriers to entry for competitive moves by other companies (Michell et al. 2001; Leek & Christodoulides, 2011). Therefore, the strong management of an international brand could be expected to counteract some of the effects of a competitive overseas market but since B2B markets are characterised by factors including the high sophistication of buyers and highly complex markets (Mudambi, 2002), then higher levels of competitiveness in foreign markets will invariably be expected to influence the effectiveness of strategic brand management on a firm's performance. In highly competitive markets, there is a need for greater information and information management due to the level of uncertainty of product introductions, potential strategic directions to follow and customer relationship efforts of current suppliers' increases (Daft, Sormunen & Parks, 1988). Therefore, B2B firms may be expected to focus their strategic brand management efforts more on using their branding capabilities for risk reduction (Mudambi, 2002) and reducing the uncertainty involved within the purchase decision making process (Lilien & Grewal 2012).

3.4.6 Strategic Brand Management

Brand Management is argued to be a method that expedites the achievement of a brand's relevance in the market. (Vorhies et al. 2011). To enable brands to become a form of competitive advantage for B2B firms, managers must commit to strategically managing their brand(s) on the foundation of several key elements. Santos-Vijande et al. (2013) created a

brand management system and include the elements 1) significant investment by a firm to manage its brand 2) greater investment of resources in brand management than a firm's competitors 3) a well co-ordinated, multidisciplinary team to manage the firms brand 4) the development of all marketing actions in line with the desired brand image; 5) the management of the brand over the medium to long term perspective.

Brand management theories and practices have been an under-developed area in branding (Merrilees et al. 2013), particularly in terms of B2B and almost completely deficient in B2B international marketing. However, there has recently been a growth in interest in brand management. Some scholars regard brand management as a higher-level integrative marketing capability (e.g. Vorhies et al. 2005; Morgan et al. 2009b), however, among discussions by the leading academics in the field of strategic brand management it is not referred to as a capability (e.g. Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2007; Kapferer, 2012; Keller, 2013). For the purposes of this thesis, strategic brand management will not be referred to as a capability, however, the reasoning for considering it as higher order capability is not refuted.

The returns from a longer-term brand strategy are far higher than the associated costs to achieve it; three areas of the firm will be particularly impacted: financial, strategic and managerial (Shocker & Weitz, 1998). From the perspective of revenue growth, firms that demonstrate strong brand management can create and sustain awareness among existing and potential buyers and can differentiate their products and services in ways that lower their buyers perceived risk and search costs (Hulland et al. 2007). There is previous research to support the positive effects of brand management on some aspects of performance (Morgan et al. 2009b), however, there can be prohibitive costs involved in the building and managing of brands (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). Within their discussions about branding,

Kozlenkova et al. (2014), recommend future research efforts should also account for the cost of developing and maintaining antecedent resources and capabilities to provide a more comprehensive overview. This study aims to achieve this with an integrated framework incorporating antecedent resources and capabilities and antecedent external environmental influences linked to superior brand management. In addition, this study also aims to examine the influence of superior B2B strategic brand management on a wide range of international firm performance outcomes.

3.4.7 Firm Performance

A fundamental essential question within the marketing discipline is the effect that a firm's marketing activities has on explaining performance outcomes (Katsikeas et al. 2016). The ability to answer this question is crucial to explaining the consequence of conducting academic research (Reibstein et al. 2009) and ensuring marketers opinions are both heard and influential in firm level strategy (e.g. Peterson et al. 2009). This also applies to international marketing and a considerable number of studies have looked at different marketing determinants of export performance; Sousa et al. (2008) review of previous studies found there had been 40 determinants of export performance examined. Due to inconsistencies in measurements for reporting performance, the research into firm performance has been fragmented and inconclusive (Rust et al. 2004; Morgan, 2012; Katsikeas et al. 2016), this also applies to international marketing efforts (Sousa et al. 2008). Cavusgil and Zou (1994) found there was no uniform definition or agreement on exactly what constitutes export performance. It is unfortunate that this is still largely the case today; however, there has been a movement towards a consistent set of measures within the top tier publications and therefore these measures have been adopted for this study.

Previous studies focusing on branding, both within a domestic and international context, have generally focused on ‘brand performance’ instead of ‘firm performance’, though some studies have used measures of brand performance such as market share and profit (Ambler et al. 2002; Ehrenberg et al. 2004; Coleman et al. 2015), that also can be found as measures of firm performance within the international marketing literature. Research into the measurement of brand performance is also variable and inconsistent - it has been measured in many different ways and from numerous different viewpoints (Wong & Merrilees, 2007). Chabowski et al. (2013) reinforce this view and their bibliometric analysis of global branding literature concluded brand performance has taken a wide range of formats. Previous studies have denoted areas of brand performance ranging from brand equity, brand satisfaction, brand awareness, brand knowledge to market share and brand purchase likelihood (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Roth, 1995; Steenkamp et al. 2003, de Chernatony, 2004; Munoz & Kumar, 2004). In addition, brand performance has included employee measure such as satisfaction and loyalty (Coleman et al. 2015) and has concentrated on other consumer based performance, for example, brand relevance and product consideration (Erdem et al. 2006; Fischer et al. 2010). This study looks at B2B brand management within an international context, building on previous international marketing literature addressing different antecedents of export performance. Therefore, a key feature of this research is to investigate the direct effect of superior international B2B brand management on firm performance.

Given there have been variations in the measurement used for firm performance in previous international marketing studies, for this study the measures of performance chosen to be utilised are selected based on their use in widely accepted pivotal international marketing research that have been published in top tier journals. Table 3.1 shows the measures used

for this study and examples of where these measures have previously been employed and the subsequent publications. In each case the context of the question was relative to the performance of the firm's major competitors in their main export markets. Export performance measures are highly correlated both within and between economic (financial) and noneconomic (market) measures (Katsikeas et al. 2000). This study takes the approach that performance is multidimensional (Katsikeas et al. 2000; Hultman et al. 2011) and therefore export performance should be measured both in terms of financial and market performance.

Measures for this study	Measures used in previous international marketing studies		
	Morgan et al. (2012) Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	Morgan et al. (2009) Strategic Management Journal	Vorhies et al. (2005) Journal of Marketing
International Market Performance			
Market share growth	✓	✓	✓
Growth in sales revenue	✓	✓	✓
Acquiring new customers	✓	✓	✓
Increasing sales to existing customers	✓	✓	✓
International Financial Firm Performance			
Export profitability	✓	✓	✓
Return on investment (ROI)	✓	✓	✓
Export margins	✓	Return on sales (ROS)	Return on sales (ROS)
Reaching export financial goals	✓	✓	✓

Table 3.1 Export Performance Measures

3.4.7.1 Firm Financial Performance

Strong brands have become a vital part of the asset value of a company (Rosenbaum-Elliott et. al. 2011. p.90). Before 1980 when firms were acquired or merged, the price paid to the firm's earnings as a ratio was normally in the region of around eight to one; however, after 1980 multiples of twenty to one become accepted as standard (Aaker, 1991). The reason for this can be attributed to an increasing realisation that strong brands are important to a company's long term financial success and brands were progressively becoming viewed as one of a company's most important assets (Rosenbaum-Elliott et. al. 2011. p.90). The financial cost/benefit outcomes of the firm's performance in the target export market has been captured in metrics relating to profitability, margins, financial goals and return on investment (Morgan et. al. 2004; 2012)

3.4.7.2 Firm Market Performance

Firm market performance includes, the extent to which the firm achieves desirable market based goals such as high customer acquisition rates, increased market share and sales revenue growth in the target export marketplace (Morgan et al. 2012). Strong brands with a positive brand equity will have a loyal core of repeat customers and subsequently retain a high market share (Rosenbaum-Elliott et. al. 2011). Having high brand loyalty means firms can usually charge comparatively higher prices and maintain higher margins than international competitors (Rosenbaum-Elliott et. al. 2011). Therefore, even in situations whereby firms are not experiencing current high levels of financial success 'the brand is a potential source of future profits' (Kapferer, 2012), this for example could translate to increased sales to existing customers as they perceive the risk of larger orders reduce due to brand strength or acquiring new customers who have become aware of the international

brand as an alternative to their current domestic supplier. In addition, there are other ways a strong international brand can contribute to building and sustaining higher profits, for example a strong brand can act as a deterrent to new potential competitors from entering the market Rosenbaum-Elliott et. al. 2011.

3.4.8 Country of Origin Effect

A fundamental topic identified in international branding research emphasises brand/country origin (Chabowski et al. 2013). Verlegh & Steenkamp (1999) indicate that COO plays an essential role in pre-purchase attitude formation, customer perception of quality and performance, and crucially purchase intention. Buyers associate some nations expertise with producing certain types of products, for example French wine or Japanese electronics when assessing product quality and perceptions, especially when brand names are not well known (La et al. 2009). COO branding has been seen to be an early topic for discussion (Leclerc et al. 1994), with regards to conversations about the brand configuration of companies in international markets. This developed and highlighted the buyer perceptions of international and local brands (Batra et al. 2000), more recently, some scholars have concentrated on identifying an international brands origin (Samiee et al. 2005; Zhou et al. 2010). These developments show that examining the topic of brand and country of origin can be multifaceted at the local and international levels as companies increase their branding efforts in different countries. (Chabowski et al. 2013). COO origins lie within the B2C domain and thus there has been a lack of research specifically targeted at B2B (Veloutsou, 2010), however, recent studies suggest the effects of COO as advised by B2C studies also apply in a B2B context. La et al. (2009) developed and tested a model drawing from both RBT and contingency approaches to internationalisation, their focus was on how B2B clients perceived performance and value contingent upon COO as the critical moderator, albeit in

a service environment. They link a firm's resources to being able to present a positive perception in the eyes of international buyers but find that the perception of the firm and service provided is subject to COO. Therefore, it can be reasonably assumed a B2B firm's entire brand would also be subject to this COO perception. The use of COO has been linked to the positive contribution of secondary associations to brand equity and Abimbola (2001) suggests international firms should adopt the approach to develop strong brands that leverage secondary COO associations wherever possible.

3.5 Summary

This section has first examined the theoretical standpoints of Resource Based Theory and the Structure Conduct Performance theory. Following this was the development of an all-inclusive integrated framework that incorporates both distinctive theoretical views into one framework for this study. The conceptual framework is developed to provide a roadmap for this thesis and for future research in determining the best B2B international strategic brand management practices for export marketing managers. The rationale for the measurement variables have been justified and these key constructs address the inter-relationships between international strategic brand management and both internal and external forces.

By incorporating research into export performance within the study that identifies international strategic brand management as a key deterministic factor of export performance, this study argues that superior strategic brand management has a significant influence on the export performance of a B2B firm. In turn, selected internal and external variables are viewed as antecedents to the international strategic brand management policies adopted by the firm.

Therefore, this chapter has accomplished the following objective of this thesis:

Objective 1: Develop a comprehensive model founded on pertinent theoretical perspectives which incorporates external and internal environmental variables influencing strategic brand management practices affecting international firm performance in a B2B domain.

The following chapter will explain the philosophical foundations and provide justification for both the research methods and research design adopted for this thesis.

Chapter 4 – Research Philosophy, Methods and Design

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a comprehensive new conceptual framework, putting strategic brand management as a central factor leading to B2B firm's international performance. This was achieved by advancing previous theoretical models and providing rationale for each measurement variable suggested. This chapter introduces philosophical standpoints and the research design strategy adopted within this thesis. The methodology of a research endeavor describes 'the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods' (Crotty, 1998. p.3). The structure of this chapter is as follows: firstly, a section discussing philosophical research paradigms most commonly used and associated with the marketing discipline, the reasoning for the selection of a pragmatist approach is justified. Following this, the research objectives will be reiterated and discussed in terms of the most suitable data collection methods. The pragmatist approach is supported by a mixed method design and a sequential-exploratory design adopted (Creswell, 2014). Lastly, this section plans out the various phases of the research and discusses the analysis procedures employed.

4.2 Philosophy and Interpretation

Research practice is greatly influenced by philosophical ideas and ideology, these should be clearly identified within any research design (Creswell, 2009). The relationships amongst data and theory are the subject of intense deliberation and a 'failure to think through philosophical issues, while not necessarily fatal, can seriously affect the quality of management research' (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008, p. 56). Examining pertinent philosophical issues is an important stage in the research process. There are three reasons for this: 1) philosophical approaches are regularly closely connected to particular

research designs and can clarify potential methods; 2) an understanding on philosophy should clarify which designs will be successful and which not; 3) they may assist by suggesting designs and approaches which would otherwise have been outside past experience (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008). Therefore, by clarifying the philosophical viewpoints they adopt, researchers can justify these views in a clearer manner. Teddlie & Tashakkori (2009) advocate that a review of the differences between philosophical positions and individuals who subscribe to them is required to determine and support a philosophical stance.

4.2.1 Characterisation of the Paradigmatic Philosophical Assumptions within the Field of Marketing.

Before continuing further, it will be useful at this stage to clarify the meaning of the term paradigm. The term ‘paradigm’ became widely used and accepted amongst social scientists in particular through the work of Kuhn (Easterby- Smith et al. 2012. p.22). Kuhn asserts a paradigm is a set of connected assumptions about the world which are accepted by a community of scientists investigating that world (Kuhn, 1962). This is significant because the chosen paradigm guides the researcher in philosophical assumptions about the research, along with the selection of methods, tools, participants and instruments utilised in the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Others have called paradigms “worldviews” (Creswell, 2014. p.6), and defined them as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990. p.17), this thesis will mainly refer to paradigms unless otherwise stated.

“A mature science is governed by a single paradigm”, it is further accepted that most fields have a dominant paradigm and normal scientists must be uncritical of the paradigm within which they work (Chalmers, 2002. p.110). The reason being, it is only by accepting the

paradigm that they are able to put all their efforts into the in-depth articulation of the paradigm and thus to perform the esoteric work essential to probe nature extensively (Chalmers, 2002. p.110). This thesis acknowledges Chalmers position but will also be looking in the next section at flexibilities within the dominant paradigm. In terms of the “normal Scientist” to which Chalmers refers, Karl Popper states his view of the ‘normal’ scientist as Kuhn describes him, “is a person one ought to be sorry for” (Lakatos & Musgrave, 1970. p.52).

To get to the dominant paradigm in marketing it is worthwhile looking back a bit further in history to also understand why the dominant paradigm emerged. Bartels (1951) raised the issue of “Can Marketing be a Science?” while conducting early writing on the philosophy of marketing. Buzzell (1963, p.13) continued this questioning with “Is Marketing a Science” and provided heavily cited criteria for science as “a classified and systemised body of knowledge organised around one or more central theories and a number of general principles usually expressed in quantitative terms knowledge which permits the prediction and, under some circumstances, the control of events”.

Easton (2002) asserts that through the 1950s and 1960s, marketing, seeking to reinvent itself as both rigorous and consequently an acceptable discipline, changed from a discipline that was termed descriptive and qualitative in positioning to one that unequivocally advocated rigor and quantification. Hunt (1976. p.26) subsequently put forward a revision of these views in line with the narrower vision of logical empiricism which was accepted by many within the field as the appropriate paradigm. Passmore (1967) indicates logical empiricism is a synonymous expression for logical positivism.

Peter (1982) identified logical empiricism as the dominant philosophical approach in marketing, which has been adopted from economics and psychology both in terms of theory construction and research methods. In agreement with this prognosis Arndt stated "marketing has been dominated by the logical empiricist paradigm stressing rationality, objectivity, and measurement" (Arndt, 1985, p. 11). This dominance has in many ways been cemented over time as Hunt (1994) asserts "the dominant paradigm in marketing is positivism (logical positivism or logical empiricism), which implies the use of quantitative methods, the adoption of realism, the search for causality, and the assumption of determinism". More recently, Hanson & Grimmer (2007) published results from a study involving a content analysis of 1,195 articles published between 1993 and 2002 in three prominent marketing journals. The results showed the continuing dominance of quantitative research. In each of the three journals analysed, a large majority of over 70% of the research articles were quantitative, which was even taking account of an apparent increase in qualitative research over the earlier part of the sample period (1993 to 1999) which subsequently was found to have reversed in the most recent years. "Academic marketing thus remains dominated by the goal of making generalisable statements from an objectivist framework" (Hanson & Grimmer, 2007).

Philosophical assumptions which support the four major different worldviews/paradigms of social science are summarised in Table 4.1. The characterisation of the dominant paradigmatic assumptions for marketing can therefore be seen to be post positivism.

Postpositivism	Constructivism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Determination * Reductionism * Empirical observation and measurement * Theory verification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Understanding * Multiple participant meanings * Social and historical construction * Theory generation
Transformative	Pragmatism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Political * Power and justice orientated * Collaborative * Change-orientated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Consequences of actions * Problem-centered * Pluralistic * Real-world practice orientated

Table 4.1 Four Worldviews/Paradigms (Creswell, 2014)

4.2.2 Competing Paradigmatic Views

Theory generation is usually the outcome of a conceptual and qualitative process, while theory testing is more likely associated with empirical, quantitative hypotheses testing. While it may seem incomprehensible, hypotheses testing is regarded on the highest level of scientific excellence in social sciences, including academic work in marketing. (Gummesson, 2005). There are contrasting assumptions on the nature of reality (ontology) offered by different research paradigms, how we come to comprehend the reality (epistemology) and subsequently how we can methodically access knowledge about that reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). A hard positivist ontology asserts that an objective reality is available to be found and epistemologically this can be achieved with knowable degrees of certainty utilising objectively correct scientific methods (Carson et. al. 2001; Neuman, 2003). Constructivism is situated at the opposite end of the continuum. It has relativist ontology, whereby each person has his or her own reality (Long et. al. 2000; Neuman, 2003). Epistemologically, the attainment of objectivity is rejected and prominence is put on individual understanding of specific viewpoints (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Fig. 4.1 provides a network of basic assumptions from subjectivist to objectivist approaches to social sciences adapted by Anne Cunliffe from Morgan & Smircich's original typology.

	Subjectivist Approaches to Social Science			Objectivist Approaches to Social Science	
Core Ontological Assumptions	reality as a projection of human imagination	reality as a social construction	reality as a realm of symbolic discourse	reality as a contextual field of information	reality as a concrete process
Assumptions About Human nature	man as pure spirit, consciousness, being	man as a social constructor, the symbol creator	man as an actor, the symbol user	man as an information processor	man as an adapter man as a responder
Basic Epistemological Stance	to obtain phenomenological insight, revelation	to understand how social reality is created	to understand patterns of symbolic discourse	to map contexts	to study systems, process, change to construct a positivistic science
Some Favored Metaphors	transcendental	language game, accomplishment, text	theatre culture	cybernetic	organism machine
Research Methods	exploration of pure subjectivity	hermeneutics	symbolic analysis	contextual analysis of Gestation	historical analysis lab experiments, surveys

Fig 4.1. Network of Basic Assumptions Characterising the Subjective – Objective Debate within Social Science (Cunliffe, 2011) adapted from Morgan, G. & Smircich, L. (1980).

Central to the quantitative-qualitative debate in management research are the distinctive differences in the paradigmatic assumptions of interpretivism and functionalism (Shah & Corley, 2006). In brief, functionalism research aims to test and refine extant theory; the ontological assumption is that the world is objective and therefore it may be deductively evaluated (Andriopoulos & Slater 2013). Using this deductive type of approach, the researcher will typically focus on previous theory and develop hypothesis to test relationships (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008), this reasserts the positivist ontology previously discussed.

Conversely, interpretivism demands for a thorough interpretation grounded in those experiencing phenomena so that theory can be developed (Shah & Corley, 2006). A

qualitative style of research whereby there is a concentration on understanding and interpretation is, effectively but not exclusively, required for a wholly constructivist standpoint (Carson et al. 2001). This is a characteristically inductive standpoint which involves defining the research problem but with minimal or no theoretical framework to be based upon, instead, interviews or observations enable the researcher to probe respondents to expand upon expansive themes within a chosen subject area. Malhorta (2004) asserts that utilising an inductive approach, respondents are useful in explaining the nature of certain issues, allowing the researcher to develop their own theories (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008).

Thomas Kuhn (1970) was one of the first to highlight the notion of competing paradigms. Ensuing paradigm debates reveal how scholars with opposing viewpoints disagree about relative merits of their positions (Dann, Nash, & Pearce, 1988; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The debate between the paradigms centered around scholars on each side maintaining there were incompatibility issues (often referred to as the incompatibility thesis), making it unsuitable to mix quantitative and qualitative forms of research due to basic differences between the paradigms (Parasuraman, et al. 1988; Fay, 1999). These scholars basically consider research methods to be linked with particular research paradigms in a ‘one to one’ correspondence and if different paradigms are incompatible then the methods associated cannot be combined (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 15). In recent years this view has been challenged and an increasing number of scholars recognise that instead of being incompatible, these different paradigms can be used in conjunction to complement each other (Fay, 1999). Accordingly, a key premise of mixed methods has become that “the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone” (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011).

Contemporary work relating to paradigms proposes that boundaries are more fluid than originally described (Cunliffe, 2011). Respected psychologists Reichardt & Cook (1979, p.17) on writing about qualitative and quantitative based paradigms indicate the biggest distinction is quantitative methods have been developed for verifying or confirming theories whereas qualitative methods were purposively developed for the task of generating or discovering theories. As previously discussed, quantitative methods still dominate marketing research which would indicate most marketing scholars are far more involved in theory verification thus it could be surmised a bit of flexibility in terms of methods could lead to more marketing theory being generated. Bryman & Bell (2015, p.28) describe how mixed methods can be “fruitfully combined within a single project”. The use of multiple methods can generate outcomes that are more convincing than results from single methods alone (Stewart, 2009) since single method studies can restrict the scope of research and contain certain inherent biases (Deshpande, 1983). Although mixed methods origins can be seen to date back longer (Campbell & Fiske, 1959), it has only developed into a separate orientation over the last two decades (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 7). Incompatibility issues within mixed methods research are addressed by Brewer & Hunter (2006)

“The pragmatism of employing multiple research methods to study the same general problem by posing different specific questions has some pragmatic implications for social theory. Rather than being wedded to a particular theoretical style...and its most compatible method, one might instead combine methods that would encourage or even require integration of different theoretical perspectives to interpret the data”.

The advancement of an alternate perspective ‘Pragmatism’, enables researchers to counter incompatibility on a philosophical level (Creswell, 2009; Morgan, 2007; Teddlie &

Tashakkori, 2009). Pragmatism has been adopted as the perspective for this study, this will be discussed further in the proceeding sections.

4.2.3 Pragmatist View

Pragmatism stems from the work of Peirce, James, Mead and Dewey (Cherryholmes, 1992). American philosopher C.S. Pierce is often credited with the modern view of pragmatism (Morgan, 2007); he progressed the view that “beliefs are habits of acting rather than representations of reality” (Mautner, 2005. p.485). Another central figure in the development of pragmatism is William James. He developed previous views and stated “true belief was one which led to successful action” (Mautner, 2005. p.485), consequently leading a theory of truth as ‘what works’. John Dewey adopted a naturalistic Darwinian view of Pragmatism (Mautner, 2005) grounded in the view that disinterested truth was a contradiction and that there was no clear separation between the practical and the theoretical. James and Dewey both held the belief that traditional issues about philosophy were a consequence of dualisms (theory – practice) which were dated and had been taken for granted. Therefore, pragmatism is allied with the concept of effectiveness in practical application ‘what works out most effectively in practice’ and that this can serve as determination of truth (Honnerich, 2005. p.747).

The focus for a pragmatism philosophy arise out of actions, situations and consequences instead of just antecedent conditions as is the case in postpositivism (Creswell, 2014). There is a concern for ‘what works’ to get to the solutions to problems (Patton, 1990). The focus is less on methods and more placed on the research problem and the ability to use all approaches available to gain a better understanding of the problem (e.g. Rossman & Wilson, 1985). Authors including Morgan (2007), Patton (1990) and Tashakkori & Teddlie, (2010)

use pragmatism as a philosophical underpinning for mixed methods studies, and pragmatism is primarily viewed as the philosophical partner for the mixed methods approach (Denscombe, 2008). For those seeking to challenge ‘sterile and unproductive’ dualistic research philosophies largely concerned with ‘getting things right’ (Cherryholmes, 1992), pragmatism offers a search for common ground between the ‘old’ philosophies of research (Denscombe, 2008).

Based on the views of Cherryholmes (1992) and Morgan (2007); Creswell (2014), indicates pragmatism provides the following points as a philosophical basis for research:

- Pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality. This applies to mixed methods research in that inquirers draw liberally from quantitative and qualitative assumptions when they engage in their research.
- Individual researchers have a freedom of choice. In this way, researchers are free to choose the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best meet their needs and purposes.
- Pragmatists do not see the world as an absolute unity. In a similar way, mixed methods researchers look to many approaches for collecting and analysing data rather than subscribing to only one way (e.g. quantitative or qualitative).
- Truth is what works at the time. It is not based in a duality between reality independent of the mind or within the mind. Thus, in mixed methods research, investigators use both quantitative and qualitative data because they work to provide the best understanding of a research problem.
- The pragmatist researchers look to the ‘what’ and ‘how’ to research based on the intended consequences – where they want to go with it. Mixed methods researchers

need to establish a purpose for their mixing, a rationale for the reasons why quantitative and qualitative data need to be mixed in the first place.

- Pragmatists agree that research always occurs in social, historical, political, and other contexts. In this way, mixed method studies may include a postmodern turn, a theoretical lens that is reflective of social justice and political aims.
- Pragmatists have believed in an external world independent of the mind as well as that lodged in the mind. But they believe that we need to stop asking questions about reality and the laws of nature
- Thus, for the mixed methods researcher, pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis.

Findings are important to pragmatist researchers, they allow practical consequences of the research to be clarified and form the basis for organising future observations and experiences (Cherryholmes, 1992). It is vital that explicit knowledge is combined with tacit knowledge that lacks words and can only be established in action including experience, commonsense and intuition, to arrive at pragmatic wisdom (Baker & Saren, 2016. p.456). Since the role of the researcher is also important within pragmatic research, experiential understanding of the world is imperfect and subject to revision. Therefore, pragmatists do not pretend to have an answer to the question of whether research represents reality, instead they would ask if there was any way one could know; “pragmatic researchers are aware that by reading the world we are often reading ourselves” (Cherryholmes, 1992. p.14). A definition of pragmatism as a philosophical orientation is provided by Teddlie and Takahashi (2009): “A deconstructive paradigm that debunks concepts such as ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ and focuses instead on ‘what works’ as the truth regarding the research question under investigation”.

4.2.4 Paradigm Adopted for this Study

Following a review of the different philosophical viewpoints, the researcher believes that pragmatism should be the adopted research philosophy in order to suitably investigate and answer the research objectives. It has been suggested that where there is a scarcity of previous research then the researcher should adopt a flexible approach (Creswell, 2003) - this is relevant for this study since there has been a lack of research into B2B branding within an international context. With regards to how potential flexibilities may be incorporated into a methodological argument that is appropriate for this thesis, Sieber (1973) identifies three distinct areas whereby qualitative work can make a contribution to surveys; namely, survey design, data collection and analysis.

Firstly, according to Sieber, initial qualitative personal interviews conducted with a limited number of the sample subject populace could help with understanding the specific sample (for this thesis this equates to UK B2B international suppliers to overseas markets) that should be later included within the large-scale survey. In this study, the researcher will be required to become more subjectively personally familiar with an interviewee who represents the larger sample populace. According to Sieber, this familiarity can make a significant contribution to the development of a meaningful survey design. Qualitative fieldwork can also contribute to surveys in terms of data collection. Sieber specifies that exploratory interviews and qualitative observations preceding a large-scale survey can produce important data about the receptivity, frames of reference, and span of attention of respondents. Therefore, the survey instrument can then be expanded or lessened depending on how well the topics are received by the pre-test respondents. This could certainly be helpful when considering the large-scale survey and enable the researcher to focus on the most relevant resources, capabilities, strategic brand management, performance, COO and

competitive intensity questions. The third contribution that qualitative fieldwork can make to survey research is within data analysis. Sieber states that regularly statistical results from survey data analysis can be confirmed by recourse to qualitative observations and informant interviews.

To answer the research aim and objectives, this study advances a new conceptual model and then both investigates and tests the inter-relationships between the measurements variables. Therefore, it would have limited the researcher's ability to fully answer the research objectives and ultimate aim by utilising the marketing discipline's dominant positivistic paradigm and only quantitative methods. Instead, for this study, it is important to adopt a philosophy that accepts a mix of appropriate methods. A pragmatic stance offers the researcher:

An immediate and useful middle position, philosophically and methodologically; it offers a practical and outcome-oriented method of inquiry that is based on action and leads, iteratively, to further action and the elimination of doubt; and it offers a method for selecting methodological mixes that can help researchers better answer many of their research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17).

In order to gain a clear understanding of the inter-relationships between the variables within the newly developed conceptual framework it was crucial to conduct a set of qualitative in-depth interviews which will provide a primary evaluation of the structure of the research framework and offer a first validation of the critical branding measures that lead to superior B2B international firm performance. The next stage of the study requires a large scale survey to examine and test the measurement variables within the research framework. The

pragmatic philosophy allows the researcher to use methods that ‘work’ (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This study requires a mixed methods approach, thereby pragmatism offers thorough philosophical underpinnings. The findings from this study have practical implications for B2B firms seeking to initiate or expand their international activities, Goldkhul (2012. P. 7) asserts “one of the foundational ideas within pragmatism is that the meaning of an idea or a concept is the practical consequence of the idea or concept”; pragmatism focuses on the practical implications of the research (Creswell, 2007. p.23).

To provide a clear overview for comparison, a summary of the pragmatist perspective chosen for this study and the post-positivist and social constructivist views can be seen in Table 4.2. There are certain implications to deciding upon a pragmatist perspective, it is common for researchers that choose this perspective to utilise a mixed method approach to data collection. The following section will introduce the concept of mixed methods research and the research design to be used within this study.

Pragmatist World View	<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Pragmatism does not commit to one philosophy or perspective. Researchers engage with both qualitative and quantitative research.+ Researchers have freedom of choice, methods can be selected that best meet the needs of the study.+ Pragmatists do not see the world in absolute unity and look to a range of methods to make sense of the research problem.+ For pragmatists, truth is whatever works at the time and is not based on objective or subjective perspective.+ Pragmatist researchers are concerned with what and how to research.
	<p>For the mixed methods researcher, pragmatism opens</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">+ the door to multiple methods, worldviews and assumptions.

Post-Positivist World View	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Knowledge is conjectural. Post-positivists do not claim absolute truth. On this basis a researcher fails to reject a hypothesis rather than prove one. + Knowledge is shaped by data, evidence and rationality. + Post-positivistic claims are refined or abandoned and often involves theory testing. + Researchers seek to demonstrate causality or explain situations by testing the relationship between variables. + Objectivity is crucial – researchers must address issues of validity, reliability and bias.
Social Constructivist World View	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Social constructivists make sense of their surroundings according to their own social perspective and gather information through face to face interaction and by visiting research settings. + Meanings are phenomenologically constructed by individuals and explored through open ended questions. + Meaning generated from research is derived from social interaction and constructed through inductive approaches.

Table 4.2 Summary Comparison of Philosophical Views (based on Creswell, 2014).

4.3 Research Methods and Design

The research design is a central element of a research study, Dillon et al. (1994) suggest that the research design provides the ‘blue print’ of conducting research.

4.3.1 Mixed Methods

It would be useful at this point to provide a clear definition of both qualitative and quantitative research. Firstly, qualitative research can be defined as:

research which is undertaken using an unstructured research approach with a small number of carefully selected individuals to produce non-quantifiable insights into behaviour, motivations and attitudes. (Wilson, 2012. p.103)

In contrast, quantitative research can be defined as:

research which is undertaken using a structured research approach with a sample of the population to reproduce quantifiable insights into behavior, motivations and attitudes. (Wilson, 2012. p.130)

Alongside qualitative and quantitative researchers, mixed method researchers have become known as the third research community (Johnson, et al. 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), or ‘the third methodological movement’ (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The early beginnings of mixed methods are attributed by many researchers to Campbell and Fiske (1959). As cited by Creswell & Plano Clark (2007, p.5) and Johnson et al. (2007) they used multiple quantitative measures within a single study and referred to this as multi-method or multi-trait research. These numerical early stages served to establish that by juxtaposing the results of multiple methods, this allows for the identification of different facets of a phenomenon, this concept was later formalised by Webb et al. (1966) as ‘triangulation’, this is now established as an advantage of mixed methods (Wilson, 2012. p.147). Triangulation can increase validity when multiple findings either confirm or confound each other, therefore reducing the chances of inappropriate generalisations. A further argument for triangulation is that “all methods have inherent biases and limitations, so use of only one method to assess a given phenomenon will inevitably yield biased and limited results” (Greene et al. 1989, p.256). Therefore, triangulation is said to have a methodological advantage over single methods. Another scholar who progressed triangulation was Jick (1979, p.602), who viewed triangulation as a “vehicle for ‘cross-validation’ when two or more separate methods are found to be corresponding and produce data from which comparisons can be made. Researchers could then be more confident of results and drive the development of further inventive research approaches. At this time, other scholars also supported a multi-source approach to gathering data (Denzin, 1978).

Prior to the arrival of ‘mixed methods’, there were numerous studies that utilised multiple methods to realise the benefits of triangulation (e.g. Galton & Wilcocks, 1983) without confining themselves to any methodological category or paradigmatic membership (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). However, there was still an awareness of the issues at that time associated with producing results based on multiple types of data. Mixed methods are often considered as liberating since it is “welcoming all legitimate methodological traditions” (Greene 2005. p.207). Due to this, many theorists propose that pragmatism, or the ‘philosophy of free choice’, is the most appropriate epistemology for mixed methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003) With the further strength given by the adoption of pragmatism, mixed methods is considered to be a ‘third paradigm’ (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004, Johnson et al. 2007) in a trinity of otherwise incommensurable approaches. In recent years mixed methods approaches have expanded which has led to many dedicated books and journals advocating the approach (Bryman, 2007; Johnson et al. 2007; Morgan, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Creswell, 2009; 2011; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Morse, 2016). As stated by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie in support of mixed methods: “It is time that methodologists catch up with practicing researchers!” (2004. p.22).

A definition of mixed method studies is therefore provided as:

“studies that are products of the pragmatist paradigm and that combine the qualitative and quantitative approaches within different phases of the research process”. (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008, p.22).

This definition is similar to that given by Johnson et al. (2007) who synthesised the perspectives of 31 thought leaders to formalise the definition:

“mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration”.

This definition is nearly identical to that given by Creswell & Plano Clark (2007. p.5):

“Mixed methods is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies”.

So, unlike other paradigms, there is a consensus about what mixed methods is and how to define it. The central element of each definition provided above is the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches on one or more of the levels of epistemology, methodology and methods. “This rests on the logic that methods, methodologies and paradigms are strongly linked” (Symonds & Gorard, 2008). Creswell (2014. p.17.) notes that it is useful to consider the full range of possibilities of data collection and to organise these methods; for example, by their use of close ended versus open ended questions, their degree of premeditated nature and their focus on numeric and non-numeric data analysis.

Table 4.3 displays a summary of the forms of data collection, analysis and interpretation

available from qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches. Table 4.4 then illustrates some strengths and weaknesses of a mixed methods approach.

Quantitative Methods	Mixed Methods	Qualitative Methods
Pre-determined	Both pre-determined and emerging methods	Emerging methods
Instrument based questions	Both open and closed ended questions	Open-ended questions
Performance data, attitude data, observational data, and census data	Multiple forms of data drawing on all possibilities	Interview data, observational data, document data, and audio-visual data
Statistical analysis	Statistical and text analysis	Text and image analysis
Statistical interpretation	Across databases interpretation	Themes, patterns interpretation

Table 4.3 Different Methods for Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation. (Creswell, 2014. p.17).

Table 4.4 Strengths and Weaknesses of a Mixed Methods Approach (Creswell, 2003)

What are some strengths?

- Can be easy to describe and to report.
- Can be useful when unexpected results arise from a prior study.
- Can help generalise, to a degree, qualitative data.
- Helpful in designing and validating an instrument.
- Can position research in a transformative framework.

What are some weaknesses?

- Time required.
- Resolving discrepancies between different types of data.
- Some designs generate unequal evidence.
- Can be difficult to decide when to proceed in sequential designs.
- Little guidance on transformative methods.

The pragmatic, mixed methods approach to conducting research has a wide practical appeal and is suitable for this thesis. Since this study and subsequently the writing of this thesis was conducted over a number of years, the time constraint weaknesses identified in Table 4.4 of the approach are not a critical issue. The researcher was able to devote a significant amount of time to two data collection projects (qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey), thereby becoming familiar with each. The approach taken within this thesis is qualitative interviews (chapter 5) and a quantitative survey (chapter 6) which meet objectives and inform the overall research aim. The results and findings are all discussed in chapter 7. There have been around forty mixed methods designs reported in the literature (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Creswell (2009) identifies the most used designs, these six forms of mixed methods research designs are categorised under the two principle headings of sequential or concurrent designs. Table 4.5 provides a brief overview of each of these research designs, how they are typically characterised and the primary purpose of each.

Table 4.5 Six Mixed Methods Design Strategies (Creswell, 2003)

1. Sequential Explanatory

Characterised by: Collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by a collection and analysis of qualitative data.

Purpose: To use qualitative results to assist in explaining and interpreting the findings of a quantitative study.

2. Sequential Exploratory

Characterised by: An initial phase of qualitative data collection and analysis followed by a phase of quantitative data collection and analysis.

Purpose: To explore a phenomenon. This strategy may also be useful when developing and testing a new instrument

3. Sequential Transformative

Characterised by: Collection and analysis of either quantitative or qualitative data first. The results are integrated in the interpretation phase.

Purpose: To employ the methods that best serve a theoretical perspective.

4. Concurrent Triangulation

Characterised by: Two or more methods used to confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate findings within a study. Data collection is concurrent.

Purpose: Generally, both methods are used to overcome a weakness in using one method with the strengths of another.

5. Concurrent Nested

Characterised by: A nested approach that gives priority to one of the methods and guides the project, while another is embedded or “nested.”

Purpose: The purpose of the nested method is to address a different question than the dominant or to seek information from different levels.

6. Concurrent Transformative

Characterised by: The use of a theoretical perspective reflected in the purpose or research questions of the study to guide all methodological choices.

Purpose: To evaluate a theoretical perspective at different levels of analysis.

The sequential designs involve the use of one data collection, then following on from the analysis utilising a second data collection method, conversely concurrent designs involve the researcher simultaneously undertaking multiple research activities. According to Wilson (2012. p.147), a researcher may wish to employ interviews at an earlier exploratory stage in order to firmly grasp the key issues before using a survey to collect descriptive data, thus allowing the researcher to have the confidence they are addressing the most important issues. This is the case for this study whereby the research design is required to enable the initial interview stage to collect primary data which will support or differ the earlier conceptualisation ahead of continuing with the large-scale survey to test the inter-relationships within the model. The most appropriate design is therefore a sequential exploratory design to fit the requirements of this thesis. The following section introduces and discusses the chosen research design for this study.

4.3.2 Chosen Research Design

Sequential Exploratory Designs (SED) are very useful within the mixed method approach, fig 4.2 displays the key stages within this design. Conducting an exploratory sequential approach involves firstly a qualitative research stage to explore the views of participants (Creswell, 2014. p.16). The data is then analysed and information from the findings are built into a second quantitative data collection stage (Creswell, 2014. p.16). SED enables qualitative data based on smaller samples in stage 1 to be applied to a larger sample during stage 2 with the aim of stage 1, informing and assisting with the development of stage 2 (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

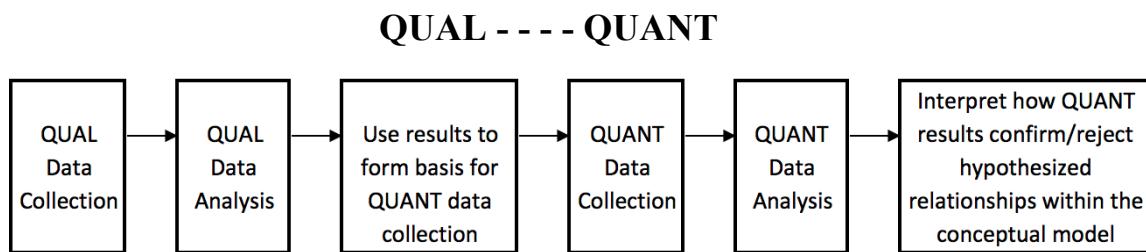


Fig 4.2 Sequential Exploratory Design, based on (Creswell, 2009. p.209; Creswell, 2013)

This type of exploratory research should be used:

- 1) Often an initial step in research and provides insights into the research problem
- 2) Enables an established research problem to be more closely defined
- 3) Gives a relatively speedy and economic way of acquiring an overview of the research problem and its relevant factors (inter-relationships)
- 4) Useful in developing hypothesis about specific markets; tends to use qualitative assessments rather than quantitative data
- 5) Makes full use of published data
- 6) Particularly valuable as a 'research filter' before further commitments are made to more extensive and expensive research activities.

(Chisnall, 2001) Exploratory Research

Table 4.6 provides a summary of the strengths and challenges of the SED approach; specific advantages include that the process is straightforward to implement, describe and report. It is beneficial for researchers who want to initially explore a phenomenon and then utilise qualitative findings (Creswell, 2009). A disadvantage or challenge to the SED approach is the substantial amount of time required, however, given the nature of the PhD and the timeframe of study this is not a cause for concern. SED designs can be used as a template and particular emphasis can be focused on the qualitative or quantitative stage dependent on the specific aim of the research.

Strengths
* Separate phases make the exploratory design straightforward to describe, implement, and report.
* Although designs typically emphasise the qualitative aspect, the inclusion of a quantitative component can make the approach more acceptable to quantitative-biased audiences.
* This design is useful when the need for a second, quantitative phases emerges based on what is learned from the initial qualitative phase.
* The researcher can produce a new instrument as one of the potential products of the research process.
Challenges
* The two-phase approach requires considerable time to implement, potentially including time to develop a new instrument. Researchers need to recognise this factor and build time into their study plan.
* Researchers should consider using a small purposeful sample in the first phase and a large sample of different participants in the second phase to avoid questions of bias in the quantitative strand.
* If an instrument is developed between phases, the researcher needs to decide which data from the qualitative phase to build the quantitative instrument and how to use these data to generate quantitative measures.
* Procedures should be undertaken to ensure that the scores developed on the instrument are valid and reliable.

Table 4.6 Strengths and Challenges of the Sequential Exploratory Design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.89).

For this study, the literature review and conceptual development first advance a new conceptual framework drawing from relevant previous studies and theoretical standpoints. The qualitative stage is aimed at exploring the inter-relationships within the framework and allowing for further development if new ideas emerge. Provided the inter-relationships have been established, the quantitative stage then sequentially builds on and follows the analysis of the qualitative findings and poses hypothesis to be verified thus empirically testing the emergent model.

4.4 Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Mixed methods data analysis is not very different from single methods approach. In the majority of mixed methods design's, each stage of the research process will be independently analysed using recognised techniques, then the data can be combined. (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). By using both qualitative and quantitative findings there is the opportunity to discover insights that couldn't otherwise be attained (Bryman, 2006), further and importantly, it should be apparent that the strengths of one approach can potentially supplement the weaknesses of the other and vice versa. Bryman (2006) conducted an extensive review of the reasons frequently given in both research articles and methodological writings for integrating qualitative and quantitative research. Table 4.7 presents the findings from this review.

a) Triangulation or greater validity – refers to the traditional view that quantitative and qualitative research might be combined to triangulate findings in order that they may be mutually corroborated. If the term was used as a synonym for integrating quantitative and qualitative research, it was not coded as triangulation.
b) Offset – refers to the suggestion that the research methods associated with both quantitative and qualitative research have their own strengths and weaknesses so that combining them allows the researcher to offset their weaknesses to draw on the strengths of both.

c) Completeness – refers to the notion that the researcher can bring together a more comprehensive account of the area of enquiry in which he or she is interested if both quantitative and qualitative research are employed.
d) Process – quantitative research provides an account of structures in social life but qualitative research provides sense of process.
e) Different research questions – this is the argument that quantitative and qualitative research can each answer different research questions but this item was coded only if authors explicitly stated that they were doing this.
f) Explanation – one is used to help explain findings generated by the other.
g) Unexpected results – refers to the suggestion that quantitative and qualitative research can be fruitfully combined when one generates surprising results that can be understood by employing the other.
h) Instrument development – refers to contexts in which qualitative research is employed to develop questionnaire and scale items – for example, so that better wording or more comprehensive closed answers can be generated.
i) Sampling – refers to situations in which one approach is used to facilitate the sampling of respondents or cases.
j) Credibility – refers to suggestions that employing both approaches enhance the integrity of findings.
k) Context – refers to cases in which the combination is rationalised in terms of qualitative research providing contextual understanding coupled with either generalisable, externally valid findings or broad relationships among variables uncovered through a survey.
l) Illustration – refers to the use of qualitative data to illustrate quantitative findings, often referred to as putting ‘meat on the bones’ of ‘dry’ quantitative findings.
m) Utility or improving the usefulness of findings – refers to a suggestion, which is more likely to be prominent among articles with an applied focus, that combining the two approaches will be more useful to practitioners and others.
n) Confirm and discover – this entails using qualitative data to generate hypotheses and using quantitative research to test them within a single project.
o) Diversity of views – this includes two slightly different rationales – namely, combining researchers’ and participants’ perspectives through quantitative and qualitative research respectively, and uncovering relationships between variables through quantitative research while also revealing meanings among research participants through qualitative research.
p) Enhancement or building upon quantitative/qualitative findings – this entails a reference to making more of or augmenting either quantitative or qualitative findings by gathering data using a qualitative or quantitative research approach.

Table 4.7 Reasons for Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Research (Bryman, 2006)

There are clearly many benefits from combining analysis from **QUAL** and **QUANT** research. Firstly, as Table 4.7 displays it allows for a) *data triangulation* with combined findings in order that they may be mutually corroborated. Another very relevant benefit of integration to this thesis is the notion c) *completeness*, i.e. the researcher can bring together a more comprehensive account of the area of enquiry in which he or she is interested if both quantitative and qualitative research are employed (Bryman, 2006) since they measure 'overlapping but distinct facets of the phenomenon under questions' (Caracelli & Greene, 1993, p.196). Also, relevant to this study is the notion of h) *instrument development*, by using a SED this allows the qualitative research employed to assist in the development of a questionnaire which can assess all variables within the conceptual framework and offers the potential addition of supplementary scale items. Within this thesis n) *confirm and discover* is also pertinent since the qualitative stage will explore the inter-relationships within the model and reinforce the creation of appropriate hypothesis to be tested within the quantitative stage. Finally, m) *utility or improving the usefulness of findings* is very important within this study as by combining the two approaches will allow for confirmation of links between variables within the framework, but also the qualitative stage will allow for more expansive commentary to explain links which will be useful for practitioners. As has been discussed, there are a number of relevant rationale for the integration of mixed methods within this thesis, though there are various reasons applicable from Table 4.7, broadly speaking, development and triangulation will strengthen the validity and credibility of the overall findings and ultimately lead to increased utility of the results.

4.4.1 Approaches to Analysis

Characteristically, sequential mixed data analysis happens when the different methodological elements of a study follow chronologically, so that the analysis of one stage

is supported by the previous stage, which can involve the development of hypothesis based on the initial qualitative research. Table 4.8 presents a straightforward linear strategy for collection and analysis of SED research. The researcher should principally:

1) Collect the qualitative data
2) Analyse the qualitative data qualitatively using analytic approaches best suited to the research question
3) Design the quantitative strand supported by the qualitative results
4) Develop and pilot test the new instrument
5) Collect the quantitative data
6) Analyse the quantitative data quantitatively using analytic approaches best suited to the quantitative, and mixed methods questions
7) Interpret how the connected results answer the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods questions.

Table 4.8 Strategy for Collection and Analysis of SED Research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p.219).

Within an SED there are three stages of analysis, first the Qualitative, then the Quantitative and where applicable, combined data. This enables the validation of themes from the qualitative stage to occur within the quantitative stage (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) and the development of the quantitative stage based on the qualitative findings. For this thesis, chapter 5 presents the qualitative research based on in-depth interviews with key informants to explore the conceptual framework presented in chapter 3. This is followed by the quantitative stage in chapter 6 which entails a large-scale survey in the form of an online questionnaire to firms that meet the study criteria. The data is analysed independently at each stage and findings presented at the end of each chapter. Chapter 7 consolidates findings from both stages of the research within the discussion section. Each stage of the research can cross inform the research objectives and therefore further triangulate findings.

It is important to take note of certain barriers to integrating quantitative and qualitative methods as discussed by Bryman (2007). According to Bryman a first issue occurs when researchers simply do not integrate the results in any way; for example, a quantitative stage may progress into an unrelated area from the proceeding qualitative stage. He goes on to discuss the issue of mixed method researchers becoming influenced by their potential audience and therefore either one set of data is highlighted or used more or less exclusively than initially intended. For this research both research methods are important but there will be further emphasis on testing the inter-relationships within the conceptual framework developed once these relationships have been explored and supported during the qualitative stage. A further potential barrier can emerge if the researcher has greater faith in one methodological approach over the other, this can be discounted as an issue for this thesis as the researcher has equal confidence in each method. Lastly, Bryman (2007) discusses potential issues with regards to skills specialisms, again this is not an issue for this thesis. The researcher has an industry background prior to returning to academia and while within industry had the opportunity to collect and analyse both qualitative and quantitative data.

The continuing chapters of this thesis are: Chapter 5 - addresses the qualitative stage, this includes the approach to the in-depth interviews which were semi-structured in nature, the population, sample frame and findings and analysis. Chapter 6 addresses the final objective, included within this quantitative stage is the development and testing of hypothesis consisting of a large-scale survey and analysis using structured equation modelling to test the model derived from the conceptual framework. Chapter 7 - provides an overarching discussion of the research, the theoretical contribution of the thesis, managerial implications, suggestions for future research, limitations and conclusions.

4.4.2 Ethical Issues to Anticipate

Researchers are required to anticipate ethical issues which may arise during their studies (Sieber, 1998; Berg, 2001; Punch, 2005; Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Wilson, 2012; Creswell, 2014). Research involves gathering data from people about people (Punch, 2005). Researchers must protect their research participants, develop a trust with them, promote the integrity of the research, guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organisations or institutions and cope with new challenging problems (Israel & Hay, 2006). Ethical issues in research require increased attention today, ethical considerations that need to be anticipated are extensive and are reflected through the research process (Creswell, 2014). These issues apply to qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research and to all phases of the research (Creswell, 2014).

Wilson, (2012, p.39) asserts that “marketing research ethics refers to the moral guidelines or principals that govern the conduct or behaviour in the marketing research industry”. Acknowledging that ethics is of particular importance in marketing research, Wilson (2012) justifies this because the industry is dependent on four key elements as displayed in Table 4.9.

Goodwill

The goodwill of the individual respondents for their willingness to volunteer information on their awareness, attitudes and behaviours. Any practice that erodes that goodwill makes future marketing research studies more difficult to undertake.

Trust

Marketing decision makers trust researchers to provide accurate information that has been collected in a professional manner. Researchers also trust decision makers to divulge all information that may have an impact on the completion of a marketing research study.

Professionalism

If respondents are to answer questionnaires in a serious and thoughtful manner, they have to feel that the research is going to be used in a professional manner.

Confidentiality

Respondents are more willing to express their views and opinions if they know that the information is going to be used in a confidential manner (in other words, taking part in marketing research will not result in the respondent becoming subject to sales calls, political lobbying or fundraising).

Table 4.9 Importance of Ethics in Marketing Research (Wilson 2012. p.39).

In B2B research, recently the nature of the relationship between clients, researchers and respondents has been seen to be evolving. Although survey anonymity has to remain a necessary right of any respondent for both ethical and data validity reasons, interestingly, there is however a trend in B2B customer research towards respondents choosing to forgo this (Malhotra & Birks, 2007, p.789). The size of B2B respondent populations can often be very small, for example, firms' supplying specialised products, so it is becoming even more important to treat respondents with care and not, for example, try to cram more than necessary into long interviews which could be irritating and put them off participating in future research studies (Malhotra & Birks, 2007. p.790).

The sample unit for this study is the “company” but, data will be collected from individual managers (marketing/exporting in the UK). Consequently, the ethos and fundamental principles underlying the data collection, use and dissemination could be a concern.

The University of Strathclyde, through the “University Ethics Committee” (UEC), maintains a high standard of ethical code of practice when it comes to primary data collection. Within the scope of this study, the major concern is “respondent’s anonymity” and non-disclosure of information in any way that could be traceable to the individual and/or company since the latter could jeopardise the position of the respondent in the company and the position of the company in its industry.

In accordance with the policies of UEC, a cover letter answering the key questions identified in the participant information sheet and consent form (e.g. why a specific company/manager has been invited to take part, what are the potential risks to the company/individual in taking part, proceeded both the qualitative and quantitative stages of data collection.

This section has given an overview of some ethical issues to anticipate and ethical considerations within B2B marketing research. The next chapter will now address the qualitative stage of the study.

Chapter 5 – Qualitative Research Stage

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapters have provided an extensive review of relevant literature in Chapter 2; a theoretical framework and conceptual developments in Chapter 3 and methodology and research design in Chapter 4. This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative stage of the study which addresses the need to investigate and explore the inter-relationships between the significant variables identified within the conceptual model

This chapter is designed to first discuss the methods taken and secondly report the findings of this qualitative stage of the research. The below quote from Morse (1991) provides a sound reasoning for this chapter, since the concept of B2B strategic brand management within an international setting is an “immature” underdeveloped concept which requires further exploration to assist with the creation of suitable research hypothesis before prescribing to quantitative research to test the inter-relationships within the conceptual model.

“Characteristics of a qualitative research problem are: (a) the concept is “immature” due to a conspicuous lack of theory and previous research; (b) a notion that the available theory may be inaccurate, inappropriate, incorrect, or biased; (c) a need exists to explore and describe the phenomena and to develop theory; or (d) the nature of the phenomena may not be suited to quantitative measures. (Morse (1991, p.120).

The benefit of the qualitative approach is the ability to represent the wider picture of the research problem, this perspective ensures consideration of all relevant constructs in the research design (Glynn & Woodside, 2009). Ideally, a report on a qualitative study should provide multiple quotes for each and every point made so there is proof to account for what

is being said (Pratt, 2009). By presenting multiple quotations for each point, it enhances the strength of points being made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Pratt (2009) acknowledges there is no standardised language or template for writing up qualitative research and determining quality.

Mason (2002) contends that the development of original theory is not always a necessary outcome for qualitative inquiry but pre-existing theories do drive the entire research enterprise, even if you are not aware of them. Given the lack of substantiate previous empirical work in this field, primary data collection was required in addition to secondary data to explore the theoretical perspectives presented in this study. In an effort to augment understanding in relation to drivers of export performance for B2B exporters to incorporate strategic brand management as a key antecedent of success, primary data was also necessary so that it could be utilised to confirm the characteristics of key international capabilities such as marketing planning, market information and branding in a B2B context. Therefore, qualitative fieldwork was conducted to formulate research hypothesis based on the emerging conceptual framework the precedent review of the literature suggests.

5.2 Interviews

The method of in-depth interviewing was used. Specifically, qualitative, “open-ended,” semi-structured interviews (Gillham 2000) with “key informants” (i.e. personnel with senior positions) in the participating companies, since typically senior people drive corporate brands (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). The in-depth qualitative analysis of international resources and branding capabilities in a B2B domain is useful for building theoretical propositions (Hollenstein, 2005), and subsequently constructing well defined hypothesis.

In depth-interviews are commonly employed when dealing with sensitive matters. There is a risk involved with this technique since the outcome of the data collection is subject to the ability of the interviewer to remain impartial (Aurini et al. 2016) and avoid introducing bias in the responses (Creswell, 2009; Holliday, 2016) while succeeding in relating and identifying with the interviewee so they can relax and discuss sensitive issues in confidence. This method is not capable of producing results which can be generalisable to reflect the population, however, it is an excellent way to offer the researcher an initial understanding that can be developed upon (Malhotra, 2010) by providing a primary evaluation of the relevant variables identified within the literature and therefore offers a first validation of the critical internal and external brand management antecedent factors affecting B2B export performance. Further, through the in-depth interviews, the researcher seeks to produce a preliminary picture of the structure and strength of the inter-relationships between the variables presented within the conceptual framework allowing for the parsimonious version (theory trimming) of the research framework to emerge (Heise, 1969).

The following sections will further discuss the method used and the pertinent population from which samples were drawn is described in more detail.

5.2.1 Participants and Population

According to Pratt (2009), “qualitative authors should discuss whether they are sampling people, events, cases and the like, and why they are being sampled”. The UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) do not differentiate between B2C and B2B businesses, they instead classify businesses according to the Standard Industrial Classification 2007, based on their main activity. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, companies were selected

primarily in terms of 1) meeting the eligibility requirements (detailed in the next sub section) and 2) representing key industrial characteristics in comparison with UK industries. This method of sampling ensured information collected was from a representative group of businesses. This stage of the study is exploratory so concerns on the ability of this sample to completely represent a broader, general population can be somewhat relaxed (Wilson, 2012).

5.2.2 Participant Eligibility and Sample Size

Prospective informants were initially approached by a postal invitation (see Appendix 1) and were pre-screened with general questions about their company and whether they would be willing to participate in an interview. Informants agreeing to participate signed a consent form on the day of the interview. General eligibility questions asked participants to confirm initial eligibility criteria: 1) they are a UK based company; 2) currently exporting goods/services to companies overseas in a B2B capacity; 3) they have not taken any breaks from exporting. The sampling process concluded at saturation as indicated by information redundancy. The qualitative sample consists of key decision makers in 34 UK exporting firms, in line with sample sizes recommended for this type of research (McCracken, 1988).

The field research consisted of in-depth interviews with a sample of 34 senior managers and directors of eligible B2B firms based in the UK and that export overseas. The companies and individuals were identified through a number of means: (1) B2B nominees or winners of the Business Quarterly Magazine (BQ) export awards 2014 & 2015; (2) B2B Members of the Borders export association (3) The FAME database. Companies identified were first inspected using set criteria which satisfies the study eligibility requirements. Of the 34 individuals, 15 held the position of Managing Director (MD), 6 held the position of Chief

Executive Officer (CEO), 4 held the position of Export Manager and the other 9 held similar relevant senior positions including, Chief Operating Officer (COO), Communications Director, Sales Director and Business Development Manager. This is displayed in Table 5.1. along with other pertinent information about both the key informants and the participating firms including industry, position in firm, duration held this position, firm size (both in terms of employees and turnover), number of years exporting, number of countries export to and the percentage of overall sales attributable to exporting.

Key for Table 5.1

Position	
COO	Chief Operating Officer
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
MD	Managing Director
EM	Export Manager
SMD	Sales/Marketing Director
BDM	Business Development Officer
CD	Commercial/Communications Director

Table 5.1. Characteristics of the Participating Firms and Interviewees

Respondent	Main Industry	Position in Firm	Held position (Years)	Employees	Turnover £ (million)	Years exporting	Number countries export	% overall sales export
R1	Metals	MD	15	100	7.5	20	23	65%
R2	Industrial Aerosols	EM	9.5	75	17.1	22	37	20%
R3	Auto Accessories	MD	10	3	0.5	10	30	70%
R4	Industrial Doors	MD	20	12	13	20	35	60%
R5	Manufacturing	CEO	2	170	25	20	6	10%
R6	Manufacturing	MD	4	42	4	17	25	27%
R7	Manufacturing	SMD	3	95	18	7	10	9%
R8	Textile	EM	10	140	24	55	60	85%
R9	Textile	MD	29	13	1	29	17	60%
R10	Textile	MD	7	27	1.5	50	10	35%
R11	Industrial carpets	MD	2	12	1.2	40	7	25%
R12	Beverage	CEO	2	3	0.2	2	6	30%
R13	Beverage	MD	7	24	5.5	20	45	85%
R14	Technology	CEO	9	67	6	7	47	97%
R15	Technology	MD	3	5	0.5	2.5	6	75%
R16	Technology	MD	2.5	18	0.5	3	8	60%
R17	Electronics	SMD	6	37	3	15	25	14%
R18	Electronics	MD	34	25	0.5	30	15	80%
R19	Oil & Gas	SMD	3.5	105	13.5	21	40	50%
R20	Oil & Gas	CEO	7	300	40.5	15	25	50%
R21	Oil & Gas	CEO	7	27	10	4	15	95%
R22	Packaging	BDM	2	7	0.25	1	2	90%
R23	Packaging	CD	6	55	10	6	35	10%
R24	Engineering	CD	2	200	35	60	68	30%
R25	Food	EM	2	8	0.13	1	5	5%
R26	Food	EM	5	250	24	19	20	10%
R27	Food	MD	20	140	15	20	18	6%
R28	Food	SMD	4	74	6.5	20	5	1%
R29	Paper	COO	6	25	30	12	48	100%
R30	Scientific	CEO	8	10	2	8	9	85%
R31	Plastics	MD	10	8	0.6	16	4	2%
R32	Medical device	MD	22	50	6.7	29	70	65%
R33	Wind Energy	SMD	3	17	5	5	8	90%
R34	Defence	MD	15	43	4	8	5	70%

5.2.3 Reflexivity / Bias

In recent years, qualitative researchers have become much more self-revealing about their qualitative writing (Creswell, 2007. p.178); there is a growing acceptance amongst these social scientists of the need to be reflexive about their own work (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008). Conversely, positivist researchers avoid self-disclosure since the admission of their personal motives and aims could be viewed as damaging to the appearance of objectivity and independence that they seek to cultivate (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008). Reflexivity essentially enforces the fact that researchers inhabit the world which they study and therefore this could potentially have an impact on the findings (Morgan, 2007), qualitative research today recognises the impact of the writing on the researcher, the participants and the reader (Creswell, 2007. p.179).

How each individual researcher writes, is a reflection of their own interpretation on the culture, gender, class, social and personal politics that they bring to the research (Creswell, 2007. p.179). Given that all writing is positioned and within a ‘stance’, all researchers structure the writing that emerges, and qualitative researchers must acknowledge this interpretation and be open about it within their writing (Creswell, 2007. P.179). Richardson (1994. p.518) writes about the fact that the best writing candidly acknowledges its own “undecideability”, that ‘all writing has subtexts that situate or position the material within a certain historical and locally specific time and place’. Taking account of this perspective, no writing ever has “privileged status” (Richardson, 1994, p.518). In fact, writings are co-constructions, representations of collaborative processes between researchers and the researched (Gilgun, 2005).

It is important when conducting qualitative research from a pragmatism point of view that the researcher is perceptive to who they are in relation to the study (Creswell, 2003). By acknowledging potential inherent bias, values, gender, history, personal background and culture can shape the subsequent interpretations within a study, represents an honest approach to the research process and concedes that in axiological terms interpretive research is value laden (Creswell, 2009). There are no specific issues with regard to bias in relation to the researcher to be reported within the qualitative interviews within this study. Though, a certain issue to discuss was the nature of the strategic brand management concept and how this would be discussed in each interview. As discussed in section three, part of this study was to advance a new conceptual framework and develop an understanding of the inter-relationships. To avoid interviewer bias from the preferment of the conceptual model and given the complexity of the theoretical standpoints which were combined to create the conceptualisation, it was decided by the researcher to discuss the individual dimensions of the model as themes, rather than the theoretical whole. The conceptualisation was consequently considered through the themes, which are discussed within the following data collection section, aspects of strategic brand management and the inter relationships between the model variables could then be extracted and interpreted during the analysis stage.

5.2.4 The Role of Interviewer

For semi-structured exploratory in-depth interviews, normally the aim is for the interviewee to actively participate within the interview, at times leading the direction rather than entirely following a question and answer format (McDaniel & Gates, 2010). Therefore, the interviewer's role incorporates the ability to be a facilitator, using the skills of prompting, probing and checking where required. Denscombe, (2007, p.192.) suggests the use of

prompts, probes and checks are vital tactics for interviews as is shown in Table 5.2. Given the qualitative nature of the interviews, the same potential prompts (see appendix 2) were not always required depending on the extent of the initial answers provided by the respondents.

Key Tactics for Interviews - prompts, probes and checks

Remain silent	(prompt)
Repeat the questions	(prompt)
Repeat the last few words spoken by the interviewee	(prompt)
Offer some examples	(prompt)
Ask for an example	(probe)
Ask for some clarification	(probe)
Ask for more details	(probe)
Summarise their thoughts ('So, if I understand you correctly.... What this means, then, is that.....')	(check)

Table 5.2 Tactics for Interviews – Prompts, Probes and Checks (Denscombe, 2007. p.192).

Efforts were made to take a non-judgmental stance in relation to the topic areas covered and unearthed within the interviews as advocated by Denscombe (2007). For example, one interviewee, a company founder/MD, when discussing their firm, launched into a narrative about how bad the independence referendum could have been for his business. It was clear the interviewee had strong personal political views that were being translated into his demonising narrative (Sims, 2005). In this particular case, the MD actually took it upon themselves to email the researcher another full page of criticising views about that one point in the week following the interview. Sims (2005) would attribute this to the MD having found the researcher as a suitable audience to appreciate the strength and clarity that they were showing. The researcher kept an impartial status throughout and didn't encourage or discourage their views on this matter, instead, thanking them for their contributions.

5.2.5 Data Collection

To ensure there was consistency within each interview in terms of structure and topic area prompts and terminology, an interview guide (protocol) was developed (Creswell, 2009). The protocol (see Appendix 2) included general headings and notes for the interviewer, and each topic area to be discussed and probed. A benefit to this approach is the researcher can devote considerable time to thinking through the key points within the protocol that warrant attention and subsequently will be well informed on potential issues which may arise during the interview (Denscombe, 2007. p.189). The schedule of each interview was set up in three phases as suggested by Wilson (2012. p.111) discussion guide, these phases were firstly the introduction phase, next, the discussive phase and finally, the summarising phases; these are expanded upon within Fig 5.1.

1. The Introduction Phase

The objectives of the session
Explanation of the nature of a group discussion
The general agenda of topics to be followed
Prompts for participants to introduce themselves

2. The Discussive Phase

General topic areas to be discussed
Potential prompts and stimulus material

3. The Summarising Phase

Prompts for summarising what has been discussed
Thanks to participants

Fig 5.1 Creation of Discussion Guide for Semi-Structured Interviews. (Wilson. 2012. p.111).

To address the requirements of objectives 2-5 (see below), it was necessary to first explore the inter-relationships between the variables within the previously developed conceptual framework and examine the existing measures available for the variables identified.

Objective 2: Uncover the impact of exporters resources and capabilities on international strategic brand management practices in a B2B context.

Objective 3: Clarify the impact of external environment factors on international strategic brand management practices in a B2B context.

Objective 4: Evaluate the extent to which successful UK B2B exporters benefit from improved international firm performance through effective strategic brand management practices

Objective 5: Investigate the significance attached to a B2B exporters country of origin as manifestation for achieving improved export performance through effective strategic brand management practices

The interview questions therefore needed to probe the different key elements of the framework and the potential linkages. General topic areas and leading questions were generated around particular dimensions of RBT, SCP, brand management, COO effect and export performance - these are displayed in Table 5.3. Using a narrative approach enabled the researcher to organise findings to create a coherent story to not only describe themes but also how those themes fit together (Spradley, 1979; Pratt, 2009).

Dimension		Source
Resource Based Theory (RBT)	Financial Resources	Spyropoulou et. al (2011)
	International Marketing Planning Capabilities	Vorhies & Morgan (2005) Morgan et al. (2012)
	International Branding Capabilities	Merrilees et. al (2011)
	International Market Information Management Capabilities	Vorhies & Morgan (2005)
Structure Conduct Performance (SCP)	Macro Environmental Stimuli - Enabling Conditions	Katsikeas et al. (1996)
	Micro Environmental Stimuli - Precipitating Conditions	Katsikeas et al. (1996)
	Foreign Market Competitiveness	Jaworski & Kohli (1993) Morgan et al. (2004)
Strategic Brand management	Strategic Brand Management	Santos-Vijande et. al (2013)
Export Performance	International Firm Financial Performance	Chen et al. (2011). La et al. 2009).
	International Firm Market Performance	Morgan et al. (2012)
Country of origin effect (COO)	Country of Origin Effect	Morgan et al. (2012)

Table 5.3 Dimensions for Interview Questions

Each dimension represented a general theme and suitable questions and further potential probes to be utilised were written up into the protocol.

A brief introduction and description of the research project was provided. The context of the questions was set for the past five years so the participants would be able to recall and discuss recent information and examples for their firm before proceeding with the main themes of the interview. Similar to the methodology used by Kohli & Jaworski (1990) & Mudambi (2002), the researcher was careful about the use of the word ‘branding’ in the

interviews when discussing the measures that comprise the constructs: international branding capabilities or international strategic brand management. Therefore, attempting to avoid potential misinterpretations that branding can often be confused as being a reductive concept involving mainly attributes such as logo and colour (Inskip, 2004), “branding is more than just a logo” (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2007). For example, one Managing Director articulated his feelings about what branding means to his company:

It is all about performance; we don't consider branding like the NIKE tick and stuff like that; our markets don't really require that kind of level of branding, our brand is based on high quality, performance and reliability (R32).

Hence, follow up questions with regards to specific capabilities and brand management the company possess allow for the examination of international branding antecedents and effects without relying on differing perceptions from key informants from different firms of what constitutes a brand.

5.2.6 Data Collection Period

Interviews were conducted between March and September 2015. They were arranged at the convenience of the participants, all but one asked for the interviews to be conducted at their place of business, one respondent took up the researcher's option provided to conduct the interview within Strathclyde University which they were alumni and very familiar with. Therefore, in each case, an accepted natural environment setting was used, enabling the participants to feel comfortable discussing the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014. p.185).

A participation information sheet was sent to each participant prior to the interview, this outlined:

- The context and nature of the research
- The expected duration of the interview
- The confidentiality of the interview
- How the results will be reported

5.2.7 Duration and Recording of Interviews

The duration of interviews ranged from 45 to 128 minutes with an average of 79 minutes for each. Each interview was recorded using a digital recorder, there were two recordings made on separate devices to ensure data could not be lost through a technical issue with one recording device. Before beginning each interview, respondents were asked for written consent to the interview being recorded and, in each case, the secure confidential storage of the recordings was explained to alleviate any doubts they may have had. One respondent was uncertain about the recording; however, once his legal advisor (Strathclyde University alumni) reassured him that the University's data storage procedures would be followed, then the recording was allowed to proceed. The researcher explained that interviews could be transcribed if any respondent was against the recording process. The application software 'AudioMemo' was used to record the interviews and each was downloaded and stored onto Strathclyde University's secure cloud storage 'Strathcloud'. Each was then transcribed using Microsoft Word and stored onto Strathcloud. The researcher used a research diary to keep track of emerging ideas and pertinent points from each of the interviews. The following section will explain how the data was analysed.

5.2.8 Data Analysis

As previously discussed, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. A semi-structured interview approach was used allowing for a set of open ended questions to both cover an aide-memoire of themes to be addressed and answers probed when necessary to explore deeper to elicit examples and other insights (Baker, 2015. p.154). This approach also allowed respondents to describe what is meaningful and salient in their companies international branding activities without being limited to standardised categories (Patton, 2002). The transcripts became the foundation from which the analysis was conducted (Wilson, 2012). In many cases, there were additional notes taken by the researcher's logbook, these were also written up following each interview. Qualitative techniques were used to systematically analyse open-ended questions, undertake a thematic analysis and identify the patterns of response between groups.

5.2.9 Coding

A 'code' in qualitative research is most often a short phrase or word that "symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana, 2013, p.2), the data can consist of various inputs including interview transcripts. According to Charmaz (2001), coding is the critical link between data collection and ability to provide an explanation of meaning. To 'codify', is to organise things into a systematic order, to make something part of a system or classification to categorise (Saldana, 2013. p.9). When codes are applied to qualitative data, the researcher is codifying – a process that allows data to be "segregated, grouped, regrouped and linked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation" (Grbich, 2007. p.21). Richard and Morse (2007, p.146) amusingly advise "if it moves, code it", however, the process can be open to

interpretation and according to Wilson (2012), the classification of data can be completed in numerous different ways and it is down to the researcher's preference as to how data categorisation is accomplished. Nvivo (qualitative research software) was considered and trialed for this thesis; however, the researcher decided to follow the path of utilising Microsoft word and excel spreadsheets since they had previous experience and was comfortable categorising the data using this method.

For this study, the researcher first used a form of holistic coding to capture the essence of extracts and set a preliminary foundation due to the large amount of data (Saldana, 2013). The next step was to move onto grounded theory coding, which includes open, axial, and selective coding (e.g. Strauss & Corbin, 1998) by independently undertaking open coding, paragraph by paragraph, to identify the key variables and inter-relationships mentioned in the verbatim transcripts. This is consistent with Layder (1998) assertion that pre-established theories can inform and drive the initial coding process. Any key variables and inter-relationships that emerged during the analysis were transcribed in the margins and then labelled with descriptive codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A coding plan was developed that: 1) listed the key variables and inter-relationships identified; 2) provided a label and definition for each variable; 3) specified the respective properties of each variable and 4) provided an example to elucidate its meaning and content (Ulaga & Reinartz, 2011). Overall, the formal coding process from the transcribed results captured the key variables related to the central constructs and the related inter relationships with regards to UK firms exporting in a B2B context. Themes were then examined and relevant quotes extracted in preparation for the write up.

The following section presents the findings of the interview phase. These are presented within the context of the key elements from the conceptual framework and followed by a broader discussion of the results.

5.3 Results

To begin with in each interview, some initial opening questions were first asked in relation to both the key respondents and the participant firms, e.g. role in firm, firm size etc. as was displayed in Table 5.1 An additional question asked in each interview but not included in Table 5.1 was whether the respondent firms had taken any breaks from exporting since beginning, in every case the answer was no. The following sections provide finding and discussions in relation to each theme.

5.3.1 International Resources and Capabilities

According to the research framework, superior B2B brand management in international markets requires antecedent financial resources, along with branding and key marketing capabilities including marketing planning and market information capabilities. The following sections use the results from the qualitative stage of this study to examine these resources and capabilities, and subsequently, the inter-relationships these capabilities have with strategic brand management in foreign markets.

5.3.1.1 International Financial Resources

Financial resources govern the capacity of a B2B supplier to access necessary cash and capital (c.f. Ling-Yee & Ogunmokun, 2001; Glynn, 2012) to develop their marketing planning, information and branding capabilities in export markets. Consistent with this, a

relatively new high growth B2B technology firm which has already built a strong brand reputation in numerous overseas markets elucidated:

In terms of financial resources, we got an injection in December we're looking to raise a significant amount by the end of this year, hopefully to the tune of five odd million and that should set us on good stead for the next couple of years so I think we're in a relatively strong competitive position.... that money will be used to grow the commercial side of the team which will be focused on accessing and growing external markets (R16)

This strategic approach to finding future funding is consistent with Spyropoulou et. al (2011) who measured the firm's ability to access additional financial resources when needed, along with current levels of financial resources, speed of acquiring and deployment of financial resources, size of financial resources devoted to exporting and current access to capital when they were assessing financial resources for export branding advantage.

There was agreement by participant companies that financial resources are a central tenet for their exporting activities and vital for improving their capabilities. There were some examples of larger companies with solid brands having the most access to cash, one describing their company as 'cash rich' which subsequently coincided with a recent commitment by the CEO to financially invest in developing their brand in multiple new high growth export markets. Conversely, the smallest company by current annual turnover within the study (R25), disclosed that although there are numerous business customer led opportunities available to them in overseas markets, they were focusing primarily on developing one export market to begin with due to financial resource constraints.

This was also the case for other smaller firms within the study, R3 agreed that financial resource constraints were a key issue to developing their capabilities, when probed about developing their capabilities:

We have got a great product and great brand; our biggest problem is lack of cash
(R3).

One respondent with a history in Economics was firm in his belief that the main internal resource for his firm, both generally and specifically for international trade is financial resources:

The internal resource is money really, we're very cash rich because when you're building a business up in a booming market, you're looking at the trade cycle, my first degree is in economics so I look at it like a clock face, you go from 6 o'clock to 12 o'clock and unfortunately you go from 12 o'clock to 6 o'clock... so if you're getting an investment you want it between 6 and 9 not 9 and 12, so when you're on that climb to 12 if you've negative cash flow you need money, provided you haven't gone and spent all the money that you got from 12 to 6 you then have positive cash flow, you start putting money away, because you need less money for your business, so as the money comes back in you start building up cash balances so that allows us to have targeted a new export market or bought another company; for example, you know now 6 clocks the time to buy a company that's in crisis, (R4).

Different respondents had varying access to financial resources and access to capital, the two quotes below represent different approaches, first by only expanding their overseas markets using profits and secondly by pursuing grants:

We've expanded by profit, so that's why it's slow expansion (R9).

We have one EU grant and one council funded grant, the EU grant was for £25,000 for expansion of premises so we could produce the stock for expanding into new territories and the council was around £10,000 for international marketing (R12).

Interestingly, though access to financial resources is important to determining a firm's ability to successfully engage in international marketing activities (Morgan, 2012), another respondent elected to decline potential investments and the ability to improve their international marketing capabilities to instead retain full ownership and control over their firm:

We've been offered investments on 8 or 9 occasions which I've refused, because if somebody gave us half a million pounds we could probably be where we want to be in terms of exporting a bit faster, but we would still owe him half a million and I would rather be captain of my own ship and take a bit longer but actually it's still 100% mine. Cash is king and businesses will say the same thing so its keeping that cash flow moving is the key (R11).

For larger firms with a strong focus on increased exporting it was conveyed that there was access to a higher level of financial resources and they could find additional financial resources to support their international marketing and branding capabilities; however, there was a stronger need for validating the additional financial resources:

We are a cash rich company... we're a profitable company so we don't owe anybody anything and we kind of stand on our own two feet in that regards, we don't have to answer to investors or the bank or anybody external to the company so the holding board, all 4, they own the company and that's it so we're kind of in charge of our own destiny in terms of what we want to invest in markets and what we feel we can invest in markets so in terms of export specifically I need to justify my forecast and my associated budget for the year and that has to be no more than a set % of sales so although I will overspend in certain markets in other markets we'll spend nothing so the overall % so I'll make far less margin in one market than another but if that's justified in terms of driving sales and additional sales then I can justify for that year then we'll have to look at it again the next year to see if its sustainable to do that for the rest of the time and make really reduced margin or can I, do I have to pull it back and reallocate it to another market, so I have to justify my spend, I don't have an unlimited budget (R26).

This approach was also taken by R24, they emphasised the need to train all their staff worldwide on what their brand means and to ensure they all convey a consistent brand meaning (Merrilees et al. 2011):

We have access to capital so, if, I guess like everything else, we have to present the case to be able to get that funding but we have done that around the world, it worked best for example in the HX the high speed gear, that involved investment, even things like investing in brand training for all of our 50 sales people around the world over a couple of years, that's cost a lot of money so there's an investment in that, so yes we have access to it but as you can imagine we have to have a rock solid case, you've got to be very focused on what you're spending you're money on (R24).

Respondent 5 also advised they devoted significant financial resources to relevant capabilities in order to strengthen their brand in foreign markets:

We have made a big financial investment in full time staff dealing with our international customers and increased investment in marketing (R5).

Additionally, there was evidence that levels of financial resources available for entering a new export market may be dependent on the level of return:

If there's a good business case for targeting a new market then yes, the moneys available, the down side is it needs to be a big opportunity, if it's just going to create an extra £200,000 they're not as interested they'd rather invest £2 million to get £10 million back (R19).

As established within the literature, branding reduces the uncertainty within the purchase decision (Lilien & Grewal, 2012) and value taken from a B2B brand is principally through the functional qualities they convey (Kuhn et. al. 2008) there was agreement with participating company's responses:

The way the oil industry works {is} they're very reluctant to change a supplier especially on what they call a critical component.... if you've been the brand that they started developing that particular product with, they'll stick with you because it's not worth the risk to them of changing the supplier and ending up with a failure, since a failure on an oil rig can have catastrophic consequences (R1).

Therefore, significant financial resources are required to build international B2B branding capabilities, especially since there are fewer customers for B2B transactions leading to a stronger emphasis on longer partnerships (Glynn, 2012). To illustrate this further, the CEO of a successful international B2B branded company (currently exporting 95% of its manufactured goods with an annual turnover of ten million pounds), describes the early stages of the funding process, it should be noted he had significant previous experience and a proven track record:

I went out to the various venture capital companies in 2007, made presentations and in 2007 I could have got as much money as I wanted, we borrowed five million pounds on our first funding round subsequent to that I borrowed another two or three million pounds, we were loss making of course in those early years because we're designing the stuff.... conducting market research and not selling anything, (R21).

Therefore, this company serves as a good example of a company with strong funding resources that allowed it to endure losses in its formative years while building its brand, this has now led to increased export performance constituted by both increased financial and market performance (Morgan & Slotegraaf 2012). Each of the comments outlines the importance of international financial resources. It is therefore important that this study includes 'international financial resources' as a variable within the conceptual model which will be tested in the quantitative stage of this study. The following sections will now describe respondent's discussions surrounding the key capabilities identified for this study.

5.3.1.2 International Marketing Planning Capabilities

Building on the extant literature the key respondents were asked about their marketing planning capabilities but also probed further in some cases with regards to their export planning skills, ability to set clear planning goals and formulate creative marketing strategies and how thorough their marketing planning processes are (Morgan & Katsikeas, 2012).

The majority of companies in this study emphasised they do create and follow international marketing plans; however, there were variations in terms of how accountable they were to keeping to aims stated in the plans and how often plans were reviewed and adjusted throughout the year. The following company had been growing their exports exponentially over the past twenty years and had successfully established their company brand as one of the leading companies in their field in 40 overseas markets. They were very focused on the strategic planning process while concurrently utilising their market information capabilities:

Our international marketing plan goes hand in hand with our business plan, we have a strategy and that strategy obviously includes how we can grow the company, growing the company is based on where can we find new overseas markets and implement our plans, we have to do market research so its intertwined with our ongoing business plan, we always have a three-year business plan running so the marketing's discussed at board level and we have formal marketing meetings (R33).

Predictably, a common theme found was companies with export business amounting to more than 50% of their overall revenue, were highly focused and thorough with regards to their international marketing planning capabilities. A good example of this was a high growth

firm exporting 100% overseas and currently achieving £30 million revenue but realistically expecting to double this turnover in international markets in coming years. With regard to planning and implementing plans to enter new markets they stated:

We sat down as a company on the 9,10,11,12 June this year where everyone from all over the place came in from India, Scandinavia and all staff here were drafted in for 4 days of intensive 'this is where we are' and 'this is where we need to be' and 'this is how we're going to plan out the next year and implement these plans', we'll follow that up with another meeting in September/October so we'll do it maybe 3/4 times a year (R29).

The following statements also convey the importance attached to thoroughness within the marketing planning process:

We have an annual budgeting round normally Sept/Oct time and we'll plan out things for the following year and look at new markets, new countries that we're targeting for business and a detailed review of how we might do that (R24).

Quarterly I would look carefully at a plan for the export markets we do a comprehensive demand plan for each market every month (R5).

Our marketing manager prepares a plan every quarter (R32).

We have a quarterly marketing meeting where we'll look at our market strategy for each of our top 3 sectors that we cover (R6).

We do everything in a very sensible and methodical way per territory, we have a marketing plan, a marketing budget and all pricing models go into a spread sheet model and if it goes green you can sell it for that price, if it's red then you can't so we're pretty disciplined and we use a MRP - material resource planning system for all stock so even although we've pretty small, we're very organised (R3).

A strategic approach to marketing planning includes the ability to answer the question 'where are we now' (Gilligan & Wilson, 2009), strategic brand management must therefore develop out of a detailed understanding of the environment. When a firm does not adopt a carefully planned strategy it can inhibit their ability to develop and manage their brand in overseas markets, during an open discussion with one firm that does have a trusted brand, exports to over twenty countries and has been exporting for over 20 years but exporting only accounts for 14% of their overall sales. It became apparent they were not fulfilling their potential internationally and they admittedly accepted part of the reason for that was a lack of strategic planning as this statement displays:

I've currently got 2 guys who work for me covering foreign markets and the reality is that I'll probably say to each of those, based on what we've seen so far, I'd like you to look at this area in addition to what you're doing, and the other one will look at a different area and we'll see how that works out (R17).

There was clear evidence from many respondents that marketing planning skills and the setting of clear export marketing goals was important to their strategic brand success in overseas markets, both now but also importantly in the future:

I think our true goals now are to get the American market sorted: establishing our brand in America is our goal for the rest of this year, just to get that sorted before we even look at Oz, Canada (R11).

We do try to focus our people to go to areas of material significance, it's easy to sell one tool to the operator in Tonga, he might buy it on a personal whim and it's of no future value to us, selling into Kuwait where there's 56 rigs running today and there's a need to keep up their opec quota that's a proper sale, so there are significant sales and stuff we should never touch and we always steer our people away from insignificant, it's easy to get excited about potentials, and we make a sale but it still of no value to me (R21).

At the start of this year we had an ambition that we needed to secure an additional 3 markets.... we stopped asking the question where are the biggest {product} countries in the world, it's where are the next emerging markets for our brand {product} that are going to follow and that was our key difference in the approach we'd taken before (R12).

During a lengthy discussion with one respondent (R19), they explained that often they will plan to make small adjustments to their products, not to save money and not necessarily to increase sales since they realise the changes are not ground breaking but instead to provide a reason to engage with current and potential buyers to showcase their brand as innovative and constantly evolving new products to the international market:

The engineers would rather have a bombshell change that's big and impressive whereas in sales and marketing you're just trying to keep things live, so keep them interested, keep them engaged with your brand, you can't expect them to wait 2 years then go back to them and say I've got something new now, you've forgotten who your speaking to in 2 years' time because their business guys gone so you need to have something slightly different. So; for example, we bring out a sonar, we now put a new capability in it because a couple of customers have asked for it and can tell everybody about it and 'oh they're moving forward, their sonar no longer requires a {specialist function} it can work with a plug it in like I plug in a pc and it'll recognise it'. The number of people that'll actually use it will be very few but the fact that you're seen to be adapting and moving forward will give the right perception of a brand that's innovative and moving forward (R19).

This strategy of communicating a differentiation of product lines by the company in a product category is a form of developing brand awareness (Kay, 2006).

The comments by respondents in this section have shown the importance of international planning capabilities and shown they can be linked to strategically managing an exporters brand, the quantitative stage will test this relationship later in this study. The next section will provide the findings and discussions in relation to market informational capabilities which this study argues are also essential antecedents to superior international strategic brand management.

5.3.1.3 International Market Information Capabilities

The literature on marketing information capabilities has shown that gathering information about customers, using market research skills to develop effective export marketing programs, tracking international customer needs and wants, making full use of international marketing research information and analysing export market information are all important elements (Vorhies et al. 2005).

There was support by respondents for this capability and the influence it can have on their brand management as exemplified by the following statement:

The way we manage our brand has evolved differently in different markets, depending on the competition and depending on the market, we get higher gross profit in the states than we do in Europe because in the states there isn't the same facility to go direct to wholesalers or manufacturers, they're a lot more reliant on the merchants and they don't have the same opportunities to go direct so we get a higher margin for our brand in the states, likewise in the Middle East as well and in Europe it's more difficult, there's more competition (R8).

A characteristic of B2B markets is that relationships are more important than in a B2C setting (Kuhn et al. 2008). In a B2C setting many purchase decision making situations are independent of the seller; however, this is not the case in a B2B context. There was support for this when examining the respondents international market information capabilities, the next two statements provide backing for the importance of tracking customer needs and wants by developing a strong relationship, to the extent firms will provide flexibility on designs and additional engineering support to satisfy customer needs:

We've got an understanding of the metals and the moulding process, there can only be changes we make to the products while we've got a knowledge of the products we produce, generally they're customer driven, we produce to a customer's design so to take our knowledge from production and start offering to the customer, it can be a case of 'that's your design but if you tried it this way it could be a better product' and that's where I can see us developing on the research side of it to offer that extra product, the value added service (R1).

For our customer's we offer flexibility, we're not selling catalogue products, we're not selling widgets, we're sitting with the clients, listening carefully to them... 'what is it you need, how do you want to do it, how do you need to do it and can we help you do it'. Our flexibility from an engineering perspective and flexibility in creativity, that's why people come to us, we take the product off the customer's desk and turn it into a solution for them (R20).

Respondent (20) went on to explain that even with a strong brand and a lot of export experience, it can be difficult to gain access to certain new industry segments, they stressed market research information is again important but it also highly beneficial to have people in the business who are familiar with the industry and able to use trusted relationships to help enable the brand to gain entry:

I think we could compete for overseas defence contracts, we need to do more research work on it, it's a bit grey in this area, it's a pretty closed shop and unless you've got someone in your business who knows people...., it's a bit like oil & gas, unless you're in oil & gas then it's a closed shop and I think it's very similar in the defence market so we've got to put some hard work in there but I'm sure {SE Scottish Enterprise} are going to help us with some of that research work (R20).

In terms of monitoring competitors, respondent (R14) discussed that they do monitor competitors but since it is a specialist market they operate it, there are few competitors and their approach is more to lead than to follow:

We have a marketing team that watch them, we mainly focus on what customers are needing. Part of our brand philosophies to run faster than everyone else so they worry about us more than we worry about them. it's usually quite easy to find what their {competitors} up to, in fact our customers tell us what they are up to most of the time, our customers will say 'well we had so and so in here last week showing us that as well' so we do track, there aren't a huge number of competitors, it is quite a specialist area we're in so it's not like there's a competitor based in every country, it's not that hard to track what's going on (R14).

Given market information capabilities involve the processes firms use, not only to learn about their markets but also how they use that market knowledge (Day, 1994), the interviews were used to examine how respondents utilise the knowledge they accumulate:

We look at our countries, we've have two sales directors, one is for the gulf, he's also Lebanese but lives in the UK so he speaks Arabic and we've got another one who does Europe. They look at how the market is developing and look at what opportunities there are for us or how we can better position or maintain our brand position, how to make it more difficult for our competition, so we look, some markets are so small that they're not worth the effort (R4).

If we think there's definitely an appetite in a particular market, we have something unique then it's quite nice if we can put you know half a % on it and for the market to add to our cache but that's all, and the reason we like working with global partners is you can't do anything without the local knowledge and that's culturally as well as pricing models (R23).

You can justify it and we also understand from the local markets what is suitable, if you're looking at the likes of France, they pay their staff a wee bit more than we pay over here because of tax things, Colombia pay less so the rate card has to be local so we need to be able to adjust (R15).

There were also examples whereby the analysis of market information is used to avoid any potential risks for the brand in overseas markets:

We are open to new things and open to new areas, having said that then it's all done based on bottom line and all done based on an awful lot of research and we don't do things on a whim so we are not up for risk that could have a negative impact on our brand or be detrimental to the rest of the business (R26).

Evidence was found to support the proposition that B2B firms need to put emphasis onto developing their market information capabilities which can focus efforts to strategically manage their brand to fully capitalise on opportunities in overseas markets, otherwise export markets can be unexploited. A good example of this was revealed during a frank discussion with respondent (R27), the Managing director of a successful company with strong brand management practices for the domestic UK market. It was revealed that although they have

developed an enviable brand within the domestic market over the past three decades and have successfully exported, they have not identified market opportunities through market informational capabilities. Subsequently, they have not fully implemented a brand management strategy or taken advantage of opportunities to really develop their brand in export markets in the same way they have for the domestic market:

I'm making I suppose the point that we've been playing at export, not 'playing' but we've been doing export for about fifteen to twenty years and in that time, we've probably supplied into thirty or forty countries so we're supplied all over the world but our export business has not grown beyond a relatively small point. It's not because we don't make a good product, it's not because we've not supplied at competitive prices and that kind of thing but we've not really gone beyond that, to use the phrase relatively at a superficial level {we have} just kind of been fulfilling the demand, we haven't been identifying where there really is strong opportunities for us to develop a market..... we haven't been strategic in how we're managing and communicating our brand in foreign markets (R27).

The views of respondents have indicated the importance of international market information capabilities to being able to strategically manage their brand in overseas markets, this relationship will be tested in the quantitative stage of this study. The next section will provide the findings and discussions in relation to international branding capabilities and their influence on international strategic brand management practices.

5.3.1.4 International Branding Capabilities

Prior literature on branding capabilities has shown that utilisation of available resources to present a simple brand meaning for international customers, the ability to use branding as an operational tool, communicating a consistent brand meaning to international customers, treating the brand as an asset and ensuring staff understand and support the brand meaning and values are all essential (Merrilees et al. 2011).

The development and management of a firm's brand requires strong brand capabilities (Davcik & Sharma, 2016). It is very important for firms to be able to utilise available resources to present a simple brand meaning and communicate a consistent brand meaning to international customers (Merrilees et al. 2011). This was supported within the interviews and many firms expressed the importance of emphasising the essence of what their brand stands for, high quality, good service and trust were frequently stated. The following four examples are from discussions regarding this:

So, no gimmicks and the brand will work across different markets, if you create a brand that is a classic high-quality product then it will appeal to lots of different buyers in different regions (R12).

Brand is in my opinion something created by the experience we create, a 'brand experience' and that is the service and technical support that we give (R4).

We've rebranded, all our communication is about versatility and quality and to trust the business to be interesting, so our marketing and PR is very much around supporting what we're trying to do and to use this to increase the number of international buyers (R28).

Our international brand depends on good service, good quality and trust (R8).

Respondent 8 provided some further interesting insights into the way they consider branding as much more than just a name, which supports the literature that branding should not just be considered as a reductive concept consisting of just the name or colour of the brand (Inskip, 2004):

Our customers are building their own brands so they'd normally put a "X" woven label in to show where the fabric came from but ultimately, it's a "Z" suit or something like that so they're not really pushing our name, they're pushing their own name. So, we are aware because we haven't got an end product.... we're selling cloth to businesses and cloths not something that a person on the street is necessarily going to identify with so the "X" name as a brand hasn't been as strong as it might have been. It is more important to us a brand to keep the level of service and the quality and the whole sort of ethos surrounding what we are, what we do and how we behave, how we work and how we support our customers, that's more important to us than the actual brand name (R8).

In relation to presenting and communicating a simple brand meaning to all international customers, one respondent who had a solid background in marketing described through her own mistakes the importance of ensuring the understanding of the meaning is consistent throughout different foreign markets:

Well my backgrounds marketing, so before we set up {brand name} we ran a marketing consultancy, started it from scratch, grew it to a team of 9 and sold out to BC's in London so we've always been a marketing driven business which is why we've built the brand from the word go. We've got two brands, one for the UK for the English-speaking markets and one for the German market and that was the biggest balls up in the history of marketing because {brand name} in German has connotations of death so we had to set up {brand name} for Germany and Austria and Switzerland. So, we run two brands concurrently which is hard but has never been a problem, so that was a really bad bit of marketing from my point of view but we do everything in relation to the brands in a very sensible and methodical way per territory (R3).

This was an interesting example as it meant the firm had to essentially manage two brands across international markets instead of one due to a lack of marketing planning and information about the potential markets to export. However, there is support within the literature that in some instances a single brand cannot be imposed across all international markets (Keegan & Green, 2015).

It is well cited in the literature that successful branding capabilities requires firms to treat their brand as an asset (Aaker, 1991; 1996), and this was found to be the case for the majority of respondents. A common subject of discussion amongst respondents was their ability to protect their brand in overseas markets; for example, one firm discussed the difficulties in protecting their core branded products from being copied:

Dealing over international boundaries there's always a trouble, it might be easier across a European boundary where you've got a European court you can call to, if you're trying to sue someone in India or the far east who's copied your design it's hard to prove (R1).

Another respondent described how they use patenting as to deter overseas competitors copying their brand. This is in line with the branding literature that conveys brands can offer firms legal protection for unique features or aspects of the product (Keller, 2013):

A patent looks good on paper, it gives resellers a value to invest in you but you physically can't patent in every country in the world unless you're fricken Apple, if you're Apple you can afford to do, at PCT stage you can afford to apply for every country and pay the translation, pay the postings you could be £100,000 trying to cover one patent globally and then you've got to defend it so unless you're the Samsung and Google and Apples, these big brands.... but what it does is it adds value to your brand proposition, it shows there a value in something and its usually enough of a deterrent to show somebody, right ok you know these guys mean what they say then you can fire a shot over their bow if something ridiculously close to our brand starts to come into the market place, you can start to get aggressive with them (R15).

Respondent 21 also used patents as a measure to protecting their products and brand, they operate in the deep-sea oil and gas industry and had discussed the catastrophic effect it could have on their brand if another overseas firm was to imitate their unique products and an imitation product failed:

We have no known imitations yet, we have a very good patent, I have a book there of our patent portfolio and our patent activity which we do, we're patented in Europe and the USA and wherever we feel it's appropriate, we haven't been copied, we'll start exporting to China, Chinas rules have tightened up a bit so we're not too worried about that and we've not seen anybody else do exactly what we do so we haven't gone out to be litigious on anybody...yet (R21).

The same firm went on to convey that from their perspective patents are a weak link in the exporting process and it is difficult to completely stop inferior imitations appearing in emerging markets in particular, which can harm the firm brand:

I would say in hindsight, the patent process, the myth of patenting is a little bit of a myth, it doesn't protect or if you've very deep pockets then yes you can go and sue somebody and you might win you might not, but patents can normally be worked around its a weak link in the export process (R21).

Wong & Merrilees, (2007) argue that branding becomes the driving force for firms that consider branding a significant issue in business decisions and directions when prominence is placed on an integrated effort from all aspects within the firm. This integrated effort necessitates a comprehensive understanding of what branding is and means among all the staff, branding must go beyond being the sole responsibility of marketing people, and include everyone from top management to front-line staff. The following extract from the COO of a successful exporting brand develops this theory:

All the staff understand our brand, they know how and why we work, if there's value to be added to the brand, come to us with a proposal, I'll occasionally tweak things or occasionally knock things back but if you can justify things....for example, a colleague of mine came to me with a thing to go to Sri Lanka to do because there's an exhibition there which would be good exposure for the brand and she didn't even need to present something per say but she showed me this is what I where I want to go, this is what I want to achieve, this is what I want to do and so on and so on, just a paragraph of not even written but just her speaking to me and it was sanctioned, it doesn't need to go through loopholes.....is it making sense for our brand? is it adding value? if it's adding brand value just go and do it, don't even ask me (R29).

One respondent (R23), extended their staff involvement with their brand to the extent that all staff were given share options and participation within a profit share scheme. The extant literature suggests another element of achieving successful branding capabilities is the ability to use branding as an operational tool (Keller, 2013). B2B firms which aim to differentiate themselves from competitors in a global market have appropriated the branding concept as an operational tool and use this capability to good effect. The following statements from respondent's extent this point:

I'll deal with the intangible aspect of our brand, the intangible is our technical know-how, we employ guys that are the best in the industry. We know better, we have more knowledge and experience than say the test laboratory's that we use! we're just surrounded because our offering is, we're a technical offering as I explained to you at the very beginning, it's a technical concept, if you buy this product, we'll tell you how to make {the product}, we'll show you how to

make {the product} and we'll put our arm around you "oh by the way you've got to buy the product from us" that's our approach (R4).

Therefore respondent 4 clearly identifies the core essence of their brand is their technical knowhow and experience, to the extent that they want to be completely transparent with buyers about the manufacturing process of the product because they are supremely confident they are the best and by taking this approach simply strengthens their brand equity. This supports the assertion by Gilligan and Wilson (2009) that if contemporary brands are to be trusted they must be far more open and transparent. Given (R4) have been the preferred brand in numerous overseas markets for two decades, their approach is working. The following statement by a different firm (R16) also emphasises the core essence of their brand is contained within their knowledge base which they use to good effect as an operational tool. It was interesting that larger competitors were prepared to ask to utilise their brand in an effort to enter the market, although the firm is relatively new to exporting compared with other firms in the study, they clearly realised their worth and were carefully managing their brand for the future by refusing approaches by larger corporates to use their brand in order to completely retain control their brand image:

From a brand perspective, we're thought leaders in the field, we have the best people, we know this because we've had competitors coming to us asking to use our brand to help them sell their product, we know that the brand that we have and the standing we have is wanted to be leveraged by much larger corporates than ourselves in their bid to enter the space (R16).

The last element of successful branding capabilities which was emerged and was examined was specific to B2B branding and involves the use of branding to reduce the uncertainty associated with the purchase decision making process (Mudambi, 2002), there was widespread agreement from the respondents on this. The following statement illustrated this point and demonstrates the importance of managing their brand capability long term since a characteristic of B2B markets is often personal long-term relationships (Mudambi, 2002):

Well it's such a good product, the way the oil industry works they're very reluctant to change a supplier especially on what they call a critical component on a casting they'll do the testing with you and development with you and as long as you keep that quality and keep the returns down and if you're not getting lots of rejects back, they'll stick with your brand because it's not worth the risk to them of changing the supplier and ending up with a failure, since a failure on an oil rig can have catastrophic consequences (R1).

Successful B2B suppliers realise the need to reassure buyers and reduce any concerns or uncertainties they might have as one respondent explained in relation to buyers insisting on visiting their premises before placing an order:

They have to be certain you can deliver on your brand's promises, they want to see bricks and mortar, when they come here they want to see it's not just a person that exports, it could be a one-man band but there's a whole factory sitting there and the quality's there, they've {the buyers} have got the knowledge then that the company's going to be there in 2/3 years' time as well so you have to build up trust through a sort of experience together (R2).

This is an important point and supports the emphasis put on reducing uncertainty within B2B markets that has been characterised in previous literature (e.g. Mudambi et al. 2002), it also points towards the building of long term relationships characterising B2B markets (Webster & Keller, 2004). Trust in the brand acts to reduce uncertainty:

The trust with our brand and our people and our products is an incredibly powerful thing, that really is the crux of our business (R32).

The vast majority of respondents were in agreement that international branding capabilities are essential to their exporting activities and that the development of these capabilities is consequently critical to the management of their brands overseas.

The preceding sections have reviewed and examined the internal environment findings from the qualitative interviews adopting resource based theory (Barney, 1991), the next sections will cover the external environment.

5.3.2 External Environmental Factors

5.3.2.1 Macro External Environment – Enabling Conditions

With regards to the extant literature on the structure conduct framework (e.g. Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), during the interviews respondents were asked about macro environmental influences on their exporting decisions and where applicable further discussions were conducted in relation to how this impacts the strategic management of their brand in foreign markets. There were a number of contingency factors to take account of which provided influence from the external environment; for example, currency fluctuations were

mentioned as having both a positive and negative influence for B2B supplier's dependent on particular markets and regions, the following statements from respondents (R8, R15) indicates how currency variances have had a negative effect in particular markets in recent years:

Change in the currency rate between the pound and the euro has affected our business, it's made it more difficult, particularly in areas where there's a lot of competition, Italy being a particular example (R8).

The dollar's been a nightmare because our export orders were pegged on dollar then you're going from Columbian peso to dollar, rand to dollar, rand to sterling but we pegged originally on the dollar, that was the issue because it's not just your transaction, your cost of positioning price point based on 1.58 to the pound, it's your buy back from that currency back to yours so you get the double hit, you're having to peg on the right purchase price but you're having to build in the fact of the buy back, so current, pegging on any currency is a risk, the dollar drop has been significant, a costly exercise, it went from 1.75 to 1.47 at one point (R15).

Interestingly, respondent (R31) who an exporter of specialist plastic products also purchases materials in a B2B capacity and they conveyed that currency fluctuations can negatively affect both their imports and exports:

I would say the euro rate might have had a negative effect on an import order but not an export order. I buy thick pieces of thick sheet from places like Germany that are very bespoke for the semi-conductor industry, they are coated and they are

special lengths costing from 600 to 1000 pound a sheet and the sheet is only 8 feet by 4 feet. So, when speaking about currency - the euro, it effects an import order for materials more than an export for us. It could well have been the reason {exchange rate drop} why work in Bahrain dropped for a while but I never investigated it, currency can affect us (R31).

The majority of the companies in this study had a relationship with government bodies such as UKTI and Scottish Development International (SDI), which provided exporting support (Kotabe & Helsen, 2011), some described this relationship as more positive than others, the following statements were positive:

UKTI also puts up export guarantees in certain countries around the world where you can tap in to make sure you're going to be paid, so there's a lot of positives (R22).

In Moscow they had, they {SDI} still have their own office there and around that time, when I first went out about 12 years ago I think, they were tremendously helpful, very good contacts to the industry and they made a number of appointments for me, it was a great start (R10).

SDI have helped us with training, with events, with strategies, strategy meetings, strategic consultation, things like that, very very helpful (R15).

We also get funding from SDI because we're deemed a high growth company and we get a third of our costs paid for international work, for developing our brand in new markets (R12).

Scottish Enterprise offers an OMIS, it's an "overseas market introduction service" where they offer market research for key territories, we have used it before and would again if we felt it was useful in a market we knew nothing about (R3).

However, not all firms spoke positively about support from government agencies, it seemed there was more support made available to fledgling exporters but then once they matured the same support wasn't always forthcoming, at least for some firms:

There were external factors that encouraged us to export and that was British government but that's all fallen away, they encouraged us and made it easy. You know members of the SDI used to do trade missions and they were funded, we did trade missions with BG {business gateway} and SE {Scottish Enterprise} but I never seen anybody from these organisations now (R4).

A number of firms spoke about the effect new legislation can have which allows products/services to be legally sold in newly acquired international markets (Katsikeas, 1996), the following statements support the important consequence this can have:

There are ongoing discussions in America about a ruling to lift restrictions which would make it easier for us to export a key product; however, it's a slow process and might never happen we keep a close eye on things and would be ready to move if things change (R28).

There's a lot of legislation issues in India, they have some interesting rules that we have to get around and there's a lot of interesting laws in other countries that we have to try and make our way through (R26).

Further direct effects the macro environment can have are with regards to attractive profit and growth opportunities in new markets and often coupled with this is when a firm has possession of unique products or is the provider of unique services appropriate for serving the needs of new customers in export markets (Katsikeas et al. 1996). Several respondents provided details to support these potential effects as the following statements illustrate:

It's about growing and opening new markets, expanding our global brand to a network because on the back of that we can start to look at exclusive software renewals of what we're doing now (R15).

It's not about the numbers in terms of the price and the value of the contract, it's about the value of the relationships that are established to generate demand for our unique technology and generate interest in the brand long term (R16).

One respondent whose firm currently exports to every continent but want to continue to open new markets discussed at length how important test orders are when attempting to enter potentially very profitable markets such as Japan:

Exporting has been a key part of what we've done over the last few years, we need more of it, in oil and gas especially we need to start looking at different customers out in japan and South Korea especially where there still a lot of money getting spent and

we're really just at the start of tapping into these, you know it's not an easy thing a UK company selling into Japan but we've had one or two test orders and we've executed them successfully so we just need to follow up on them now (R24).

Therefore, it has been shown enabling external macro environmental conditions can influence a firm's brand internationally and a firm's ability to realise and sustain positional advantages can be better accomplished by the effective management of their brand. The next section will now look at the effects of precipitating environmental conditions.

5.3.2.2 Micro External Environment – Precipitating Conditions

In relation to the extant literature on the structure conduct framework (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), respondents were asked about micro environmental influences on their exporting decisions and where applicable further discussions were conducted in relation to how this impacts the strategic management of their brand in foreign markets. There are a number of precipitating conditions which can positively influence a firm's strategic brand management; for example, diminishing domestic sales. Intensifying domestic competition and a saturated domestic market are conditions which stimulate firms exporting activities (Katsikeas et al.1996), and can therefore motivate firms to strategically manage their brand in overseas markets as a method of gaining competitive advantage. The below statements from respondents support the assessment of the importance of these precipitating conditions:

We have a lot of competition within the UK and it's everything from companies' that are 5 or 10 times our size to 'Fred in a shed' type organisations (R17).

Within the UK the market is, in our view, quite saturated so there's a lot of other competitors for {product} in the UK, so if you can find a customer outside the UK, you don't have to go through the same hoops. This has certainly played a part in why we are now pushing to increase our brand presence overseas (R2).

Another important precipitating condition is when a firm receives unsolicited order from abroad, this can obviously lead to initially an unexpected increase in sales but also an opportunity to build a long-term relationship by investing in the brand. The receipt of an unsolicited order can be viewed as reactive stimuli, linked to changing conditions and can mark a passive attitude towards export opportunities (Doole & Lowe, 2008); however, a more aggressive approach can then be implemented to fully capitalise on these opportunities. The following respondent first received unsolicited orders through their new ecommerce website which led to an unexpected approach by a large company in America which they then focused a lot of time and resources on developing a relationship, subsequently this has become their largest buyer:

I guess when I bought {firm} there was no real online strategy, no real website there was nothing growing so one of the first things I done was put an ecommerce website up and found we were getting a lot of unexpected enquiries from America and that came out great. I decided then that we'll be better off focusing on the American market as surely that's where the market for real volume is and we had a lot of {product} that we weren't selling in America. So, I undertook that path to try and get something more formal arranged in America and I suppose I was very lucky and a big company in America approached us and contacted me and said, we like your brand and what you do, can we work together, and it's just carried on (R11).

A fundamental precipitating condition is the level of managerial beliefs about the importance of exporting (Doole & Lowe, 2008; Sousa et al. 2010), it stands to reason that the value those in managerial positions put on exporting will affect the strategic direction and decisions taken. There was evidence that the more successful exporters were also the more committed in their beliefs of the current and unrealised future benefits of not only exporting but investing in and managing their brand in foreign markets. A good example of this is given by a firm now exporting 100% from the UK, turning over £30 million and currently exporting to 48 countries. Their COO spoke enthusiastically about the importance of exporting and how they put a high amount of emphasis on managing new and current relationships. He provided the example that no matter where in the world their buyer may be based, they would fly across and do a follow up meeting face to face six months after the first meeting to “cement the relationship” and ensure their brand is “number one”, but also use it as an opportunity to speak with more potential buyers if it is a new market:

You can use a new relationship to develop a market, so you may have one new Tunisian customer but six months later you might have four or five because your brand reputation is enhanced in the market (R29).

It has been shown precipitating micro environmental conditions can also influence a firm's brand internationally and a firm's ability to realise and sustain positional advantages can be better accomplished by the effective management of their brand. The previous statement by respondent 29 also supports assertions made in the literature that B2B branding has the ability to lead suppliers to receive favourable referrals (Bendixen et al. 2004). The next section will now look at the effects of foreign market competitiveness.

5.3.2.3 Foreign Market Competitiveness

The external environment competitive intensity within foreign markets has been incorporated within many international marketing studies, both looking at direct effects and its role in moderating effects (e.g. Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Murray et al. 2011; Kumar et al. 2011; Morgan et al. 2012; Kaleka & Morgan, 2017; Spyropoulou et al. 2017). However, until now it has not been investigated within a study looking at its direct effect on a B2B firms strategic brand management in overseas markets. Competitive intensity is in relation to the number of competitors in the export marketplace and the intensity and regularity with which they utilise marketing tools such as promotion and pricing to react to competitive actions (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). Higher levels of competitive intensity can therefore be expected to create marketplace uncertainty and create an environment where it is more difficult to determine and execute strategic options (e.g. brand management) designed to deal with uncertainty (Kumar et al. 2011).

Previous studies have measured whether competition in foreign markets is cut throat, if there are many promotion wars in a given export market, whether price is a hallmark of a given export market and if there are new competitive moves in an export market on a regular (daily) basis (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Morgan et al. 2012; Spyropoulou et al. 2017). The following revealing statements were made by respondents in relation to the effects of competitive intensity in their export marketplaces:

It's very, very, competitive just now because what's happened with oil and gas, there's not much business getting placed so everyone's chasing after the same projects and everyone's obsessed with cost because the oil price is so low and their margins are getting squeezed, so where do we sit, how do I answer that question, it depends because we can take business if we chose to take it then we can be as competitive as

the rest of them but there might not be much money on the job but we might take it for strategic reasons, maybe a new customer or its seen as a breakthrough order for us and if we can get one in the bag then it'll open up potential for more business for us so probably in that middle range but we are competing with companies who have a lower cost base and its pushing us to look out with the UK for our supply chain, that's where we are the now (R24).

Our brand is well known and the customers do know that they get what they pay for but we're in a difficult scenario right now because the market's slightly depressed: people are looking for the cheapest, but historically our brand's what sold it, the brand and quality of the delivery and the people for our aftersales is what sold it, you know think quality so that's what we sold on for a premium price (R20).

The size of competitors was also mentioned as a factor in several discussions:

We have to intensely compete with several companies which are bigger than us, we've two particular ones, ones in Paris plus an Italian company, plus now other companies from the far east as well (R8).

Some firms discussed competitors from emerging markets who are entering their export markets. Respondent (R1) provide some useful insights into this; though the following comments include some technical dialogue the central point conveyed is their main competitors in India cannot produce the same quality 'yet'. However, since they are improving, the firm is already looking ahead and part of their strategy is to initiate new and strengthen current relationships, look at building long-term relationships and ensuring that their brand will be first choice for buyers in future years, even when their competitors can produce a similar quality for slightly cheaper:

The competition in India's been local manufacturers and we get a much better quality, it's a much better grain structure so that the cold from the water was passed through the casting a lot more efficiently so it's not disintegrating in the furnace so quickly so the guys operating the furnace have a more efficient belt they're producing, two million pounds a scale rather than one and a half. So, it's a better quality, but, as I said, that Indian foundry that we compete with, their quality's getting better, they're improving, they're getting a better knowledge of how to do it so we need to take that next step and we're now doing this in various ways (R1).

Price was regularly mentioned in interviews as an important competitive factor, the following comment was made by a firm who has heavily invested in their brand and relies on their reputation instead of getting into price wars:

We have a much more expensive product to make and we have to make our margin as we go along so we don't compete on price (R3).

The following respondent (R17) discussed at length how they have built a strong brand image which stands for quality but buyers still are prepared to risk quality to gain a cheaper price. Interestingly though due to the technical nature of the products they manufacture they spoke of seeing buyers returning to them after a number of years once they realised the substandard quality was costing them more in the long term than the cost saving achieved by a cheaper price in the short term:

Unfortunately it generally requires people to have had that bad experience before they'll come to the conclusion that paying a higher price is worth it in the long run,

there's a lot of people that although they understand that the UK has got a reputation for better quality, and that our brand stands for quality, when it comes down to it they'll decide to take the risk anyway because they can get their end product made for a price that's that bit less, further down the line they might regret that decision, you know there's always a continual flow of companies' prepared to take that risk initially if they haven't gone that route (R17).

This sentiment was shared by respondent (R23), who as a firm are extremely brand focused and recognised weaknesses in their competitors by not being so and instead their rivals were more reliant on cheaper prices. Again, they realised their rival did win some business by being cheaper but they had experience of buyers coming to them after a bad experience with their competitor:

We're quite lucky really with our main competitor because they seem to be quite similar to us on the surface but actually they're really, culturally extremely different as an organisation. So where we win out is that we have a really strong brand, a really stable core of a team, so we have this knowledge capital, we've got the drive to get it right whereas their working culture means they've got a high staff turnover, they've got less general interest to what they're doing so the working culture I think makes a difference so a lot of people go to them first because they've got low pricing on the face of things but then they just piss people off and get it wrong every time so a client thinks, well they're annoying but I like this kind of product so oh lets buy from {brand} I think that's something that happens quite often (R23).

An interesting strategic approach was conveyed by respondent (R31). To counter potential increases in competitive intensity by new entrants, they differentiate their offering to operate in numerous sub markets so reducing the potential negative effect on their brand if intensity increases in any one area:

Usually when a new competitor comes in or something happens technology wise then there is the danger of being left standing there saying what just happened. It's harder to do it, but if you keep fingers in lots of pies its good. It's not like being a master of none, you can be good in all areas, we remain like that, we have experts in all the areas and just have a smaller brand presence in all the markets (R31).

These previous sections have discussed external environmental factors, both enabling and precipitating stimuli and competitive intensity in the export marketplace. There has been agreement by respondents of the importance of external environmental factors and that these factors influence their strategic brand management practices. The significance of this influence will be tested within the quantitative stage of this study. The following section will now provide insights from the interviews into exporting firms strategic brand management practices.

5.3.3 Strategic Brand Management in Export Markets

During the past twenty-five years research and views on branding have undergone a wide spread evolution, branding is becoming more global, interdisciplinary and strategic. The extant literature includes reasons for this as continual changes to markets and environmental and technological challenges firms face when managing their brands and reputation (Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017). Over the past three decades brand management has

progressively become seen as a distinct field and new ideas have dramatically changed this area of study (Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017). Strategic brand management involves the design and implementation of integrated marketing and branding programs (Keller, 2013).

This section will report respondent's views in relation to their strategic brand management, Santos-Vijande et al. (2013) measurement items for strategic brand management are a basis 1) firm commits significant investments to managing its brand(s) internationally 2) firm invests more resources in brand management than international competitors in their main export markets 3) firm has a well-coordinated multidisciplinary team to manage brand(s) internationally 4) firm plans their marketing actions taking into account the possible repercussions for the brand image and firms manage their brand internationally from a medium and long-term perspective.

Respondent (R27) emphasised the importance of strategically managing their brand:

Our business just now it tells its own story, everything we do is about our brand
(R27).

With regards to investment in foreign markets, there was evidence from a lot of firms that external environmental factors have been evident; for example, unsolicited orders from overseas firms on the basis of their brand:

Due to resources, up until maybe 2 or 3 years ago we were relatively reactive to the opportunities that came from the likes of Europe and sometimes further afield interest in our brand, whereas now we're very much proactive at exploring international

opportunities within Europe and further afield and we've also swung that around into more sector development pieces to manage our brand.... which would have more of a global span rather than just being focused on the territory we're looking at sectors (R23).

Firms from a cross section of different industries indicated a need to significantly invest in the management of their brands internationally to improve exporting performance:

I guess that Scotland and the UK is a bit of an island and the product that we sell is fairly niche so I think when your brand is based around a niche product you need to heavily invest in taking it out the a much wider audience to get volume, it's a simple as that (R11).

The fact many firms operate in niche markets was highlighted, respondent 9 who had a lot of experience and been successfully exporting for 29 years, commented that they invest in managing their brand in different niches in export markets which was an interesting approach:

You can export the same brand in different niches, you can expand whom you sell to by putting investment into having different niches for the same branded product (R9).

The increasing importance of brands and the way they are managed requires robust marketing planning capabilities (Gilligan & Wilson, 2009). Firms planning capabilities has implications for a co-ordinated effort by their team to manage their brand in overseas markets in a longer-term capacity:

It is very strategic the way we manage our brand, we've become very focused in the last 5 years and looked at our strategic plan and built that out for the coming years, really out to 2020 roughly where we want our brand to be for the next 3 years is contained in our strategic plan and it is very tied down, but where the euros going to cause us issues we are going to have to look at that again and look at those markets where that will be affected. It's very strategic in terms of where we're willing to spend money and where we're not and what markets we're targeting - it's kind of broken down into development markets, markets we don't have any brand presence in that we want to target and it's into those areas that we spend our time and money (R6).

This long-term approach to invested in and managing the firms brand was reiterated by a lot of respondents:

It's a long term approach we take to managing our brand, because it's definitely cost us money right now, unfortunately the way things have gone the market has slowed down, it will come back but that is where we are playing the long game managing our brand in certain countries, but you've got to be selective, you can't do it everywhere, you have to take the attitude - so we did it there 3/4 years ago, it's now time to pick another part of the world where we start planting the seeds about our brand, right now its Asia in Japan and China (R19).

Both this respondent (R19) and the following by respondent (R13) provided evidence that strategic brand management in specific targeted markets was necessary to achieve their long-term goals, they both explained it wasn't about attempting to grow the brand in all markets simultaneously. Given they both have twenty years or more exporting experience and strong brands in overseas markets then this targeted approach has proven to be successful:

I felt we were in quite a number of markets but we were doing a little bit in a lot of places, so the strategy was very much: let's focus our branding on the core export markets, the top 10, certainly the top 15 and drive the sales there and enter the other markets but not spend as much time and attention there. So, so it was not a case of expanding the number of markets, it was about growing our brand presence in the markets we had (R13).

Several firms discussed the importance of doing research into targeting export markets and gathering market intelligence on the market and potential competitors. Respondent (R31) relayed that strategy was a key element in their exporting decisions and by investing in their branding activities and specially their brand management they hoped to develop one specific target market at a time:

We've been investing money into research, we are putting investment into our brand, we might be looking at sort of investing money in special packaging, marketing activities what have you, so we are quite strategic to go after a market in France but unless you've got that sort of clarity of vision and strategy you can't really just say, well yes we want to develop our export business, we're going to go to more exhibitions or whatever, you have to get quite into the gritty detail of the thing and the French market is a good example for us as to how you really need to go about it. You need to do specific research, look at what sort of infrastructure support marketing activities you need on the ground and be quite strategic with how you manage your brand in that one target market (R31).

With regards to firms planning all their marketing actions to take account of the possible repercussions for the brand image in export markets (Keller, 2013; Santos-Vijande et al. (2013), several firms commented that after sales and returns were an important element of how they manage their brand to ensure that if there is an issue which in some industries is inevitable at some stage then the way in which the firm then attends to that issue is taken into consideration in upholding their brand image:

We've got a good brand reputation for support, the key thing for support is that people know you're listening to them in my view. There's nothing more frustrating than if you send in a support request and you get silence (R14).

We do all our own quality control both on the raw materials coming in and on the finished product so we give a warranty on all of our products, it's a warranty tied to our effectiveness of producing so if there's a problem then we'll immediately address it (R2).

If there's a problem then we send people from here, people with specialist skills and knowledge with the right bag of tricks and you 'parachute them in' (R20).

We do have a 24- hour number to call if international buyers have technical issues, it's very rare that anybody would call you for that, we don't really push that capability, most of the major customers can support themselves, they really can. The real customer service part of our brand that really benefits us is our turnaround time of repair, so if somebody's got something they need repaired it's not unusual for our competitors to take 3 months to repair for different parts of the world whereas we try

to get things done within a couple of weeks and if really pushed it'll get done tomorrow type thing (R21).

This typifies a high number of responses, especially companies whereby exporting constitutes more than half of their turnover. They were likely to go out of their way to resolve a customer issue or complaint regardless of geographic location and it was common to hear photographic evidence was all that was required to send a replacement or in the case of large high price items an engineer to be flown out to assess and potentially repair the issue on site, (R20) was speaking metaphorically when they said they would “parachute people in”, stressing the fact they would get their engineers on site quickly by any means.

In a candid discussion, though respondent (R31) agreed that they would also strive to achieve excellent after sales in terms of replacement parts or service requirements to ensure their brand image was held in high regard. They also implied that they could actually build better quality branded products which would last longer but do not because this would lose them revenue from providing replacement parts in future years:

We have got to be careful we don't do ourselves out of jobs, we have got to watch that, we provide great branded materials but you don't want to build something that lasts too long because we are continually replacing something that need replacing and if you suddenly come in with a new material that doesn't need replaced you are doing yourself out of a job (R31).

There were other example of firms carefully planning their activities around securing a strong brand image, especially when there is the potential for low quality copies in the technology sector:

I think you have to ensure that you're building and managing your brand image in foreign markets. To the point that buyers realise what is and what isn't the real product, and because it is quite technical it would be hard to copy it to a point that it did exactly what the technology is meant to do (R22).

The following is an example to highlight, since it shows an underlying emotional set of attributes allow this company to set higher prices than their competitors selling products which do a similar function. Thus, it supports a notion initially only associated with B2C brands that business customers can also be prepared to pay a premium for a known brand. It therefore supports the assertion by Bendixen et al. (2004) that firms can command a price premium through B2B branding:

Prices are a dirty business; you want to sell on brand value, always you want to have your product to the point that I'm beating the competition because our products and overall buying experience is so much better than the competition. So, we win by being the best because once you get like for like then the price plummets, at that point they just come back and trade you off who's going to go the lowest and we've had times where our competitors are selling at 50% of the price of what we're selling but they {the buyers} still buy from us (R14).

In agreement with competing on brand value, strong relationships and quality rather than prices, respondent (R2) commented:

If it's our brand then they know their quality's being looked after and they could be paying a premium. It's not coming in from china, it's not being produced in some shed somewhere and we are not going to suddenly reduce the quality, but

I'm not saying they're always paying a premium, if they're on the ball then they'll be getting a competitive price but if at any point the raw material costs go up then you can present your case and say this is where we're at, our price of cost has went up we're going to have to move your price as well so they understand the situation it's not just like they say that's just tough (R2).

The following statement from respondent (R34) reinforces that B2B brands can command a higher price provided they are managed in such a way to ensure superior performance benefits are promoted to international buyers:

Our brand is based on performance and reliability in that particular market, it's certainly not low cost so therefore the way we manage our brand is all based on just making sure that we perform well and the word gets out. It's a clique market the sonar market, you know you pretty much know all the people and how to put the word out so that's how we do it so our brand is preserved by the fact that we continue to operate in that market in a successful way and we continue with making sure we break the boundaries in terms of performance, you know everybody knows that there's an {Brand} out there that's better than everybody else's and that's what we continue to do just get the word out (R34).

There was an interesting example of one firm that had invested significantly more into managing their brand internationally than their larger competitors which had the unusual effect of the larger competitors asking to utilise their brand in order to assist with selling more of their own similar products:

From a brand perspective, we have become known as thought leaders in the field we have had competitors coming to us asking to use our brand to help them sell their product, we know that the brand that we have and the standing we have wants to leveraged by much larger corporates than ourselves in their bid to enter the space (R16).

The following extract from a participant clarifies common misconceptions regarding 'intermediaries' e.g. distributors, resellers or agents:

There's always been a differentiation between distributors, resellers and agents - the terms are definitely mixed up sometimes, our distributors are not really distributors, they don't bring stuff in a hold it, they don't stock hold, a distributor would typically buy a hundred grand's worth of kit, put it on the shelf and distribute it/sell it as required, an agent is actually representing the company, they would sell it as if they were our company, we have none of that and we don't have distributors, what we really have, although we call them distributors is resellers - people overseas who will facilitate a sale, they will promote our products, they will buy it when there's a requirement and they will supply it or they will create the conduit for the customer to come direct to us and we will pay them a commission because they did the work (R19).

Most participating companies stated they used a combination of direct sales along with one or two intermediaries as their channel management strategy. This form of multi-channel strategy is increasingly being used as a means to gain sustainable competitive advantage in overseas business markets (Rosenbloom, 2007). Thus, the need for strong B2B brand management is crucial to ensuring the firms core values are consistently relayed across

borders by different intermediaries along with the company's direct sales to business customers overseas. Products of a high technical nature were more likely to be sold exclusively directly thus signifying the suppliers didn't trust intermediaries could provide precise knowledge of such specialised products and in turn this could negatively affect their brand.

Strategically managing a firm's brand in many overseas markets can be a difficult task so some firms that were not able to meet the required performance outcomes commented they would cut their losses and scale back their efforts:

We've spent quite a lot of time in the past year trying to minimise the complexity within the business, we used to export to probably 35 countries and that's been reduced because there's certain markets that if they don't meet the threshold for sales then we've just had to walk away, it's just not feasible to supply everybody because you can understand we're an unknown brand in all these markets. If we can't see any growth potential for our brand in markets then we unfortunately have to walk away because you're adding complexity for no real reason (R26).

Therefore, this respondent demonstrated the need for measurable export performance of their brand both in a financial sense by meeting financial goals and market performance by meeting sales requirements.

Overall, these findings suggest that respondents regard both internal and external environmental factors are being important antecedents of B2B international strategic brand management. In addition, and in agreement with the literature the findings support the importance of the measurement items used as prompts to discuss firm's strategic brand management practices.

The following section will provide some findings in relation to how participants considered their export performance.

5.3.4 Export Performance

There have been many studies which have utilised export performance measures for firms (e.g. Morgan et al. (2009; 2012; Vorhies et al. 2005) so discussions with the respondents were less focused on ensuring these measures were adequate for this study given they have been previously rigorously tested. However, it was interesting to see that different firms placed more emphasis on financial performance over market performance and vice versa.

5.3.4.1 Financial Performance

Commonly accepted measures of export financial performance include export profitability, return on Investment (ROI), export margins and reaching export financial goals (Morgan et al. 2012). Respondent (R34) made their position very clear with regards to increased profits through managing their brand in new overseas markets as the reason they export:

It's quite simple, we realised that we'd actually have to export to grow the brand and the reason we wanted to grow the brand was to grow the profit, simple (R34).

They went on to explain that in their industry measures such as market share are not accurately attainable so they focus on purely financial performance:

It's very difficult to look at performance based on market share, it's almost impossible to get the complete figures published about the overall market we're in. So, we basically look at the profits and the turnover (R34).

The following respondents were also good examples of ultimately focusing on the financial performance of their exporting activities and specifically their strategic brand management.

When asked about how they measure performance the following comments were made:

Purely financial, we measure performance in these terms (R8).

Our brand has got to be profitable, absolutely, if it's not profitable there's no point whatsoever, well thank god that we exported because the state of the UK economy we'd have gone bust if we hadn't (R3).

When it comes to the performance of our brand, I think we've done ok so far but I think ultimately, it'll be measured on money. There will come a time, I'd say by the end of this year we'll need to start measuring it on pure finance and I'd think that with our brands American market performance, we could easily double our turnover just on the one marketplace, one foreign market (R11).

The way we manage our brand, we would be very diligent in understanding what each addressable market opportunity is, what the likely level of profitability is before we even embrace the opportunity (R10).

Generally speaking we measure performance as a function of the total income relative to last year and to this year and next year and so on (R16).

Respondent (R19) discussed that although they based performance on financial projections and subsequent returns, the headline figures could at times be misleading due to underlying reasons in certain markets:

The bottom line is always money isn't it, it's how much you're getting out of your markets, internally we monitor it and try analyse it based on as I said the targets we set – if we expect to do £50,000 in a certain territory then we'll base on that to say whether or not we're succeeding there but that can be misleading because you start thinking that well wait a minute, last year I did a million pounds in Norway and I only did £20,000 this year - yeah because there's usually an underlying reason so that's the understanding the dynamics of the industry you're in (R19).

Respondent (R2) was clear that they also focus on the financial side of their export performance, stating that it's about sales volume and export margins:

Its financial, we've not got the data to hold down say you know we've got such or such a % of the market and at the end of the day it would be so small it wouldn't be worth registering anyway so its financial, how much can we sell and how much margin can we make on exports. as long as, if we can grow our top line volume and grow our margin then that where the business wants to be (R2).

5.3.4.2 Market Performance

Commonly accepted measures of export market performance include market share growth, growth in sales revenue, the ability to acquire new customers and increasing sales to existing customers (Vorhies et al. 2005; Morgan et al. 2009). The following comments from respondents provided good examples of whereby focus was also placed on the market performance of their exporting activities and specifically their strategic brand management.

When asked about how they measure performance the following comments were made:

We've raised the profile and reputation of the brand domestically and overseas and it's been very successful over the last few years, we've had consistent growth of between 20-30% per year, in terms of how we gauge it, it's obviously done by a sale by value or sales by volume basis but we also gauge it more anecdotally on how's our relationship with the market (R13).

What we do is we set a target turnover and then we also set targets for wish list customers, we also set targets for trying to retain customers and then grow customers so that's kind of our measures and we'll always have a look at that - you know have we managed to retain all our customers and if not why, sometimes we find that we might have one year often the customer will buy from you, well not often, sometimes, and then they want a break one year then they'll come back the next year or maybe business is bad for them overall and they just place top up orders or their life's change and we just change with them then they come back to us (R9).

This respondent went on to discuss the importance of the relationships they have with their buyers which is in line with the B2B branding literature (Kuhn et al. 2008; Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). They build such strong relationships with their overseas buyers that they know if they have issues and try to help if possible, it's all about the long-term relationship:

We know the people we know their problems, we can find them what they need to buy because we know them and I'm really seeing it now - how can we get to know our customers better (R9).

In terms of the importance of increasing market share to measuring export performance respondent (R29) commented:

It will be based on quantity and the chance of success and the biggest market opportunities are definitely Brazil, followed by Argentina, followed by Chile but the Dominican Republic is high up, Peru is high up, some countries where you wouldn't expect it to be high up but we've looked at the numbers and the export and import numbers and the net import, for if Brazil for example, net imports 1 million tons and Peru net imports 500 tons we're looking at the million tons because if we can get 1% of that then that's great (R29).

A good example of the importance placed on the brand to enable repeat business was discussed by respondent (R32), they stated:

I would say we look at finance but although that's important, success is determined upon entering a market and doing repeat business because we have limited time and limited resource, the only way we can sustain a lead role the way we're doing is by reinforcing the brand and doing repeat business (R32).

With regards to sales revenue, respondent (R2) discussed that although this was an important indicator of performance for them, they also had to take into consideration a problem with one of their major customer which could skew results. They would reflect on export performance over the past ten years when making goals to double their exporting activity in the next five-year period:

The past 5 years it's been up and down, it's been up one year, it's been down the following year because one of our major customers had a problem and the last year it was up again so I think we're still on a growth pattern from there but if one of your major customers has a problem in the market it can have a big impact so it's over the 10 year period we're certainly looking at, the business is on a growth path for exports and we're really, we want to double it ideally in the next 5 years (R2).

The acquisition of new export customers was cited by various firms as being a good indicator of performance, the following respondent (R8) commented that built into their plans were the acquisition of new customers in certain markets (both large and small) and building their brand in these markets:

We had a plan that we worked on so there was certain markets that were successfully targeted for new customers Russia and Germany being two of them, then we targeted smaller markets - Scandinavia and to do that we specifically brought in research persons so there were people who were going to concentrate on building our brand in these smaller markets, Scandinavia in particular, Greece was another one (R8).

Therefore, an indicator of performance was in the first instance, whether they had managed to attain new customers in the targeted markets and develop their brand presence, not how much financial success they had achieved so far within the new markets. Though, it was discussed that this would be measured in future years.

In agreement with this, respondent (R15) was strategically focused on opening new markets and growing their global network for the future:

It is about opening new markets, expanding our global network because on the back of that we can start to look at software renewals we're doing now, look at commission structures and training and sharing the contacts we have as a network so it adds value to every partner, the work we have been doing in Columbia could be sent out as a case study (R15).

There was some evidence of strategic performance measures, respondent (R32) stated that they would measure performance against their strategic objectives:

Typically, we would measure our export performance against our strategic objectives so for Asia and Latin America regions, I think when we started we were 8% and we said our target is to get to 25% of our business being in Asia and Latin America, now its 21% so that's a type of measure we would use (R32).

However, the Managing Director of this firm did also go on to say they also measure specific financial performance measures along with placing a high degree of focus on their strategic objectives being met.

The previous two performance sections have explored the importance of financial and market performance in overseas markets, the findings show firms use common methods and measures to evaluate their export performance both in terms of financial and market performance.

The following section will provide insights from the interviews with regards to the potential moderating effects being a UK company can have on their strategic brand management performance outcomes.

5.3.5 Country of Origin (COO) Effect

The focus of COO research has shifted conceptually from assessing differences in preferences and product evaluations based on the mere notion of the national origin of a product or service (e.g. USA, France, China) to a much more complex construct which considers the entire image of the countries under consideration (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Traditional COO research focused heavily on investigating if primarily ‘consumers’ prefer products or brands originating from a given country in comparison to another; however, scholars are now taking an arguably more useful approach by putting emphasis on analysing why perceived images of the countries involved create an influential effect (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Of the few recent studies which have looked at some form of COO effect in the context of B2B branding items raised to assess the image of countries include if people from a country are proud to 1) achieve high standards 2) known as

hardworking, and if the country is known to have 1) a raised standard of living 2) a well-educated workforce, and lastly if the companies from a given country are thought to possess high technical skills (Chen et al. 2011).

There was some consensus within the participating companies that being a UK based company can strengthen their brand offering to some effect in international B2B markets. The following statements from respond firms support the assertion that UK COO can have some degree of positive effect:

The UK certainly has a reputation for producing high quality goods; so being a UK company is certainly relevant; for example, this was the case for the company we export to in Pakistan, talking to us they recognised they were going to have pay a bit more than what they were previously doing going to the far east so it was significant in their decision (R17).

I talk about it because I hear about it but directly, all I can go on is that we have an overseas customer base and it likes our UK made product or they like our UK made product, and I guess that does carry some weight and I will get some customers that will actually ask for a certificate to say that it's UK made (R1).

We put the UK flag on the actual products, that's based on the feedback we got from a couple of our international buyers, that we should put that on the products (R7).

The UK is an enabler for comfort the client knows they're going to get top quality, it's going to be the best in the world, really top quality, it also highlights the point that

there's little or no corruption or funny business, it's a clean deal, we're not going to run away that we're going to be here in 2 or 4 or 5 years' time (R20).

However, respondent (R27) explained from their perspective COO alone wouldn't necessitate an international buyer to pay a higher price for their brand:

There's obviously a cache because something is an imported brand in china let's say or because it's a Scottish or UK brand or whatever but it's a bigger global market..... international buyers won't pay a higher price {fx} unless they really think there is a specific tangible benefit because of the fact that brand was made in the UK (R27).

Several companies were specific about certain export markets which were more receptive to the COO effect; for example, this statement from one respondent:

We won the queens award for enterprise, we've won over 50 awards but that's probably the biggest stand out one, and in Hong Kong for example, they love that. I think we do have some sort of you know cache, an air or quality about us because we're an award-winning UK brand (R23).

Furthermore, specific industries were also specified by some respondents as more likely to see benefits from COO:

There is absolutely no doubt that in our field: the sonar field, that the UK has a worldwide reputation going back to probably the 1st world war (R34).

Conversely, some respondents identified particular international markets whereby COO would not be expected to have a beneficial effect for their exports:

I wouldn't say country of origin is a big benefit to us, in the Middle East if I'm pitching, I've just come back from Kuwait, Kuwait is very US orientated, although you do get a little bit of benefit from some markets where they tend to model their legislation on the UK guidelines (R6).

This indicates the perceived brand value of UK goods and services in a B2B context could be stronger from certain countries and industries, this could be examined further allowing for comparisons to be made between different sets of countries and of particular interest could be perceptions from countries with high growth economies.

An interesting and unexpected point was conveyed by one respondent (R31), that proof of COO can be necessary in some Middle Eastern markets just to be able to do business there. In the situation they described, it was necessary to prove COO was the UK and not from particular countries where international buyers in the region will refuse to do business:

Some plastic manufacturers are based in Israel, so we need to have documentation on the country of origin for all materials and a paper trail for buyers that want to know where it has been produced. The first thing you are ever taught on an export course is that if you are ever going to send to the Arabs.... and this is out of the mouth of an ex government employee, make sure there is at no time any paper trail to show you dealing with Israel. Even if your goods are on a ship that passes into Israeli waters before it reaches the Arab Emirates they will refuse the goods, that's how strong it is (R31).

Just as a B2B brand can be seen as having a more useful effect in the early stages of the decision-making process where all parties have no previous experience of dealing with each other (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011), the COO effect on international B2B brands was seen to strengthen this effect. Several respondents alluded to the fact COO did not necessarily guarantee a contract; however, it would in most cases enable an initial conversation which may not have been as readily possible if the brand was from another country than the UK.

The following statements from respondents demonstrate this:

This is not a monkey tool we produce, you know we're the guys {UK} that have put so much out into the world and you've got great engineering badge of honour with high quality staff so people get really excited. I spoke to a guy from Mexico City yesterday and he's really excited about getting his hands on the product, he's really excited the fact there's a trust in doing business with us in the UK, if I was based in Morocco I would probably find less people would trust me, but the UK thing they're more willing to talk to you and explore opportunities with you (R15).

What also happens is you have to still consider quality, we've had a lot of our customers who've built equipment in the china's of this world and they come crawling back 2 years later with their tails between their legs saying will you please help us and we want to take a reality check and come back to UK manufacturing (R20).

Interestingly the next two respondents both spoke about COO ability to “open the door” for potential business; however, they were sceptical about COO ability to assist in actually securing a deal:

When we go to conferences in the US we turn up in kilts and all sorts of things, in the end the people aren't going to buy your product just because you wear a kilt or because you're British but it opens the door for you (R14).

It wouldn't even give you a first order, it'll give you a handshake, to get you in the door to speak to them but ultimately after that it is how you perform it has an effect for the first 5 minutes but ultimately it comes down to the company and its reputation, {COO} it just gets you through the door (R29).

The following respondent with a lot of exporting experience took the viewpoint that UK COO has declined and the increased quality of cheaper products from for example China was diminishing the UK COO effect, conversely the COO effect for Chinese B2B suppliers may be therefore be increasing:

Yeah it helps {COO}, but it's not the nirvana it used to be - British products were always perceived as the best. They are still seen positively in a lot of ways in ex colonial markets, the British markets we used to have in Africa, we still have a good standing but if a wholesaler brings in a Chinese product and it's a good product and it sells, because it sells on price, then your chance of selling your product can be more limited (R2).

An interesting discussion with a leading technology firm respondent R16 provided some noteworthy insights. Although some firms believe UK COO effect may be diminishing for manufacturing as was per the previous statement by (R2), in areas such as technology the COO effect for UK B2B is seen to be increasing:

Being from the UK certainly opens the door especially in the defence and security space because of that trust that people have. I would argue the UK is a country that has defended or extremely well defended cyberspaces, this is also an advantage to {brand name} because of our technology and we're aware the UK government does a lot. People will often say the UK government doesn't do enough for cyber security but they do an awful lot more than other governments, just starting with simple things like that so definitely being a UK based company has significant advantages creating trust between us and customers, having the brand {brand name} and being thought leaders helps a lot in terms of conveying and leveraging that trust, hopefully we haven't betrayed that trust up until today. If we do sign an NDA people generally trust that we'll not share the information outside, we've had conversations with our clients where companies from other countries they sign NDA's that no one actually believes that they NDA are valid (R16).

In general, there was evidence to suggest that through COO respondent firms are realising secondary associations to their advantage and increasing their brand equity (Spence & Essoussi, 2010). Therefore, it can be proposed that COO can strengthen or weaken the inter-relationships within the model between strategic brand management and the effects of strategic brand management of international firm performance.

This section has described the qualitative stage of this study, which broadly supported the conceptual framework which has been developed through the extant literature. The following section will provide a set of research hypothesis to be tested within the subsequent quantitative stage of this study.

5.4 Research Hypothesis

This study contends that the role of the brand and specifically strategic brand management is a key deterministic factor in B2B exporters' performance. Therefore, the following research hypothesis are created based on the review of literature and supported by findings from the qualitative stage of the research. These hypotheses will be tested in the following quantitative stage of the study.

Firstly, findings suggest strong internal resources and capabilities are contributors to building superior strategic brand management which, in turn is an important determinant of improved international firm performance. Financial resources concern the ability to access cash and capital (e.g. Gomez-Mejia, 1988). The importance of international financial resources was supported within the qualitative stage of the study as displayed in the following quotes and supports and informs the first set of hypothesis:

The internal resource is money really (R4).

We have access to capital so, if, I guess like everything else, we have to present the case to be able to get that funding but we have done that around the world (R24)

The availability of sufficient financial resources stimulates the deployment of superior capabilities in export markets (Spyropoulou et al. 2011), hence it is hypothesised:

- H1 (a). A firm's Financial Resources are positively associated with the development of its International Market Information Capabilities
- H1 (b). A firm's Financial Resources are positively associated with the development of its International Branding Capabilities

- H1 (c). A firm's Financial Resources are positively associated with the development of its International Marketing Planning Capabilities

“A strategic approach to branding is important to ensure that brands leverage the most recent and relevant market information into creating more powerful brands, ones that have strong market positions” (Merrilees et al. 2012). The role of marketing and branding capabilities emerged as important influences on developing superior strategic brand management in foreign markets. Key respondents from the qualitative stage of the research frequently emphasised the contribution of marketing planning and information capabilities along with branding capabilities to the management of their brands.

For example, there was evidence from respondents to support the importance of international market information capabilities to mitigate risk for their brands in foreign markets:

all done based on an awful lot of research and we don't do things on a whim so we are not up for risk that could have a negative impact on our brand (R26).

However, there was also some suggestion that certain firms did not place the same emphasis on market information capabilities impacting their strategic brand management in overseas markets:

Part of our brand philosophies to run faster than everyone else so they worry about us more than we worry about them (R14).

There was widespread support from key respondents that international branding capabilities have a positive influence on the international strategic management of their brand:

All the staff understand our brand (R29).

The trust with our brand and our people and our products is an incredibly powerful thing, that really is the crux of our business (R32).

With regards to international marketing planning capabilities, the following statement was provided from a brand leader in over 40 overseas markets:

Our international marketing plan goes hand in hand with our business plan, we have a strategy and that strategy obviously includes how we can grow the company (R33).

An additional statement from respondent (R11) supports the importance for setting clear marketing goals in relation to their overseas branding activities:

establishing our brand in America is our goal for the rest of this year (R11)

Therefore, informed by the qualitative stage of the study the following research hypothesis are suggested:

- H2. The development of a firm's International Market Information Capabilities are positively related to the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management
- H3. The development of a firm's International Branding Capabilities are positively related to the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management
- H4. The development of a firm's International Marketing Planning Capabilities are positively related to the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management

Environmental factors are forces that shape both the domestic (micro) and overseas (macro) environment which exporters operate (Katsikeas et al. 2000). They are essentially external factors beyond the control of the exporting organisation (Aaby & Slater 1989). There was support found from the qualitative stage of the study that macro external environmental stimuli could influence international strategic brand management:

We also get funding from SDI because we're deemed a high growth company and we get a third of our costs paid for international work, for developing our brand in new markets (R12).

This influence was also supported when considering micro external environmental stimuli:

Within the UK the market is, in our view, quite saturated so there's a lot of other competitors for {product} in the UK, so if you can find a customer outside the UK, you don't have to go through the same hoops. This has certainly played a part in why we are now pushing to increase our brand presence overseas (R2).

Both external environmental macro enabling conditions and micro precipitating conditions have been shown to be sources of stimuli which can influence a B2B firm's strategic brand management internationally. Therefore, it is hypothesised:

- H5. High levels of macro environmental stimuli have a positive effect on the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management
- H6. High levels of micro environmental stimuli have a positive effect on the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management

Price is a hallmark of competitive intensity in export markets Jaworski & Kohli (1993), key respondents provided support for the notion that higher levels of competitive intensity through areas such as increased price competition will have a negative influence on their ability to cultivate superior strategic brand management practices:

although they understand... that our brand stands for quality, when it comes down to it they'll decide to take the risk anyway because they can get their end product made for a price that's that bit less (R17).

In overseas markets, a firm is embedded within an environment that has certain levels of competitive intensity which in turn influences its strategic type and the actions/characteristics it initiates in the pursuit of superior performance (e.g., Porter, 1980; Matsuno and Mentzer, 2000). Therefore, informed also by the qualitative findings it is hypothesised:

- H7. High levels of competitive intensity have a direct negative effect on the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management

Managers need to expertly utilise their strategic brand management and actively develop these skills in order to advance unique methods of conveying superior value to customers therefore realising a favourable export branding position (Keller & Lehmann, 2006; O'Cass & Ngo, 2007), which in turn will lead to increased export performance (Spyropoulou et al. 2011). The qualitative interviews provided widespread support as the following respondents clearly elucidated:

It's quite simple, we realised that we'd actually have to export to grow the brand and the reason we wanted to grow the brand was to grow the profit, simple (R34).

it was not a case of expanding the number of markets, it was about growing our brand presence in the markets we had (R13).

On the grounds of the precedent evidence and supported by the qualitative stage of this study the following research hypothesis are created:

- H8 (a). Superiority in International Strategic Brand Management is positively associated with a firm's Financial Performance in overseas markets
- H8 (b). Superiority in International Strategic Brand Management is positively associated with a firm's Market Performance in overseas markets

Chen et. al. (2011), assert the COO effect has been a key theoretical and empirical issue related to brand equity in international marketing. "Favourable country perceptions lead to favourable inferences about brand attributes and subsequent favourable evaluations" (Gurhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000). The qualitative stage of this research has provided support to the extant literature:

I think we do have some sort of you know cache, an air or quality about us because we're an award-winning UK brand (R23).

This is not a monkey tool we produce, you know we're the guys {UK} that have put so much out into the world and you've got great engineering badge of honour with high quality staff so people get really excited.

However, there was also a note of cautiousness shown by some key respondents to the degree of influence which COO can provide:

It wouldn't even give you a first order, it'll give you a handshake, to get you in the door to speak to them but ultimately after that it is how you perform (R29).

Overall, informed by the literature and qualitative stage of this study it can be suggested that COO can have a significant influence on the effectiveness of international B2B strategic brand management on firm performance which leads to the creation of the hypothesis:

- H9 (a). High levels of Country of Origin Effect have a positive effect on the association between International Strategic Brand Management and a firm's Financial Performance in overseas markets
- H9 (b). High levels of Country of Origin Effect have a positive effect on the association between International Strategic Brand Management and a firm's Market Performance in overseas markets

Each of the hypotheses outlined in this section have theoretical underpinnings from the extant body of literature. The qualitative stage of the research assisted with the process of narrowing down and limiting the most relevant variables to be studied and tested in the experimental quantitative stage of the research which is reported in the following chapter. The hypothesised relationships specified (H1 to H9) will provide insight into the variables that influence a firm's international strategic brand management and resultant performance within an B2B context.

5.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the most relevant variables and their inter-relationships ahead of their final inclusion within the conceptual framework and prior to testing these relationships during the quantitative stage of this study. The qualitative fieldwork provided comprehensive support and allowed for parsimony for the variables selected, all variables were found to be essential and none were required to be removed. By exploring the variables and inter-relationships it was possible to confirm some of the initial theoretical thinking. The model suggests that both internal and external environmental forces influence a B2B firm's international ability to achieve superior strategic brand management and by achieving this leads to improved firm export performance. Country of origin effect was found to likely play a role in moderating the aforementioned achievement of improved performance by B2B firm's strategically managing their brands in overseas markets. Lastly, this section has provided a succinct set of hypothesis which will be tested in the following chapter which reports the quantitative stage of this study.

Chapter 6 – Quantitative Research Stage

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the quantitative study findings which employed a survey design. This builds upon the qualitative findings and the conceptual theoretical framework presented in the previous Chapter 5. The methodology; provides, an analysis of the sample and measurement scales. Basic information about the data is reported using descriptive statistics in order to provide rudimentary descriptions of the data collected.

Data preparation, normality measures and the psychometric attributes encompassing the reliability and validity measures are assessed and subsequently presented using version 24 of statistical software package SPSS. The Structured Equation Modelling (SEM) results then follow using AMOS graphics version 24. The path coefficients of the hypothesised relationships and main moderating factor ‘Country of Origin’ are specified and presented.

6.2 Methodology

This section begins by providing a comprehensive overview of: the sample, inclusive of the sampling design process; the target population; the sampling frame; the sampling technique; sample size determination; execution of the sampling process and validation of the sample. Then, non-response bias is addressed and a profile of the sample is reported. Following this, the development of the measurement instrument and pilot testing of the questionnaire is presented. Lastly, the measurement scales are described for: the independent variables; the moderating variables; the dependant variables and the control variables and demographics.

6.2.1 Sampling

6.2.1.1 The Sampling Design Process

The sampling design process contains six key steps as are displayed in Fig 6.1. These steps are closely interrelated and pertinent to all parts of the marketing research project, from the initial definition of the problem to the presentation of the findings (Malhotra & Birks, 2007. p.406).

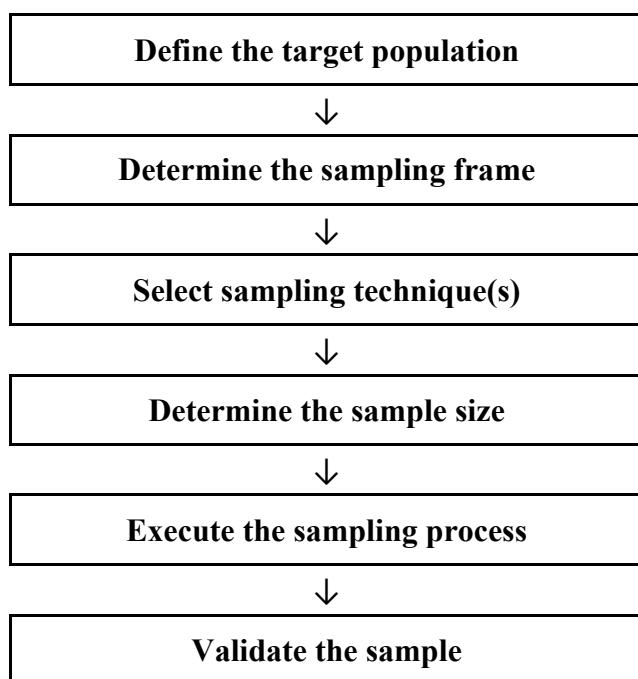


Fig 6.1 The Sampling Design Process (Malhotra & Birks, 2007. p.406).

Along with these steps, Aaker et al. (2011. p.336) suggest two additional activities: firstly, following the determination of a sample frame, any sample frame differences from the target population should be reconciled; secondly, following the data collection from the respondent's stage, any potential non-response bias should be addressed.

6.2.1.2 Identifying the Target Population

Given there are inherent differences between B2C and B2B firms branding efforts (Lilien & Grewal, 2012), the population for this study includes only UK firms which conduct B2B business internationally. Branding is considered to be just as important for firms providing services as it is for goods (Leek & Christodoulides, 2012). Additionally, the service sector is becoming increasingly important within the international arena (Chen et al. 2016). Previous studies have omitted the service sector, which represented a void in the literature; therefore, it was vital the target population included firms providing services along with those providing goods. The use of multiple industries within the study allows for generalisation of the results and is consistent with the majority of previous international marketing research (c.f. Sousa et al. 2008; Chen et al. 2016). Table 6.1 displays various industries that were included within the study. In many cases firms stated they operated in multiple industries.

Automotive & Parts	Food
Aerospace	Metal
Chemicals	Oil & Gas/Energy
Construction	Pharmaceuticals
Defence	Real Estate
Digital, Creative & IT	Research & Development
Education	Scientific
Electronics	Spirits
Engineering	Technology
Financial & Insurance Services	Textiles
Other Manufacturing	

Table 6.1 Industries Included within the Study

Certain key eligibility criteria (firm size, location of the firm and number of years' exporting) posited for the sample of firms within this study were met by the inclusion of the QA database. These eligibility criteria are shown in Table 6.2.

- 1) UK based – headquarters in the UK and submit UK tax returns (study is from UK firm perspective).
- 2) Only include B2B firms currently exporting (study is only looking at firms conducting B2B business within an international context).
- 3) Include both goods and service suppliers.
- 4) Must not have taken breaks from exporting.
- 5) Firms included in the sample population should have at least £100,000 per annum sales in international markets (must be conducting enough business overseas to have the experience to accurately answer the questions within the survey).
- 6) Minimum 2 full time staff - sample not to include sole trader firms (SME, Medium and large organisations were all included to heighten generalisability).
- 7) Must have been exporting for a minimum of five years - accepted length of time to have the experience to answer the questions adequately (Morgan et al. 2012).

Table 6.2 Eligibility Criteria for Firms Participating within the Quantitative Stage of Study

A sampling unit is an element or a unit containing the element; the element is usually the respondent in survey research (Malhotra, 2010. p.372). For this study, the sampling unit was key respondents with the knowledge and experience to accurately complete the questionnaire. Key informant surveys are an essential data source in marketing and management research (Homburg, 2016). Key respondents could hold a number of different job titles depending on the organisational structure of the firm; for example, CEO, Managing Director, Marketing Manager, Export Manager or Sales Director. A recent study in the Journal of Marketing (JM) suggests that reliability of key informants is linked to position and tenure, those informants in high hierarchical positions and with longer tenure in the firm are likely to be more reliable (Homburg et al. 2016). This reinforces an earlier sentiment

conveyed by Kumar et al. (1993), who suggested that response reliability is therefore linked to the experience of the particular informant. Further details about the key informants within this study will be displayed in a coming section but to summarise the informants were generally in high hierarchical positions and had held their current role for a sufficient tenure to qualify as reliable.

6.2.1.3 Sampling Frame

The sample frame is often discussed in relation to the population to whom the research addresses (Parasuraman et al. 2006); however, it is important to distinguish between the population and the sample frame (Aaker et al. 2011. p.338). The sample frame is usually a list of population members which is then used to obtain a sample; for example, it could include magazine subscribers, college students or hardware stores (Aaker et al. 2011. p.338); members of particular business groups with entry conditions would also fit a criterion. The implementation of the sampling design process within international marketing research is rarely an easy undertaking and developing an appropriate sampling frame can be a difficult task. (Malhotra, 2010. p.393). For instance, in many countries, in particular developing countries, secondary sources may not be able to provide reliable information about the target population (Malhotra, 2010. p.394). Given that this study was conducted in the UK, which is governed by stricter laws in terms of the recording and access to company data, some of the reliability concerns are eased.

The sample frame for this study comprised of the winners of the UK Queen's Award (QA) for International trade over a five-year period, from the year 2012 to 2016. The QA are the UK's longest running award in recognition of international trade and have been utilised in previous studies looking at different areas of international marketing (c.f. Baker & Abou-

Zeid, 1982; Javaid, 1985; Crick & Bradshaw, 1999; Beleska-Spasova & Glaister, 2013). The author of this thesis believes there are many opportunities utilising this sample frame which may have been overlooked in the past. However, as mentioned, there have still been a number of studies using this sample frame which have been published in well regarded marketing and business and management journals over the past few decades. The approach this study takes is to investigate the best practices of high-performance exporters; therefore, the QA database provides a suitable set of firms. This approach of investigating high-performance firms has been adopted by various studies in the marketing literature (e.g. Venkatraman, 1990; Vorhies & Morgan, 2003; 2005).

Within the field of strategic management exists the proposition that 'fit' (also termed consistency or coalignment) between strategy and its context (the external environment and internal characteristics of the firm) has positive implications for performance (Venkatraman & Prescott, 1990). The literature specifies that when fit among multiple variables is considered simultaneously (as in the holistic study of internal and external antecedents of strategic brand management) and the impact on criterion variables (e.g. performance) is assessed, then fit should be conceptualised and assessed as profile deviation (e.g. Venkatraman, 1990; Vorhies & Morgan, 2003; 2005). The basic concept is that if a profile of strategic dimensions can be obtained for a set of high performing firms then any deviations from this profile imply negative performance (Venkatraman & Prescott, 1990). However, when ideal profiles cannot be precisely specified from existing theory then it is advocated that fit should be assessed with empirically derived ideal profiles (e.g. Gresov, 1989; Ketchen et al. 1993). In the context of B2B strategic brand management fit with export performance, this approach requires the identification of high performing B2B firms (Venkatraman & Prescott, 1990). These firms are considered to have ideal profiles because

their superior export performance suggests that they have configured their organisation in such a way that enables superior strategic brand management practices (Van de Ven & Drazin, 1985).

The Queens Awards publishes a press book each year with a primary contact for each business so by combining the contacts for 2012-2016, this served as a suitable database of high performance exporters meeting an already pre-defined criterion. The use of databases of relevant exporting firms for study is frequently used in international marketing; for example, using the 'Dun and Bradstreet' USA database (Morgan et al. 2004; Morgan et al. 2012; Kaleka & Morgan, 2017), the 'Dun and Bradstreet' Australia database (Merrilees et al. 2011), the Hellenic Export Promotion Organisation (Spyropoulou et. al. 2011) or the ICAP Exporters Directory (Leonidou et al. 2013).

The eligibility criteria for Queens Award winners (see Appendix 4) already requires firms to have proven they had steep year on year growth (without dips) in overseas sales for over a minimum of three years or, substantial year on year growth (without dips) in overseas sales for over a minimum of six years. Therefore, all firms will have been exporting for a minimum of four years (year zero to one does not qualify) and this provided the researcher with a degree of confidence that it was likely most firms will have been exporting for at least five years and have the experience required to answer the questionnaire (e.g. Morgan et al. 2012) (all participant firms did meet the five-year threshold). The majority of QA winners are SME or medium sized firms; however, there are also large organisations with thousands of employees. It was established by Chen et al. (2016) within their comprehensive review of determinants of export performance literature, that a high number of studies (42) included small, medium and large sized firms. Therefore, this study conforms to previous studies guidelines.

Given that participant firms already met with the QA eligibility criteria (see Appendix 4), meant the criteria for this study were largely already met, therefore the QA database was ideal for this study. Aaker et al. (2011. p.340) discusses the importance of dealing with sampling frame difference, for this study, the issue of “superset” needed to be addressed. A superset problem occurs when the sampling frame is in some way larger than the population but contains all the elements of the population (Aaker et al. 2011. p.340). In this study, the QA database complied consisted of all UK firms exporting but does not differentiate for those mainly conducting B2C. It has been established earlier in this thesis that the majority of firms conducting exporting activities are B2B (FSB, 2016a). However, to reduce the likelihood of B2C firms being included within the sample, each firm in the QA database was first given an initial cursory review and any firms mainly operating in a B2C capacity were excluded. It was also necessary to include a filter question within the survey to establish those firms conducting B2C business which had not been identified within the initial review. This meant these firms could be omitted from this study.

6.2.1.4 Selection of Sampling Technique

There are two main sampling techniques or ‘procedures’: probability and non-probability (Aaker et al. 2011. p.340; Malhotra, 2010. p.390). Aaker et al. (2011) specify that probability sampling involves four considerations: firstly, the target population about which the information is being sought must be specified; secondly, the method for selecting the sample needs to be established; thirdly, the sample size must be determined, which will depend on the accuracy needs, the cost and the variation within the population of interest; and lastly, the issue of non-response must be addressed. There are various benefits of probability sampling, including the results being applicable and generalisable to the wider population since the sample will be certain to provide information from a representative group from the

population of interest (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2009). There are downsides to this technique, including a significant increase in the researcher's effort, costs and time (Wilson, 2012).

Table 6.3 displays some of the main factors and conditions for choosing probability and non-probability sampling techniques. A consideration when choosing the sampling technique is the homogeneity of the population with respect to the variables of interest. A more heterogeneous population would favour probability sampling, because it would be more important to secure a representative sample (Malhotra, 2010. p.390).

Factors	Conditions favouring the use of	
	Nonprobability sampling	Probability sampling
Nature of research	Exploratory	Conclusive
Relative magnitude of sampling and non-sampling errors	Non-sampling errors are larger	Sampling errors are larger
Variability in the population	Homogeneous (low)	Heterogeneous (High)
Statistical considerations	Unfavourable	Favourable
Operational considerations	Favourable	Unfavourable
Time	Favourable	Unfavourable
Cost	Favourable	Unfavourable

Table 6.3 Choosing Nonprobability versus Probability Sampling (Malhotra, 2010).

As can be seen in Table 6.4, examples of probability sampling include simple random, systematic, stratified and cluster (Malhotra, 2010).

Probability sampling methods	Non-probability sampling methods
Simple random sampling	Convenience sampling
Systematic sampling	Judgemental sampling
Stratified random sampling	Quota sampling
Cluster sampling	Snowball sampling

Table 6.4 Most Commonly Used Sampling Methods

In non-probability sampling, the costs and effort required to create a sample frame are eliminated; however, so is the precision to which the resulting information can be presented (Aaker et al. 2011. p.349). Non-probability sampling relies on the personal judgement of the research, instead of the opportunity to decide on certain sample elements (Malhotra & Birks, 2007. p.410). Non-probability samples can provide good estimates of population characteristics but they don't allow for objective evaluation of the sample results since there is no way of evaluating the probability of any particular element for inclusion within the research, the estimates obtained are not therefore statistically projectable to the population (Malhotra & Birks, 2007. p.410). As can be seen in Table 6.4, examples of non-probability sampling techniques include: convenience sampling, judgemental sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling (Malhotra, 2010).

The sampling method adopted for this study is cluster probability sampling. Cluster sampling is extremely useful when subgroups that are representative of the entire population of interest can be identified (Aaker et al. 2011. p.346). In this study, the QA database represents a cluster of high performance multi industry UK exporters of different sizes who have met defined performance and experience criteria and are located throughout every

single region of the UK. The make-up of the QA database cluster is similar in terms of representing high performance exporters; therefore, indicating similar levels of variability within the cluster (Wilson, 2012. p.190). The researcher does not need to produce a complete sample frame for the total population of UK exporters which would amount to 221,300 firms (FT, 2015; ONS, 2015), instead only needs to develop a suitable sample frame for the cluster of high performing exporters selected (Wilson, 2012. p.190). Cluster sampling is cost effective but does have its limitations, this includes the fact that it can result in relatively imprecise samples, and can be difficult to form heterogeneous clusters because, for example, 'households within a street tend to be similar rather than dissimilar' (Aaker et al. 2011. p.347). The author acknowledges there are suggested procedures for advanced cluster sampling (e.g. Malhotra & Birks, 2007. p.423); however, this study implemented a simplified version of cluster sampling which represents a one-stage cluster sample (also known as simple cluster sampling). The QA database was thoroughly analysed as a potential representative cluster of high performance UK exporters, and once its suitability was confirmed, data was collected from all of the firms within the selected cluster (Wilson, 2012. p.191).

6.2.1.5 Determination of the Sample Size

A challenging decision for any researcher is the determination of the most appropriate sample size for study, this process relates to financial, managerial and statistical issues (Wilson, 2012. p.194). Sample size is influenced by the average size of samples in similar studies (Malhotra, 2010. p.374). Leonidou et al. (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of studies investigating marketing strategy determinants of export performance which contained similar studies as a point of comparison, they found sample sizes ranged from 48 to 690 and two thirds of all studies had less than 150 firms. Leonidou et al. (2010) conducted a review

of leading marketing journals' contribution to the international marketing discipline, they determined that more than half of all empirical studies reviewed used sample sizes of less than 250 firms. Sections 2.1.9 and 2.3.3 contain a summary review of previous B2B branding literature and international branding literature respectively, these both contain numerous examples of prior studies employing comparable sized survey samples.

The incidence rate refers to the rate of occurrence or the percentage of persons eligible to participate in the study, it is typically below 100 percent (Malhotra, 2010. p.374). However, in this study, by using the specific QA database of high performing UK exporters, it was possible to predict the incidence rate would actually be 100 percent, that is to say all firms contacted would in fact be eligible to participate. As an overview guide to sample sizes, Malhotra & Birks (2007, p.409) recommend a minimum sample size of 200 for problem solving research for marketing research studies.

A final note on the appropriateness of the sample size is confirmed when considering the method of statistical analysis. Hair et al. (2014. p.100) recommends a minimum sample size of 100 for conducting factor analysis and SEM. They advocate a general rule of at least five times the number of observations to be analysed, preferably a 10:1 ratio for the sample size in relation to the number of variables. In this study, there are eleven variables so using Hair et al. (2014) guidelines a preferred minimum sample size is comfortably met.

6.2.1.6 Execution of the Sampling Process

Execution of the sampling process should provide an overview of the specifications of how the sampling design decisions are to be implemented (Malhotra, 2010, p.375). The total number of firms within the QA database compiled from 2012-2016 consisted of 632 firms.

In order to contact each firm, the contact listed in the QA press-book was cross checked against 1) the company website directory, or if they didn't appear 2) their LinkedIn profile.

In a number of cases the contact was not able to be cross checked, or it appeared from their profile that they had recently moved firms in which case the researcher called the firm using the phone number provided within the QA press-book and confirmed the most suitable replacement contact. In most of these cases the researcher's call was transferred internally within the firm to the relevant key respondent so this allowed the opportunity to briefly explain the reason for the call, the research being conducted, provide notification of the forthcoming survey and identify the most appropriate key informant for the study by name and contact details. The survey takes the form of an online questionnaire. According to Strauss & Frost (2009. p.159), the online questionnaire method for survey research is now the widest used methodology, accounting for a high percentage of market research budgets.

The survey followed an adaption of Dillman (2000) recommended survey protocol.

- 1) Survey pre-notification: each firm within the QA database was sent a postal notification of the forthcoming online survey (see Appendix 3).
- 2) First wave of online survey mailings sent.
- 3) Second wave of online survey mailings sent.
- 4) Third wave of online survey mailings sent.

The survey postal pre-notification was also intended to increase trust from the respondents ahead of them being sent the actual online survey, since the question of trust plays an even more important role in web surveys (Humphreys & McNeish, 2001).

6.2.1.7 Validation of the Sample

The last stage, recommended by Malhotra & Birks (2007), is validation of the sample, which involves screening the respondents in the data collection phase to account for sampling frame error. This stage was fairly straightforward since all QA database firms had already been screened to fulfil the main criteria as discussed in earlier sections. Once the data was collected, the structure of the sample was examined and compared to the target population consisting of effective multi industry B2B exporters, as advocated by Malhotra & Birks (2007). The structure was confirmed as a suitable cross section of experienced UK exporters providing both goods and services which met the research criteria. How the potential issue of non-response bias was addressed will now be discussed in the following section,

6.2.2 Non-Response Bias

One of the first steps to be undertaken, before further analysis, is to ensure there is not a possibility of non-response bias. The most common understanding of non-response bias is the degree to which a researcher does not succeed in obtaining the responses from all potential respondents included in the sample. The researcher used the wave analysis technique, also called the Linear Extrapolation Method (Armstrong and Overton 1977). The extrapolation method is based on the assumption that subjects (key respondents contacted through the survey) who respond less readily are more like non-respondents. *Less readily* has been defined as answering later. Armstrong and Overton (1977) suggest three types of extrapolations within the linear extrapolation method; namely, successive waves, time trends and concurrent waves. The technique that best fits this research is extrapolation carried over *successive waves* of the questionnaire. In this case, *wave* refers to the response generated by a stimulus; for example, a reminder or a follow up email. Key informants who

respond in later waves are assumed to have responded because of the increased stimulus and are expected to be similar to non-respondents. For this research, there were two follow up/reminder emails sent subsequent to the initial online survey; thereby, creating three waves as per Table 6.5. The researcher compared early and late respondents across the three waves with respect to various firm characteristics, including number of employees, number of years conducting international trade, goods or services and annual turnover. This approach was consistent with other research within the domain of international marketing (Morgan et. al, 2004; Spyropoulou et. al, 2011).

A t-test is a commonly used parametric test to provide inferences for making statements about the means of a parent population (Malhotra & Birks, 2007. p.526). A number of t-tests were performed, which confirmed no significant differences exist at the established 0.05 level between early and late respondents (see Table 6.6).

Table 6.5 Statistics for Each of the Three Waves of Respondents

Wave	Respondents (n)	Percentage %
1	103	49.52%
2	66	31.73%
3	39	18.75%

Table 6.6 T-Test for Non-Response Bias

Waves 1 & 2	t	df	P Sig. (2-tailed)
Total number of employees	-0.899	169	0.37
Export Goods or Services	-0.986	169	0.325
Annual turnover	-1.138	169	0.257

Waves 1 & 3	t	df	P Sig. (2-tailed)
Total number of employees	-0.541	142	0.589
Export Goods or Services	0.282	142	0.778
Annual turnover	-0.113	142	0.91

Waves 2 & 3	t	df	P Sig. (2-tailed)
Total number of employees	0.196	105	0.845
Export Goods or Services	1.024	105	0.308
Annual turnover	0.767	105	0.445

6.2.3 Profile of the Sample

This section describes the profile of the sample. The questionnaire included characteristics in relation to each firm's brand architecture, size (both in terms of number of employees and turnover), percentage of turnover from exporting, years trading, years exporting, industry, number of export markets, region of the UK the head office is based and if they provide goods, services or both. In addition, some key informant related information is also reported such as position held within the firm and number of years in this role.

From the survey conducted, 208 firms fully completed the questionnaire from a total of 632 firms contacted. This represented a response rate of 33%. A further 79 questionnaires were incomplete and therefore, were not included within the analysis.

Regarding the brand architecture, Table 6.7 displays that 70% of the sample confirmed that the corporate brand is most important to their firm internationally, while 30% confirmed a specific product or service brand they offer would be most important. Since all firms within the sample are confirmed as B2B, it is worth noting that this indicates 70% of the sample opt for a branded house approach.

Table 6.7 Sample Profile - Brand Architecture

Brand Architecture	(n)	(%)
Branded House	146	70%
House of Brands	62	30%
Total	208	100%

In relation to goods and services, Table 6.8 displays that 49% of the sample provide goods, 21% services and 30% provide both goods and services. Regarding the size of the firm size, two measures are commonly used: 1) number of employees; 2) turnover. Table 6.9 shows there were 41% of firms had between 11-50 employees and 35% between 51-250, 10% had between 1-10 employees, 8% more than 500 and 6% from between 251-500 employees. Table 6.10 shows that firms reported a wide range of turnovers, the highest was 33% within the £1million to £5 million bracket, followed by 22% within the £5 million to £10 million bracket then 19% within the £10 million to £25 million bracket. The sample reflected firms of various sizes from small, medium and large organisations.

Table 6.8 Sample Profile – Goods/Services

Goods/Services	(n)	(%)
Goods	102	49%
Services	43	21%
Goods & Services	63	30%
Total	208	100%

Table 6.9 Sample Profile – Number of Employees

Number of Employees	(n)	(%)
1-10	21	10%
11-50	86	41%
51-250	72	35%
251-500	12	6%
more than 500	17	8%
Total	208	100%

Table 6.10 Sample Profile – Turnover

Annual Turnover	(n)	(%)
0 - 500,000	1	0%
500,001 - 1,000,000	6	3%
1,000,001 - 5,000,000	69	33%
5,000,0001 - 10,000,000	45	22%
10,000,001 - 25,000,000	39	19%
25,000,001 - 50,000,000	26	13%
Above 50 million	22	11%
Total	208	100%

Regarding the percentage of firm turnover from exporting, Table 6.11 displays that 70% of firms reported they attain between 50-100% of their overall turnover from exporting. This is not surprising given the benefits of exporting and the fact these firms have proven themselves as adept at conducting international trade.

Table 6.11 Sample Profile – % Turnover from Exports

% Turnover from Exports	(n)	(%)
0-25	27	13%
26-50	36	17%
51-75	47	23%
76-100	98	47%
Total	208	100%

In relation to the number of years that firms have been trading and the number of years that firms have been exporting, Table 6.12 and Table 6.13 begin with the lowest bracket 4-5 years. As Table 6.12 displays, the majority of firms (40%) had between 11 and 25 years' experience trading and in total only 19% had been trading for 10 years or less. In relation to the number of years that firms had been exporting, there is a change compared with years trading, 32% of firms had been exporting for 10 years or less. This can be accounted for by the fact some firms will not have begun exporting when they first started trading. However, the same figure of 40% of firms had been both trading and exporting for between 11-25 years. Overall, the data shows all participant firms were experienced exporters and suitable for the study.

Table 6.12 Sample Profile - Number of Year's Firms trading

Number of Years Trading	(n)	(%)
4-5	9	4%
6-10	32	15%
11-25	84	40%
26-50	62	30%
more than 50	21	10%
Total	208	100%

Table 6.13 Sample Profile - Number of Year's Firms Exporting

Number of Years Exporting	(n)	(%)
4-5	16	8%
6-10	49	24%
11-25	83	40%
26-50	46	22%
more than 50	14	7%
Total	208	100%

Regarding the number of export markets firms are trading within, Table 6.14 shows the firms were generally exporting to a high number of overseas markets. Only 21% of firms

exported to under 11 markets, over 50% of firms were exporting to at least 26 markets and 29% of firms were exporting to at least 51 markets.

Table 6.14 Sample Profile - Number of Export Markets

Number of Export Markets	(n)	(%)
1-10	43	21%
11-25	58	28%
26-50	47	23%
51-100	36	17%
more than 100	24	12%
Total	208	100%

Given this study takes account of UK exporters, it was important to have firms from a broad range of regions participating. The QA database allowed for 12 classifiable regions within the UK to be identified and the number of firms from each to be displayed, as reported in Table 6.15. The number of firms from each area is fairly representative of the population of each region; for example, Scotland equates to around 8% of the UK population and 7% of the participating firms were from Scotland. This increases the generalisability of the results based on UK firms.

Table 6.15 Sample Profile – Region of the UK where Firms are Based

Region of UK where firms are based	(n)	(%)
East	31	15%
East Midlands	6	3%
London	24	12%
North East	4	2%
Northern Ireland	2	1%
North West	29	14%
Scotland	14	7%
South East	42	20%
South West	23	11%
Wales	3	1%
West Midlands	14	7%
Yorkshire & The Humber	16	8%
Total	208	100%

Regarding the key informants who completed the questionnaire on behalf of their firm, Table 6.16 displays that in each case the key informant was very senior within the firm: 51% were CEO or MD's, 18% were Marketing Managers and 7% were Directors; therefore, they can be considered knowledgeable about the firm's international trade activities. Table 6.17 shows only 2% of the key informants had been in their role for less than 2 years (none had been in their role for under one year) and 56% had been in their role for six to above fifteen years, this shows the key informants can all be characterised as having exhibited sufficient experience to complete the questionnaire on behalf of their firm

Table 6.16 Sample Profile - Key Informant Position within the Firm

Position in Firm	(n)	(%)
CEO	49	24%
Managing Director	56	27%
Export Manager	7	3%
Marketing Manager	38	18%
Business Development Manager/Director	7	3%
Director	14	7%
Head of Marketing	5	2%
CMO	9	4%
Other	23	11%
Total	208	100%

Table 6.17 Sample Profile - Years Key Informant Held Current Role

Years in role	(n)	(%)
1-2	39	19%
3-5	51	25%
6-10	56	27%
11-15	30	14%
more than 15	32	15%
Total	208	100%

6.2.4 Development of the Measurement Instrument

According to Aaker et al. (2011, p.276), the most difficult step in the questionnaire process is specifying exactly what information is to be collected from each respondent. During the design phase of the questionnaire, several development principals were taken into consideration to provide a reliable and valid measurement instrument. Existing measurement scales were utilised, these scales' validity and reliability has been previously verified and in some cases within multiple studies (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2006). Several elements were emphasised within the questionnaire design, to begin with, the questionnaire was designed to be a reasonable length and succinct. This provides the benefit of reducing completion time and therefore, increasing response rate, reducing non-response bias and reducing the sample frame required to ensure a minimum number of respondents for statistical analysis (Parasuraman et al. 2004). The questions were designed to be straight forward and easy to understand and interpret: ambiguous phrases and complex questions were avoided. Where an additional question was asked, it was kept simple rather than complicated, to avoid reducing content validity (Parasuraman et al. 2004).

Apart from questions related to key respondents personal and firm demographic characteristics, all items within the questionnaire were measured using 7-point Likert scales, as used in the original existing measurement scales they were taken from. The Likert scale anchors were: 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), 1 (much worse than competitors) to 7 (much better than competitors) or no effect to 7 (very important) depending on the questions asked. In each case, the scales used verbal response descriptors where respondents selected the most appropriate response to signify their level of agreement; the types of scales employed were taken from the original tried and tested measures which have been published in top tier journals. There are various scale formats used by researchers from five to eleven

point scales; however, five and seven point scales are the most common (Malhotra & Peterson, 2006). There are issues with wider ranging scales; for example, eleven point scales can create higher than actual variance levels (Friedman & Amoo, 1999).

The structure of the questionnaire was as follows: firstly, questions in relation to the key respondent's position and how long they have been in the role, followed by questions about the firm's characteristics, such as, number of employees and industry. Next, the questions assessing each measure, and lastly, questions in relation to the firm's turnover, (see Appendix 6 for a copy of the questionnaire). Preceding the final questionnaire being conducted, it was initially pilot tested which can be a valuable way of reducing flaws (Churchill, 1995), this will be explained in the following section.

6.2.4.1 Questionnaire Pilot Testing

By conducting a limited number of the questionnaires with respondents, it allows for potential design flaws to be identified (Zikmund, 2003). In order to pilot (pre-test) the questionnaire, a convenience sampling procedure was selected, this is commonly used for pre-testing questionnaires (Parasuraman et al. 2004). Usually the sample size for pre-testing is relatively small (Aaker et al. 2011), for this study, twelve respondents participated within this initial pilot phase. It is more beneficial to pre-test a questionnaire with a small sample conducting detailed probing rather than running superficial testing with a much larger sample (Wilson, 2012). The respondents consisted of seven exporting firms, two survey design specialists and three academics with knowledge about international marketing were also asked to pilot the survey and provide comments and feedback to ensure there were no errors in the design. Given the fact it is important to conduct a pilot test in the same manner

as a planned experiment (Wilson, 2012), the questionnaire was administered online using the Qualtrics software which was used for the final questionnaire.

The pilot test respondents were sent a copy of the questionnaire to complete and asked to provide general comments, also, in particular, they were asked to evaluate: 1) the design of the questionnaire with respect to the sequence of questions and layout, 2) clarity of the questions and instructions given and 3) validity of the items used in the scales for each construct. The feedback received from the pilot testing was useful and, once collated, the recommendations resulted in amendments with respect to improving clarity and wording of the questions and length. An issue which came from the pilot testing and required further investigation was that some respondents did not receive the original questionnaire into their email inbox, instead it went into their junk mail even though they did not have particularly tight email security settings. The researcher enlisted the assistance of the Qualtrics support team who examined the situation further, it was essential a resolution could be found since it would be disadvantageous for a high percent of the questionnaires to fall into respondents' junk email folders where they may not be seen. The Qualtrics support team recommended changes were implemented and this alleviated the issue when re-sending the questionnaire to the same pre-test respondents who first reported the issue. An example of a change was the word "winner" being removed from the subject and main body of the email, it had been included in the context "Queen's Award Winner"; however, it transpired words such as 'winner' are often used by mass marketing campaigns or "spam emails" so by removing several such words it meant the issue could be resolved. It was useful that the issue arose during pilot testing and allowed the researcher to implement various methods of reducing the likelihood that the final questionnaire would be received. For example, by sending out the questionnaire in batches of 50 or less increased the chances that firms with tight security

system settings would not identify the survey as a mass mailing and consequently screen it as junk.

Having conducted pilot testing and making necessary amendments, the questionnaire was considered adequate to conduct the final data collection.

6.2.5 Measurement Scales

This section defines the measurement scales that were employed for the quantitative stage of this study. The measurement scales utilised to measure this study constructs have been adopted based on: a) relevance within the current research and b) high reliability and validity scores in previous studies published in reputable ABS listed marketing journals.

6.2.5.1 Independent Variables

Financial Resources

This was measured using the exact scale reported by Spyropoulou et. al (2011). In particular, firms' financial resources were assessed in terms of level of financial resources available, access to capital, speed of acquiring and deploying financial resources, size of financial resources devoted to the firm's exporting activities and the ability to find additional financial resources when required. Five items were scored using the same 7-point Likert scale running from 1 (Much Worse Than Competitors) to 7 (Much Better Than Competitors).

International Marketing Planning Capabilities

This was measured using the scale suggested by Morgan et. al (2012). They had created this scale by adapting the original scale used by Piercy & Morgan (1994). Similar scales were

also found in Morgan et al. (2003), Vorhies et al. (2005) and Morgan et al. (2009). In particular, marketing planning skills, setting clear export marketing goals, formulating creative export marketing strategies and thoroughness of export marketing planning processes were areas covered. Four items were scored using the same 7-point Likert scale running from 1 (Much Worse Than Competitors) to 7 (Much Better Than Competitors).

International Branding Capabilities

This was measured using the scale suggested by Merrilees et. al (2011), the construct contained six items. In particular, the items measured: the ability to present a simple brand meaning for the buyers to identify, using branding as an operational tool, communicating a consistent meaning to international buyers, the firm treating the brand as an asset, and the ability to get staff to understand and support the brand meaning and values. An additional item was provided which was derived from the literature and the qualitative stage of the research, this was in relation to the capability of using branding to reduce uncertainty for buyers within the transaction process. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements scored using a 7-point Likert scale running from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree).

International Market Information Management Capabilities

This was measured using the scale suggested by Vorhies & Morgan (2005), the original construct containing five items was the foundation for this measurement scale. The measures included: gathering information about export customers and competitors, using market research skills to develop effective export marketing programs, tracking international customers' wants and needs, making full use of international marketing research information and finally analysing export market information. Participants were asked to rate

their capabilities relative to their major competitors (in the most important export markets), scored using a 7-point Likert scale running from 1 (Much worse than competitors) to 7 (Much better than competitors).

Macro Environmental Stimuli – Enabling Conditions

This was measured using the scale suggested by Katsikeas et al. (1996), the original construct containing seven items was the foundation for this measurement scale. The measures included: attractive government export incentives, national export promotion policies, attractive profit and growth opportunities in the markets new customers were acquired, possession of unique products/provider of unique services appropriate for serving the needs of new customers in export markets, opportunity to increase the number of country markets, and lastly, new legislation allowing products/services to be legally sold in newly acquired international markets. Participants were asked to rate the importance of these external environmental stimuli to their company (in the context of the previous five years), scored using a 7-point Likert scale running from 1 (no importance) to 7 (extremely important).

Micro Environmental Stimuli – Precipitating Conditions

This was measured using the scale suggested by Katsikeas et al. (1996), the original construct containing seven items was the foundation for this measurement scale. The measures included: diminishing domestic sales, saturated domestic market, intensifying domestic competition, unsolicited orders from abroad, production capacity availability, economies resulting from additional orders, and lastly, managerial beliefs about the importance of exporting. Participants were asked to rate the importance of these external environmental stimuli to their company (in the context of the previous five years), scored using a 7-point Likert scale running from 1 (no importance to 7 (extremely important).

Foreign Market Competitiveness

This was measured using the scale first suggested by Jaworski & Kohli (1993), this has been used in different research including Morgan et al. (2004; 2012) and Kaleka & Morgan, (2017). This construct assesses the competitive intensity of the firm's main export market. In particular, foreign market competitiveness was assessed in terms of: competition being cut throat, whether there are many promotion wars, if price is a hallmark of the export market, and if there are regular competitive moves in the export market. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements for each of the four items, scored using a 7-point Likert scale running from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree).

Strategic Brand Management

This was measured using the scale suggested by Santos-Vijande et. al (2013), the construct containing five items was the foundation for this measurement scale. The measures included: the firm's commitment to significant investment in the brand(s) internationally, the firm's investment in resources for brand management compared with international competitors in their main export markets, use of a well-co-ordinated multidisciplinary team to manage the firm's brand(s) internationally, planning of marketing actions taking account of repercussions for the brand image, and the firm's management of their brand(s) internationally from a medium and long term perspective. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements, scored using a 7-point Likert scale running from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree).

6.2.5.2 Moderating Variable

Country of Origin Effect:

This was measured using an adapted version of the scale used previously in a B2B context by Chen et al. (2011), the same items can be found in La et al. (2009) which was based originally on a scale used by Parameswaren & Pisharodi (1994). This construct assesses the importance of certain factors as being a benefit of being a UK based firm, compared with their main overseas competitors. In particular, that people from the UK are known for being well educated, hard-working, achieving high standards, have a raised standard of living, and have high technical skills. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements for each of the five items, scored using a 7-point Likert scale running from 1 (No effect) to 7 (Very important).

6.2.5.3 Dependent Variables

International Firms' Financial Performance:

This was measured using the exact scale suggested by Morgan et. al (2012). This construct assesses the financial performance of the participant firms evaluated in terms of the performance of exporting activities over the past year relative to major competitors (within the firms most important export markets). In particular, international firms' financial performance was assessed in terms of export profitability, return on investment (ROI), export margins, and reaching export financial goals. Four items were scored using the same 7-point Likert scale running from 1 (Much Worse Than Competitors) to 7 (Much Better Than Competitors).

International Firms' Market Performance:

This was measured using the exact scale suggested by Morgan et. al (2012). This construct assesses the market performance of the participant firms evaluated in terms of performance of exporting activities over the past year relative to major competitors (within the firms most important export markets). In particular, international firms' market performance was assessed in terms of: market share growth, growth in sales revenue, ability to acquire new customers and increasing sales to existing customers. These four items were scored using the same 7-point Likert scale running from 1 (Much Worse Than Competitors) to 7 (Much Better Than Competitors).

6.2.5.4 Control Variables and Demographics

Along with the aforementioned scales, participants were also requested to provide some firm and key informant information.

Brand Architecture

The participant firms' preference between the company (corporate) or product/service brand(s) being most important was asked with a single item scale.

Goods/Services

Information regarding whether the firm exports goods, services or goods and services was asked. A single item was used including the following options (1-Goods, 2-Services, 3-Goods & Services).

Firm Size – Number of Employees

Information regarding the number of employees the firm had was asked. A single item was used including the following options (1-10, 11-50, 51-250, 251-500, more than 500).

Firm Size – Turnover

Another measure of the firm's size was requested, information in relation to the firm's turnover was asked. To ensure the information was a recent reflection of the firm, the question asked for the annual turnover for the past 12 months. A single item measure was used instead of asking for a specific figure which may have been detrimental to the number of firms prepared to respond. The following options were available in £: {0-500,000}, {500,001-1,000,000}, {1,000,001-5,000,000}, {5,000,0001-10,000,000}, {10,000,001-25,000,000}, {25,000,001-50,000,000} and {above 50 million}.

Percentage of Turnover from Exports

Participants were asked to provide a figure for the % of turnover which could be attributed to their exporting activity. This was later categorised into four available percentage brackets: {1=1-25}, {2=26-50}, {3=51-75} and {4=76-100}.

Number of Years Trading

Participants were asked to provide a figure for the number of years in which their firms had been trading. This was later categorised into five available brackets in years: {1=1-5}, {2=6-10}, {3=11-25}, {4=26-50} and {5=more than 50}.

Number of Years Exporting

Participants were asked to provide a figure for the number of years in which their firms had been exporting. This was later categorised into five available brackets in years: {1=1-5}, {2=6-10}, {3=11-25}, {4=26-50} and {5=more than 50}.

Region

The region in which participants are from was checked against the QA press books for the years 2012-2016. The different regions of the UK (as defined by the UK government department BEIS ‘Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy’) were entered into SPSS as: {1=East}, {2=South East}, {3=South West}, {4=North West}, {5=North East}, {6=Scotland}, {7=London}, {8=Wales}, {9=East Midlands}, {10=West Midlands}, {11=Yorkshire} and {12=Northern Ireland}.

Key Informants Position in the Firm

Participants were asked to confirm their position in the firm, four options were provided: 1) CEO, 2) Managing Director, 3) Export Manager and 4) Marketing Manager or space provided to choose 5) other, and write in their position which was later categorised. The final nine categories were organised: {1=CEO}, {2=Managing Director}, {3=Export Manager}, {4=Marketing Manager}, {5=Business Development Manager/Director}, {6=Director}, {7=Head of Marketing}, {8=CMO} and {9=Other}.

Number of Years the Key Informant has been in the Role

Participants were asked to provide a figure for the number of years in which they had held their current role. This was later categorised into five available brackets in years: {1=1-2}, {2=3-5}, {3=6-10}, {4=11-15} and {5= more than 15}.

Number of Export Markets

Participants were asked to provide a figure for number of markets in which their firm currently exports. This was later categorised into five available brackets in number of markets: ({1=1-10}, {2=11-25}, {3=26-50}, {4=51-100} and {5= more than 100}.

Table 6.18 Overview of the Study's Measures

Scale	Items	From
Financial Resources	5	Spyropoulou et al. (2011).
International Marketing Planning Capabilities	4	Vorhies & Morgan (2005) Morgan et al. (2012)
International Branding Capabilities	6	Merrilees et al. (2011)
International Market Information Management Capabilities	7	Vorhies & Morgan (2005)
Macro Environmental Stimuli - Enabling Conditions	7	Katsikeas et al. (1996)
Micro Environmental Stimuli - Precipitating Conditions	7	Katsikeas et al. (1996)
Foreign Market Competitiveness	4	Jaworski & Kohli (1993) Morgan et al. (2004)
Strategic Brand Management	7	Santos-Vijande et al. (2013)
Country of Origin Effect	5	Chen et al. (2011). La et al. 2009).
International Firm Financial Performance	4	Morgan et al. (2012)
International Firm Market Performance	4	Morgan et al. (2012)

6.3 Quantitative Data Preparation and Analysis

6.3.1 Preparing the Data File

In order to analyse the data, all responses were imported into SPSS 24.0. Data screening or cleansing was conducted, this is considered an important practice to be completed preceding the data analysis (Field, 2013) since data entry errors can commonly occur. It is vital when conducting analysis to examine the data for any outliers that could potentially affect the results (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Cleansing the data requires consistency checks and, if required missing responses need to be treated in an adequate way (Malhotra & Birks, 2007. p.499).

Therefore, before beginning the analysis, a multivariate normality test was conducted by calculating the Mahalanobis distance using SPSS. This is the measure of a given data point from the mean of the predictor variable(s), and as such, higher Mahalanobis distances indicate likely influential cases (Lee & Peters, 2016. p.309). The technique has been widely accepted since it was first introduced by P. C. Mahalanobis in 1936. To begin with, each independent construct was tested and potentially high maximum scores were recorded and compared against critical values for Mahalanobis distance depending on the sample size and number of predictors (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996; Stevens, 2002). It appeared there may have been a few high values that indicated further investigation was required to identify if there may be any significant outliers. While such tables are a useful guide, the most accurate approach for any given data set is to compare each Mahalanobis variable to the chi square distribution of the same degrees of freedom whereby degrees of freedom equate to the number of predictors. This was performed using the compute variable function in SPSS and the numeric expression: $1 - \text{CDF.CHISQ}(\text{quant}, \text{df})$ whereby quant refers to the Mahalanobis score calculated and $\text{CDF.CHISQ}(\text{quant}, \text{df})$ returns the cumulative probability (P) that a value from the chi-square distribution, with df degrees of freedom, will be less than quant. Tabachnick et al. (2001) suggest $P > 0.001$ is the general rule of thumb that should be followed. This computation identified a small number of missing values, ten individual predictor variables, this is a relatively small number given the large data set. For the individual predictors with missing values, an accepted technique of replacement with estimated score was used (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007).

There were a small number of cases of potential outliers identified given their P value; therefore, it was important to establish if they would be significant. Calculating the Cooks distance is a measurement of each observations leverage (distance each data point deviates

from the mean of the other x values) and residual values (observed value – predicted value).

To find which potential outliers are influential data points and could therefore be significant, the points whose Cook distance are > 1 must be found. For this data set, there were no points that exceeded 1 and the highest Cook distance for potential outliers was 0.17; therefore, it can be concluded there are no significant outliers within the data set.

6.3.2 Assessing Scale Reliability and Validity

This section describes the reliability and validity tests and the subsequent results for the measurement instruments employed within this study. Validity is the extent to which a scale or a set of measures represents the concept of interest in an accurate way, whereas reliability is an assessment of the degree of consistency between multiple measurements of a variable (Hair et al. 2014. p.123 & p.124). In simplistic terms, validity refers to what *should* be measured and reliability refers to *how* it is measured (Sekaran, 2000). There is a relationship between reliability and validity: perfect validity implies perfect reliability and, in turn, unreliability implies invalidity. However, reliability is a necessary but not sufficient condition for validity (Malhotra & Birks, 2007. p.359).

Reliability can be defined as “the extent to which measures are free from random error, X_r . If $X_r = 0$, the measure is perfectly reliable” (Malhotra & Birks, 2007. p.357). Since no single item is a perfect measure of a concept, researchers must therefore rely upon a series of diagnostic measures to assess internal consistency. The extant literature suggests there are two commonly accepted methods of assessing reliability: firstly, ‘test-retest’, which measures consistency between the responses for an individual at two different points in time (Hair et al. 2014, p.123) and secondly, ‘internal consistency’ which reveals the consistency

(or redundancy) of the entire scale with Cronbach's alpha being the most widely used measure (Hair et al. 2014, p.123; Zikmund, 2003). Given there are issues associated with the first method, such as, sensitivity to the time interval between testing and the fact the initial measurement may alter the characteristic being measured (Malhotra & Birks, 2007, p.357), this study adopts the second widely used and accepted method of Cronbach's alpha. The coefficient alpha, or Cronbach's alpha, is the average of all possible split half coefficients as a result of different ways of splitting the scale items (Malhotra & Birks, 2007, p.358). Hair et al. (2014) suggests the generally agreed limit for Cronbach's alpha is 0.7 and Malhotra and Birks (2007, p.358) recommend a value of 0.6 or less generally indicates inadequate internal consistency reliability. Therefore, although not always explicitly stated within some domains of the literature a value of below 0.7 may still be acceptable and values greater than 0.6 are still considered acceptable (Hair et al. 1998). In this study, all Cronbach's alpha coefficients were values greater than 0.7 and therefore considered reliable, the following sections (6.3.3.1-6.3.3.4) reports the results for each construct.

Hair et al. (2014) also recommend reliability measures derived from Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), including Composite Reliability (CR) and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). This is due to the criticism that Cronbach's alpha is not able to assess each construct's unidimensionality in an effective way (Hair et al. 1995). CFA is a technique that is used to estimate the measurement model (Malhotra, 2010, p.725), it provides an examination of the covariance structure of a set of each construct, ensuring the measurement is reliable by specifying an account of the relationships amongst these variables utilising the terminology 'factors', which are a smaller number of unobserved latent variables (Byrne, 2009).

Validity can be defined as “the extent to which differences in observed scale scores reflect true differences among objects on the characteristic being measured, rather than systematic or random error” (Malhotra & Birks, 2007, p.358), in simple terms the survey should only measure what it is meant to measure. Construct validity represents the construct the scale is measuring (Malhotra & Birks, 2007. p.359), and requires both discriminant and convergent validity to be established (Aaker et al. 2011. p.269). Convergent validity refers to the extent to which the scale positively correlates with other measurements within the same construct (Malhotra & Birks, 2007. p.359), high correlations indicate that the scale is measuring the intended concept (Hair et al. 2010. p.124). Discriminant validity refers to the extent a measure does not correlate with other constructs from which it should be distinctly different (Malhotra & Birks, 2007. p.359), in this case the correlation should be low, showing that the summated scale is suitably different from the other concepts (Hair et al. 2010. p.124). The analysis of discriminant validity can be beneficial when corroborating issues of content validity when it is thought some measures might correspond with another concept (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), estimating AVE and CR is important for assessing construct *convergent* and *discriminant validity*. Convergent validity is accepted when AVE is greater than 0.5 and CR greater than 0.7 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Hair et al. 2010; Malhotra et al. 2010). To test for discriminant validity involves measuring AVE using CFA to test each pair of constructs. With CFA, the AVE is calculated as the mean variance extracted for the items loading on a construct and provides a summary indicator of convergence (Hair et al. 2010 p.709). Discriminant validity exists when AVE is larger than the squared correlation between pairs of the factors (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). An AVE of 0.5 or higher indicates that typically more error remains in the items than variance explained by the latent factor

structure levied on the measure (Hair et al. 2010 p.709). Malhotra et al. (2010, p.734) notes that AVE is a more conservative measure than CR. Based solely on the CR, it may be concluded that the convergent validity of the construct is adequate, even though more than 50 percent of the variance is due to error (Malhotra et al. 2010, p.734), CR is defined as the total amount of true score variance in relation to the total score variance.

From an initial evaluation of discriminant validity, there was an issue identified with regards to a lower square root of two constructs (international branding capabilities and international strategic brand management) than the correlation between them (Malhotra et al. 2010, p.745). Further exploratory factor analysis investigation uncovered some cross loading for 'item 5' of the construct international strategic brand management onto international branding capabilities, therefore this item was removed from the construct and when the analysis was again conducted the discriminant validity issue was resolved.

Further initial evaluations of the constructs uncovered that the constructs Macro Environmental Stimuli and Micro Environmental Stimuli contained items with low factor loadings and low internal correlations with the other items; therefore, in each case three items were removed. For Macro Environmental Stimuli an initial Cronbach's alpha for all 7 items was 0.694, with items 3,4 and 6 removed, the Cronbach's alpha increased to 0.767. For Micro Environmental Stimuli, an initial Cronbach's alpha for all 7 items was 0.680, with items 4,6 and 7 removed, the Cronbach's alpha increased to 0.783.

Table 6.19 presents the results for CR, AVE and the correlation matrix, this method of displaying the results is recommended by Malhotra et al. (2010. p.746). Table 6.19 shows all constructs exceed the critical levels of 0.70 and 0.5 for CR and AVE respectively, which establishes the reliability and convergent validity of the measurement scales in this study. Convergent validity can be further established if all item loadings are equal to or above the recommended cut-off level of 0.7 (Malhotra et al. 2010. p.745). For the sample in this study, of a total of 49 final items in the measurement model, 5 items had loadings ≥ 0.90 , 25 items with loadings in the range of ≥ 0.80 to < 0.9 , and 9 loadings in the range ≥ 0.70 to < 0.80 (see Tables 6.22, 6.25, 6.28, 6.31). All loadings were found to be statistically significant, all apart from three items were at the recommended $p < 0.05$ level (Malhotra et al. 2010. p.745).

Key for Table 6.19

CR	Composite Reliability
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
IBC	International Branding Capabilities
FRES	Financial Resources
COO	Country of Origin Effect
FMC	Foreign Market Competitiveness
STMB	Strategic Brand Management
MPLAN	Marketing Planning Capabilities
MPERF	Market Performance
FPERF	Financial Performance
MINF	Market Information Capabilities
MAC	Macro Environmental stimuli
MIC	Micro Environmental stimuli

Table 6.19 Measurement Model: Construct Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Correlation Matrix

	CR	AVE	IBC	FRES	COO	FMC	STBM	MPLAN	MPERF	FPERF	MINF	MAC	MIC
IBC	0.892	0.580	0.762										
FRES	0.931	0.729	0.129	0.854									
COO	0.871	0.577	0.307	0.038	0.760								
FMC	0.795	0.501	0.189	0.072	0.176	0.708							
STBM	0.807	0.511	0.704	0.311	0.136	0.130	0.715						
MPLAN	0.901	0.697	0.362	0.426	0.160	0.114	0.482	0.835					
MPERF	0.904	0.703	0.212	0.356	0.276	0.048	0.245	0.553	0.838				
FPERF	0.933	0.778	0.205	0.346	0.339	0.056	0.237	0.483	0.826	0.882			
MINF	0.873	0.586	0.353	0.366	0.211	0.071	0.440	0.732	0.519	0.471	0.766		
MAC	0.782	0.495	0.099	0.062	0.131	0.294	0.145	0.077	-0.130	-0.100	-0.002	0.703	
MIC	0.803	0.517	0.040	0.066	0.192	0.217	0.098	-0.119	-0.120	-0.096	-0.044	0.361	0.719

(Note: The figures corresponding to square root of AVE for each column construct is captured in bold along the diagonal. Other figures beneath the bold figures are the correlation between the constructs).

The square root of AVE for each construct is greater than the correlation between each construct (see Table 6.19), therefore discriminant validity is not found to be an issue for the final items used (Malhotra et al. 2010. p.745).

6.3.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to assess the psychometric properties and unidimensionality of all measures. Maximum Likelihood Estimators (MLE) was selected within the analysis properties to conduct CFA's for the study's constructs, it is commonly used within the marketing domain. The *chi square statistic* (χ^2) is a goodness of fit test which can be used to investigate model fit for how well the observed pattern fits the expected pattern of covariation among the observed variables (Aaker et al. 2011. p.415). Due to its sensitivity to sample size, the χ^2 does not always make clear if the statistical significance of the χ^2 statistic is due to poor fit of the model or to the size of the sample (Stevens, 2002). Though it is possible to deduce the overall model fit by testing the chi-square statistic, it's utility is challenged by the fact that it has been found to be related to sample size, model complexity, and non-normality (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Therefore, numerous further measures of model fit have been proposed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007. p.715), some of the most widely used have been utilised for this study and will now be briefly reviewed before being taken into consideration in the assessment of each models overall fit in the following sections (Joreskog and Sörbom, 1989).

Normed Fit Index (NFI)

The Bentler-Bonett (1980) normed fit index (NFI) was one of the first measures of fit proposed in the literature. It assesses the estimated model by providing a comparison of the

χ^2 value of the model against the χ^2 value of the independence model, the independence model represents the model that corresponds with completely unrelated variables (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). A high value of greater than 0.95 is indicative of a good fitting model (Bentler & Bonett, 1980); however, a value of over 0.9 is also considered acceptable. A problem to the NFI is it may underestimate the fit of the model for smaller sample sizes (Bearden et al. 1982).

Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) or Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI)

The Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) is also often referred to as the Non-Normed Fit Index or NNFI, for this thesis only the terminology TLI will be used for reporting results. An adjustment to the NFI encompassing the degrees of freedom (df) in the model yields the TLI (Tabachnick and Fidell (2007), this addresses the NFI problem that there is no penalty for adding parameters. However, the TLI can also be too small in small samples, in turn, specifying a poor fit when other indices indicate an adequate fit (Anderson & Gerbing, 1984). Again, a high value of greater than 0.95 is indicative of a good fitting model and a value of over 0.9 is also considered acceptable.

Comparative Fit Index (CFI)

The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is a goodness of fit index favoured by marketing researchers (Cadogan, 2002). The CFI assesses fit relative to other models, it employs noncentral χ^2 distribution with noncentrality parameters, τ_i . If the estimated model is perfect $\tau_i = 0$ (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). CFI values greater than 0.95 are indicative of very good fitting models (Hu & Bentler, 1999); however, a value of greater than 0.90 also represents a good fit (Bentler, 1990). CFI is normed to the 0-1 range and is suitable for estimating model fit even in small samples (Bentler & Mooijaart, 1989).

Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)

The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) (Browne & Cudeck, 1993) provides an estimation of model fit in comparison to a perfect saturated model (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Values of greater than 0.1 suggest models with a poor fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). According to Hu and Bentler (1999) RMSEA over rejects the true model in small samples, providing too large a value, due to this issue RMSEA is less preferable for smaller samples.

Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)

There are two widely used fit indices (GFI and AGFI) that calculate a weighted proportion of variance within the sample covariance known by the estimated population covariance matrix (Bentler, 1983). The GFI is the percentage of the observed covariance explained by the covariance implied in the model, the closer GFI is to 1 then the better fit of the model. GFI values greater than 0.95 are indicative of very good fitting models (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010); however, a value of greater than 0.90 also represents a good fit (Joreskog & Sörbom, 1996).

To conduct the CFA analysis of the constructs, the overall model was split into four measurement models. This type of measurement model analysis should be conducted prior to a full structural model being performed (Anderson & Gerbing, 1998; Cheng, 2001). The measurement model CFA analysis stage essentially tests four blocks of data, namely: 1) the internal environment, financial resources and all capabilities (branding/marketing planning/market information), 2) the external environment, macro and micro environmental stimuli and foreign market competitiveness, 3) strategic brand management and the moderating variable COO, and lastly 4) the two export performance measures (financial and

market). This approach is consistent with previous studies which run multiple CFA's grouping related variables (Gounaris, 2006; Wong & Merrilees, 2007, Morgan et al. 2012)

6.3.3.1 CFA Measurement Model 1 – Internal Environment

The financial resources construct is measured using Spyropoulou et. al (2011) five item measure; the branding capabilities construct is measured using Merrilees et. al (2011) measure, extended from five to six items; the marketing planning capabilities construct is measured using Morgan et. al (2003) four item measure; and the market information capabilities construct is measured using Vorhies & Morgan (2005) five item measure. A CFA was conducted for testing the construct validity and model fit statistics. CFA results indicate that the model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) with 164 degrees of freedom and $\chi^2 = 322.161$ producing a good model fit. All other CFA model fit indices are within the suggested limits and indicate a good fit of the data to the hypothesised model (see Table 6.20 below). Based on these results, no deletions of scale items were required to improve the model fit.

CFA	Cronbach Alpha	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	GFI	NFI
	0.904	0.970	0.961	0.053	0.900	0.923

Table 6.20 CFA Analysis of Measurement Model 1

	Cronbach Alpha
Measurement Model 1 Total	0.904
Financial Resources	0.933
International Branding Capabilities	0.887
International Marketing Planning Capabilities	0.895
International Market Information Capabilities	0.87

Table 6.21 Cronbach Alpha Results for Measurement Model 1

Table 6.22 presents the standardised factor loadings of the CFA analysis and shows that each item's factor loading is statistically significant and is above the 0.5 threshold recommended by Hair et al. (2010). In terms of reliability, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the overall model is satisfactory $\alpha=0.904$ and, as displayed in Table 6.21, each individual construct is also satisfactory with a Cronbach alpha greater than 0.8, so much higher than the 0.65 threshold which is suggested as the lowest accepted bound of Cronbach alpha (Nunnally, 1978). AVE and CR has also been shown to be sufficient for each construct as it was reported in Table 6.19. The measurement model and constructs are therefore considered reliable and suitable to be used for further analysis.

Table 6.22 Measurement Model 1 Standardised Regression Weights

Financial Resources	Estimates	P
Level of financial resources available	0.826	***
Access to capital	0.876	***
Speed of acquiring and deploying financial resources	0.889	***
Size of financial resources devoted to your company's exporting activities	0.892	***
Ability to find additional financial resources when needed	0.824	***
International Branding Capabilities	Estimates	P
Our company utilises available resources to present a simple brand meaning for our international customers	0.718	***
Our company uses branding as an operational tool	0.798	***
Our company is able to communicate a consistent brand meaning to our international customers	0.832	***
Our company treats our brand(s) as an asset	0.801	***
Our staff understand and support our brand(s) meaning and values	0.685	***
Our company uses branding to reduce uncertainty for buyers within the transaction process	0.755	***

International Marketing Planning Capabilities	Estimates	P
Export marketing planning skills	0.864	***
Setting clear export marketing goals	0.909	***
Formulating creative export marketing strategies	0.884	***
Thoroughness of export marketing planning processes	0.950	***
International Market Information Capabilities	Estimates	P
Gathering information about export customers and competitors	0.814	***
Using market research skills to develop effective export marketing programs	0.875	***
Tracking international customer wants and needs	0.6	***
Making full use of international marketing research information	0.904	***
Analysing export market information	0.798	***

6.3.3.2 CFA Measurement Model 2 – External Environment

The macro environmental stimuli construct is measured based on Katsikeas et. al (1996) scale. The scale used is a first order construct and the final version with items removed consists of four items. The micro environmental stimuli construct is measured based on Katsikeas et. al (1996) scale and the final version with items removed consists of four items. The foreign market competitiveness construct is measured based on Jaworski & Kohli, (1993), this is a four item measure. A CFA was conducted for testing the construct validity and model fit statistics. CFA results indicate that the model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) with 49 degrees of freedom and $\chi^2 = 91.026$ producing a good model fit. All CFA model fit indices are within the suggested limits and indicate a good fit of the data to the hypothesised model (see Table 6.23 below). Based on these results no deletions of scale items were required to improve model fit.

CFA	Cronbach Alpha	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	GFI	NFI
	0.810	0.954	0.938	0.064	0.931	0.907

Table 6.23 CFA Analysis of Measurement Model 2

	Cronbach Alpha
Measurement Model 2 Total	0.810
Macro Environmental Stimuli	0.767
Micro Environmental Stimuli	0.783
Foreign Market Competitiveness	0.813

Table 6.24 Cronbach Alpha Results for Measurement Model 2

Table 6.25 presents the standardised factor loadings of the CFA analysis and shows that each item's factor loading is statistically significant and, apart from three, all are above the 0.5 threshold recommended by Hair et al. (2010). The three items that fall slightly below this suggested threshold are $> .40$, so still considered adequate for this study. The tests for reliability were satisfactory, as displayed in Table 6.24, Cronbach alpha coefficient of the overall scale is $\alpha = 0.810$, while all latent variables have Cronbach alpha greater than 0.75, so much higher than the 0.65 threshold which is suggested as the lowest accepted bound of Cronbach alpha (Nunnally, 1978). AVE and CR has also been shown to be sufficient for each construct, as displayed in Table 6.19. Each scale in this measurement model are therefore considered reliable and suitable to be used for further analysis.

Macro Environmental Stimuli - Enabling Conditions	Estimates	P
Attractive government export incentives	0.879	***
National export promotion policies, such as UK trade envoys to markets we have acquired new customers	0.879	***
Advantageous fluctuation of exchange rates	0.443	***
New legislation allowing our products/services to be legally sold in newly acquired international markets	0.468	***
Micro Environmental Stimuli - Precipitating Conditions	Estimates	P
Diminishing domestic sales	0.763	***
Saturated domestic market	0.857	***
Intensifying domestic competition	0.757	***
Production capacity availability	0.419	***
Foreign Market Competitiveness	Estimates	P
Competition in this export market is cut-throat	0.873	***
There are many “promotion” wars in this export market	0.657	***
Price competition is the hallmark of this export market	0.725	***
One hears of a new competitive move in this export market almost every day.	0.531	***

Table 6.25 Measurement Model 2 Standardised Regression Weights

6.3.3.3 CFA Measurement Model 3 – Strategic Brand Management/COO

The strategic brand management construct is measured based on Santos-Vijande et. al (2013) scale. The scale used is a first order construct and consists of seven items. The Country of Origin effect construct is measured using Chen et. al (2011) five item measure. A CFA was conducted for testing the construct validity and model fit statistics. CFA results indicate that the model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) with 26 degrees of freedom and $\chi^2 = 45.6$ producing a good model fit. All CFA model fit indices are within the suggested limits and indicate a good fit of the data to the hypothesised model (see Table 6.26 below). Based on these results, no deletions of scale items were required to improve the model fit.

CFA	Cronbach Alpha	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	GFI	NFI
	0.774	0.974	0.963	0.062	0.954	0.944

Table 6.26 CFA Analysis of Measurement Model 3

	Cronbach Alpha
Measurement Model 2 Total	0.774
Strategic Brand Management	0.812
Country of Origin Effect	0.863

Table 6.27 Cronbach Alpha Results for Measurement Model 3

Table 6.28 presents the standardised factor loadings of the CFA analysis and shows that each item's factor loading is statistically significant and is above the 0.5 threshold recommended by Hair et al. (2010). The tests for reliability were satisfactory, as displayed in Table 6.27, Cronbach alpha coefficient of the overall scale is $\alpha=0.774$, while all latent variables have Cronbach alpha greater than 0.75, so much higher than the 0.65 threshold which is suggested as the lowest accepted bound of Cronbach alpha (Nunnally, 1978). AVE and CR has also been shown to be sufficient for each construct, as displayed in Table 6.19. Each scale in this measurement model are therefore considered reliable and suitable to be used for further analysis.

Strategic Brand Management	Estimates	P
Our company commits significant investments to manage our brand(s) internationally	0.865	***
Our company invests more resources in brand management than our international competitors in our main export markets	0.711	***
Our company has a well-coordinated multidisciplinary team to manage our brand(s) internationally	0.713	***
Our company plans its marketing actions by taking into account the possible repercussions for the brand image	0.602	***
Country of Origin Effect	Estimates	P
People from the UK are proud to achieve high standards	0.691	***
People from the UK are known as being hardworking	0.651	***
The UK has a raised standard of living	0.841	***
The UK has a well-educated workforce	0.814	***
UK companies have high technical skills	0.816	***

Table 6.28 Measurement Model 3 Standardised Regression Weights

6.3.3.4 CFA Measurement Model 4 – Export Performance

The firm performance measures 1) International firm financial performance and 2) International firm market performance, these are both measured using Morgan et al. (2012) separate four item scales. A CFA was conducted for testing the construct validity and model fit statistics. CFA results indicate that the model is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) with 19 degrees of freedom and $\chi^2 = 66.631$ producing a good model fit. All CFA model fit indices are well within the suggested limits and indicate a good fit of the data to the hypothesised model (see Table 6.29 below). Based on these results, no deletions of scale items were required to improve the model fit.

CFA	Cronbach Alpha	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	NFI
	0.944	0.970	0.953	0.059	0.931	0.863	0.958

Table 6.29 CFA Analysis of Measurement Model 4

	Cronbach Alpha
Measurement Model 4 Total	0.944
International Financial Performance	0.932
International Market Performance	0.902

Table 6.30 Cronbach Alpha Results for Measurement Model 4

Table 6.31 presents the standardised factor loadings of the CFA analysis and shows that each item's factor loading is statistically significant and is above the 0.5 threshold recommended by Hair et al. (2010). The tests for reliability were satisfactory, as displayed in Table 6.30, Cronbach alpha coefficient of the overall scale is $\alpha=0.944$, while all latent variables have Cronbach alpha greater than 0.9, so much higher than the 0.65 threshold which is suggested as the lowest accepted bound of Cronbach alpha (Nunnally, 1978). AVE and CR has also been shown to be sufficient for each construct, as displayed in Table 6.19. Each scale in this measurement model are therefore considered reliable and suitable to be used for further analysis.

International Financial Performance	Estimates	P
Export profitability	0.920	***
Return on Investment (ROI)	0.906	***
Export margins	0.881	***
Reaching export financial goals	0.803	***
International Market Performance	Estimates	P
Market share growth	0.862	***
Growth in sales revenue	0.886	***
Acquiring new customers	0.8	***
Increasing sales to existing customers	0.801	***

Table 6.31 Measurement Model 4 Standardised Regression Weights

The scales employed within this study have now been described and tested. The following section will describe the test conducted to ensure the suitability of a further item which was added to the existing items within the construct International branding capabilities.

6.3.4 Scale Development

A scale development process was conducted with regard to the construct International Branding Capabilities. The construct had been previously validated and used in a study by Merrilees et al (2011) which was published in the B2B specialist journal ‘Industrial Marketing Management’. However, the construct was sourced as originating from an earlier paper by Wong & Merrilees (2008) which was not specifically within the B2B domain. Therefore, due to some of the fundamental differences identified between B2B and B2C branding, it was suitable to analyse if any further items should be incorporated.

The first step in this process, commonly referred to as “item generation” (Morgado et al. 2017), involves defining the conceptual domain of the construct. This stage requires the

identification of what the construct is intended to conceptually represent, and also reasoning for how the construct differs from other related constructs (Spector, 1992). An initial review of relevant literature was the initial stage to develop the construct (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988; Gounaris, 2006). An examination of the literature identifies that B2B firms differ in the regard that they are likely to use brandings functional attributes to reduce the uncertainty for buyers within the purchase making process (Mudambi et al. 2002; Lilien & Grewal, 2012). Following the conceptual definition of the construct, the next stage, referred to as theoretical analysis (Morgado et al. 2017), is to generate items that fully represent the conceptual domain of the construct and to ensure items are measuring what they are intended to measure (content validity). The views of experts in the field are commonly used (Gounaris, 2006; Aaker et al. 2011); therefore, the advice of an expert was sought for this study but, as recommended by Morgado et al. (2017), the advice of the target population was also sought during the qualitative stage of this study.

This B2B branding capability construct was explored within the Qualitative stage of the study and there was broad support for the additional item to be justifiably added within B2B branding capabilities. The initial 7-point attitudinal Likert scale was considered suitable (Aaker et al. 2011) and; therefore, it was a less complex process to add the extra item within the existing measurement model to ensure all parameters of the model had been identified (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). Though it was still necessary to take into account the manner in which the new item was written (Podsakoff et al. 2003), new items developed should not be too long or pose any difficulty to respondents (Aaker et al. 2011). The pilot study did not raise any concerns about the validity of the additional item within the construct.

The next stage was to examine the psychometric properties of the new scale. For Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), the minimum sample size should be at least 100 (Comrey & Lee, 1992) and the minimum ratio of respondents to items in the scale range from 3:1 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). For this study, the sample comprised of 208 firms; therefore, well within both of the aforementioned criterion. Lastly, the Goodness of Fit of the measurement model is assessed using CFA, the validity and reliability of the measure with the new item was evaluated and if issues had been discovered then the additional item would have been removed (MacKenzie et al. 2011).

The Merrilees et al. (2011) construct items with the additional item is shown in Table 6.32

International Branding Capabilities
Our company utilises available resources to present a simple brand meaning for our international customers
Our company uses branding as an operational tool
Our company is able to communicate a consistent brand meaning to our international customers
Our company treats our brand(s) as an asset
Our staff understand and support our brand(s) meaning and values
<i>Our company uses branding to reduce uncertainty for buyers within the transaction process</i>

Table 6.32 International Branding Capabilities Construct with Additional Integrated Item

Having an initial valid set of items, the next step was to conduct an exploratory factor analysis (MacKenzie et al. 2011). The correlations matrix produced through EFA showed that all items correlate above 0.4; therefore, well above the required 0.3 required to indicate an EFA can be conducted (Pallant, 2013). As shown in Table 6.33, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) is 0.876, well above the critical value of 0.6. The Bartlett's test of Sphericity was significant with a P value of 0.000.

KMO		0.876
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	0.638.531
	df	15
	Sig.	0.000.

Table 6.33 KMO & Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

In order to maximize variance, principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation method was conducted. The result of the analysis was a single factor comprising of the six items explaining 64.139% of the total variance in the international branding capabilities construct; therefore, above the recommended 60%. Table 6.34 displays the results of the component matrix as part of the EFA, it can be seen that each item within the factor, including the new additional item in bold, loads highly above the recommend value of 0.5 (Hair et al. 2010).

Items	Component 1
Our company utilises available resources to present a simple brand meaning for our international customers	0.718
Our company uses branding as an operational tool	0.786
Our company is able to communicate a consistent brand meaning to our international customers	0.833
Our company treats our brand(s) as an asset	0.811
Our staff understand and support our brand(s) meaning and values	0.648
Our company uses branding to reduce uncertainty for buyers within the transaction process	0.727

Table 6.34 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) of International B2B Branding Capabilities

Following the EFA, a CFA was conducted as suggested by Gerbing & Anderson (1988) and DeVellis (2003) who advocate the combined use of EFA and CFA. As shown in Table 6.35, the results from the CFA also indicate an acceptable model fit for the developed construct

with the additional item, ($p < 0.001$) with 9 degrees of freedom and $\chi^2 = 33.802$ CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.978, GFI = 0.979, NFI = 0.979, RMSEA = 0.067). As shown in Table 6.36, each of the factor loadings was statistically significant. Composite reliability is above the 0.70 suggested (0.892) and the Average Variance Extracted (0.58) is above the recommended lower level of 0.50 recommended (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The developed construct reliability was also evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, the internal reliability estimates for International B2B branding capabilities (0.887) is well within the recommended level of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). Based on these results the construct developed with a further new scale item was acceptable.

CFA	Cronbach Alpha	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	GFI	NFI
	0.887	0.99	0.978	0.067	0.979	0.979

Table 6.35 CFA Analysis of International B2B Branding Capabilities

International Branding Capabilities	Estimates	P
Our company utilises available resources to present a simple brand meaning for our international customers	0.718	***
Our company uses branding as an operational tool	0.786	***
Our company is able to communicate a consistent brand meaning to our international customers	0.833	***
Our company treats our brand(s) as an asset	0.811	***
Our staff understand and support our brand(s) meaning and values	0.648	***
Our company uses branding to reduce uncertainty for buyers within the transaction process	0.727	***

Table 6.36 CFA Regression Weights for International B2B Branding Capabilities

6.3.5 Descriptive statistics

To prepare the data file for analysis in subsequent sections, the researcher computed overall composite variables for each variable characterised by multiple scale items. The use of composite variables enabled the researcher to make comparisons within the sample.

The basic features of a study can be described using descriptive statistics. Lee & Peters (2016. p.80) compare this stage of research as being like getting to know a new partner in a relationship, i.e. it is important to get to know the basics of the data before moving onto more serious activities. This section presents some basic descriptive analysis conducted of the variables included within the research model and displays certain types of descriptive statistics such as: mean, Standard Deviation (SD), variance along with skewness and kurtosis of each construct employed in the study (see Table 6.37). The reason for conducting this analysis is to assess whether any measurement errors exist and assess normality, since it is a requirement of many of the statistical methods applied that variables are normally distributed. Normality is the most fundamental assumption in multivariate analysis (Hair et al. 2014. p.67). Since 7-point Likert scales were utilised, each variable mean range must be within accepted levels. The lowest mean is in relation to strategic brand management (3.7117), while the highest mean calculated as being for branding capabilities (5.1781). SD is a manipulation of the variance, defined as “the positive square root of the variance” (Lee & Peters 2016. p.109). As per Table 6.37, the SD center around one; therefore, it can be concluded that there is satisfactory heterogeneity among answers and confirms a sufficient variance in participants selections. Though statistical methods comprise of different diagnostic tests for normality, a high degree of attention is paid to skewness and kurtosis (Kim and White, 2004). Skewness is a measure of symmetry, it is concerned with the shape

of a distribution: it basically measures how symmetrical the data is distributed around the mean (Lee & Peters, 2016. p.111). Kurtosis is a measure of whether the data is flat or peaked relative to a normal distribution (Kim and White, 2004). Data sets exhibiting high kurtosis tend to have a distinct peak near the mean, decline fairly rapidly, and have heavy tails. A variable can be classified as being relatively close to normal if its skewness and kurtosis have values between –1.0 and +1.0 (Johnson and Lowe, 1979); however, values between –2.0 and +2.0 are proposed as the lower acceptable bound so that a normally distributed variable has a symmetric distribution about its mean (Kim & White, 2004).

With regard to this study, as displayed in Table 6.37, no constructs were found to have skewness over +/- 1, so all were within the suggested limits. In relation to kurtosis all constructs were also within the +/- 1 threshold, so within the suggested limits. The descriptive statistics of individual items are presented in Appendix 5 (see Tables 1-11).

Table 6.37 Descriptive Statistics of the Study's Variables

	N	Mean	S. D	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis
Financial Resources	208	4.5149	1.29105	1.667	-0.33	-0.336
Marketing Planning Capabilities	208	4.9436	1.07368	1.153	-0.387	0.188
Branding Capabilities	208	5.1781	0.98347	0.967	-0.769	0.262
Marketing Information Management Capabilities	208	4.8838	0.99099	0.982	-0.495	0.517
Macro Environmental Stimuli - Enabling Conditions	208	2.9755	1.51718	2.302	0.608	-0.536
Micro Environmental Stimuli - Precipitating Conditions	208	2.7036	1.20674	1.456	0.15	-0.767
Foreign Market Competitiveness	208	3.5993	1.19822	1.436	-0.89	-0.493
Strategic Brand Management	208	3.7117	0.88042	0.775	-0.302	-0.397
Market Performance	208	5.0326	0.98673	0.974	-0.52	0.605
Financial Performance	208	5.1489	1.03878	1.079	-0.609	0.828
Moderating Variable						
Country of Origin Effect	208	5.4326	0.9692	0.939	-0.686	0.724

6.3.6 Comparing Categories Within the Data

To further analyse the appropriateness of the sample data-file, several MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) were conducted to identify if significant differences existed between the different categories: size of firm (employees/turnover), goods versus services, brand architecture, role in firm, years in role, number of export markets, number of years trading, number of years exporting, percentage turnover from exports, region.

Each categorical variable was recoded with a numerical value when entered into SPSS, as previously reported in section ‘6.2.5.4 Control Variables and Demographics’. MANOVA is an alternative to repeated measures ANOVA, which has the often-violated assumption of Sphericity, when the assumption is violated then significance tests are too liberal (Tabachnick & Fidell 2007. p.249). MANOVA is a generalisation of ANOVA to a situation whereby there are multiple Dependant Variables (DV) (Tabachnick & Fidell 2007. p.243), given this study is using the DV's: market performance and financial performance, it is therefore appropriate. Table 6.38 reports the relationship between the various methods (t-test, ANOVA, MANOVA) for assessing group differences, the lower right quadrant of the table illustrates the case when there are two or more dependant variables (financial and market performance) and two or more groups within the independent variable (this represents the control categories in this study), therefore confirming the suitability of the MANOVA procedure for this study.

Number of Groups in Independent Variable	Number of Dependant Variables	
	One (Univariate)	Two or More (Multivariate)
Two Groups (Specialised Case)	t-test	Hotelling's T^2
Two or More Groups (Generalised Case)	Analysis of variance (ANOVA)	Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA)

Table 6.38 Methods for Assessing Group Differences (Hair et al. 2014. p.669).

Tabachnick & Fidell (2007, p.243) assert that there are several advantages to using MANOVA over ANOVA. Firstly, by measuring more than one DV, the researcher improves the chance of discovering what it is that changes as a result of different treatments and interactions. A second advantage is that when there are several DV's, MANOVA provides protection over ANOVA against inflated type I error due to multiple tests of (likely) correlated DV's. A further advantage, is MANOVA can provide more statistical power than ANOVA when the number of dependant variables is five or fewer (Hair et al. 2014, p.678), for this study there are two, so this advantage applies. Lastly, in rare cases a MANOVA has the ability to reveal differences not shown in separate ANOVA's. MANOVA is an accepted procedure within the marketing literature (e.g. Robson, 2002; Leonidou et al. 2006; Ruiz & Kowalkowski 2014; Umashankar et al. 2017).

Box's M (test of equality of covariance matrices) is highly sensitive, so unless $p < .001$ and the sample sizes are unequal, then it can be ignored. However, if significant, and you have unequal sample sizes, the test is not robust (Tabachnick et al. 2001). The result for 'Box's test of equality of covariance matrices was for each MANOVA $p < 0.001$. Therefore, there was not a statistically significant result and it can be assumed that the covariance matrices of the dependant variables are equal across groups.

Table 6.39 reports the MANOVA findings from tests between the combined DV's and the control variables: size of firm (employees/turnover), goods versus services, brand architecture, role in firm, years in role, number of export markets, number of years trading, number of years exporting, percentage turnover from exports, region.

		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Role in firm	Wilks' Lambda	0.886	1.372 ^b	18.000	394.000	0.141
Years in role	Wilks' Lambda	0.943	1.509 ^b	8.000	404.000	0.152
Number of export markets	Wilks' Lambda	0.501	1.240 ^b	6.000	18.000	0.333
Number of years trading	Wilks' Lambda	0.957	1.128 ^b	8.000	404.000	0.343
Number of years exporting	Wilks' Lambda	0.960	1.039 ^b	8.000	404.000	0.406
% Turnover from exports	Wilks' Lambda	0.873	1.928 ^b	6.000	164.000	0.079
Goods/Services	Wilks' Lambda	0.964	1.913 ^b	4.000	408.000	0.107
Branded House/ House of brands	Wilks' Lambda	0.994	0.623 ^b	2.000	205.000	0.537
Number of employees	Wilks' Lambda	0.943	1.509 ^b	8.000	404.000	0.152
Turnover	Wilks' Lambda	0.967	.559 ^b	12.000	400.000	0.874
Region	Wilks' Lambda	0.852	1.474 ^b	22.000	390.000	0.78

Table 6.39 Multivariate Tests on the Different Control Variables

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variance reported all p values are > 0.5 indicating the assumption of equality of variance had not been violated for each control variable. Since there were no violations of assumptions of MANOVA, it was appropriate to report and interpret Wilks' Lambda (c.f. Katsikeas & Kaleka, 1999; Katsikeas et al. 2004; Leonidou et al. 2006), therefore Pillai's Trace, Hotelling's Trace and Roy's Largest Root have not been reported. Table 6.39 reports the results for each MANOVA for Wilks' Lambda: role in firm = 0.141, years in role = 0.152, number of export markets 0.333, number of years trading = 0.343, number of years exporting = 0.406, percent turnover from exports = 0.079, goods/services = 0.107, Branded House/House of Brands= 0.537, number of employees =

0.152, turnover = 0.874, region = 0.78. Therefore, in each case a non-significant result was achieved $p > 0.05$. Within the Post Hoc tests within MANOVA in SPSS, the multiple comparisons tables which represent multiple ANOVA's were also examined and, as would be expected based on the MANOVA results, no significant difference between the groups were found. It can be concluded that there are no significant differences in the responses within the questionnaire between the different categories which represent controls.

6.3.7 Common Method Bias

Common Method Bias (CMB) describes the variance that is attributable to the measurement method instead of the constructs that the measures represent (Podsakoff et al. 2003). It is widely accepted to represent a potential issue spanning many different domains of research from psychology to management (Podsakoff et al. 2012). Campbell & Fiske (1959) were among the first to recognise the potential biasing effects that methods of measurement could have on the validity of measure:

“In any given psychological measuring device, there are certain features or stimuli introduced specifically to represent the trait (construct) that it is intended to measure. There are other features which are characteristic of the method being employed, features which could also be present in efforts to measure quite different traits (constructs). The test, or rating scale, or other device, almost inevitably elicits systematic variance due to both groups of features. To the extent that irrelevant method variance contributes to the scores obtained, these scores are invalid”.

(Campbell & Fiske, 1959, p.84; words in parentheses added by Podsakoff et al. 2012).

Discussions surrounding CMB have been appearing regularly throughout the past three decades (e.g. Bagozzi & Yi, 1990; Williams & Brown, 1994; Scullen, 1999; Lindell & Brandt, 2000; Podsakoff et al. 2003; 2012). Leading marketing journals have published contributions to these discussions (e.g. Cote & Buckley 1987; 1988) and contemporary international marketing research, appearing in top tier publications, frequently explains efforts used to combat CMB (e.g. Hultman et al. 2009; Merrilees et al. 2011; Morgan et al. 2012). Using a single survey instrument to collect data from key informants creates the potential for common method variance to influence the observed relationships between measures (Podsakoff, 2003; 2012). Given the key informant approach is commonly used in marketing research, the potential for CMB is a concern (Podsakoff, 2012).

To test for CMB within this study, two principal approaches were used. First, if CMB accounts for the observed relationships between the study variables, then by running a CFA with all the constructs this should produce a single factor (Podsakoff, 2003), this is referred to as ‘Harman’s single factor test’ and has been used in leading international marketing research studies, including Hultman et al. (2003). The factor analysis was run in SPSS (including all of the studies variables) with no rotation (Podsakoff, 2003), and extraction set to 1 as required. According to Podsakoff (2003), there will be an issue if a single-factor accounts for the majority (over 50%) of the variance extracted. In this study, the result of this test showed the factor extracted accounted for less than 25% of the variance; therefore, the test found no bias. However, arguably the single factor test can be conservative in detecting biases (Malhotra et al. 2006); therefore, further tests were also conducted.

According to Podsakoff, (2003), a good approach is controlling for the effects of an unmeasured latent methods factor, referred to as a Common Latent Factor (CLF). A benefit

of this approach is it does not require the researcher to identify and measure the specific factor responsible for methods effects, additionally, this approach models the effect of the method factor on the measures instead of the latent constructs they signify and does not need an equal effect on each measure by the method factor (Podsakoff, 2003). Fig 6.2 displays a basic diagram of the method.

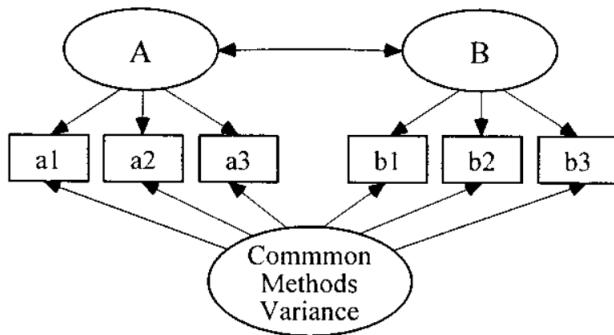


Fig. 6.2 Controlling for the Effects of an Unmeasured Latent Methods Factor (CLF) (Podsakoff et al. 2003. p.168).

To conduct the test, items are allowed to load onto their constructs along with a CLF and the significance of the structural parameters are assessed with and without the inclusion of the CLF. The researcher also referred to established procedures for creating and testing using a CLF in CFA using Podsakoff (2003) method (see Appendix 7 – CFA with CLF). There were no significant differences found between the standardised regression weights estimates with and without the CLF present and therefore, no need to include common method adjusted composites within the structural model.

6.4 Structured Equation Modelling (SEM)

According to Kumar et al. (2017)

“Structural equation models (SEM) refer to a diverse set of mathematical models, algorithms, and statistical models that fit networks to construct data”.

SEM includes and incorporates factor analysis and path analysis; it first validates the measurement model through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and then fits the structural model using path analysis (Kumar et al. 2017). SEM ultimately provides a similar function to multiple regressions but is far more powerful in prediction and takes into consideration the interaction and non-linearity of correlated independent variables having many indicators and one or more latent dependent variables, which can also have a multitude of indicators (Kumar et al. (2017). By using multiple items to represent latent variables, it allows for more precise estimates of cause and effect relations between constructs (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). SEM is the predominant statistical method used for international marketing research and can be seen used in some of the most widely cited papers such as Cavusgil & Zou, (1994). Chen et al (2016) found SEM to be employed by the majority of studies investigating determinants of export performance from a review of literature from 2006 to 2014. This is consistent with an earlier review conducted by Sousa et al. (2008) which reviewed the same criteria from literature 1997 to 2004. Therefore, it is entirely appropriate to employ SEM for the thesis.

6.4.1 Model Hypothesis

Analysis of the measurement model and constructs resulted in few changes to be required. This is not unusual given most of the constructs have been widely tested and utilised in previous different marketing research which has been published in top tier publications. Only three variables required items to be removed to improve reliability and validity, the composite variables created did not require to be adjusted for within the structural model. The development of the conceptual framework (see fig 3.2) was advanced from a review of previous literature and supported by the Qualitative stage of research in section five, which examined the inter-relationships within the proposed model. The following hypothesis in Table 6.40 determine the key relationships this study will test in SEM.

H1 (a). A firm's International Financial Resources are positively associated with the development of its International Market Information Capabilities
H1 (b). A firm's International Financial Resources are positively associated with the development of its International Branding Capabilities
H1 (c). A firm's International Financial Resources are positively associated with the development of its International Marketing Planning Capabilities
H2. The development of a firm's International Market Information Capabilities are positively related to the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management
H3. The development of a firm's International Branding Capabilities are positively related to the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management
H4. The development of a firm's International Marketing Planning Capabilities are positively related to the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management
H5. High levels of macro environmental stimuli have a positive effect on the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management
H6. High levels of micro environmental stimuli have a positive effect on the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management
H7. High levels of competitive intensity have a direct negative effect on the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management
H8 (a). Superiority in International Strategic Brand Management is positively associated with a firm's Financial Performance in overseas markets
H8 (b). Superiority in International Strategic Brand Management is positively associated with a firm's Market Performance in overseas markets
H9 (a). High levels of Country of Origin Effect have a positive effect on the association between International Strategic Brand Management and a firm's Financial Performance in overseas markets
H9 (b). High levels of Country of Origin Effect have a positive effect on the association between International Strategic Brand Management and a firm's Market Performance in overseas markets

Table 6.40 Hypothesis to Test the Inter-Relationships within the Model

Fig. 6.3 provides a graphical representation of the research model and testable hypothesis developed for evaluation using SEM.

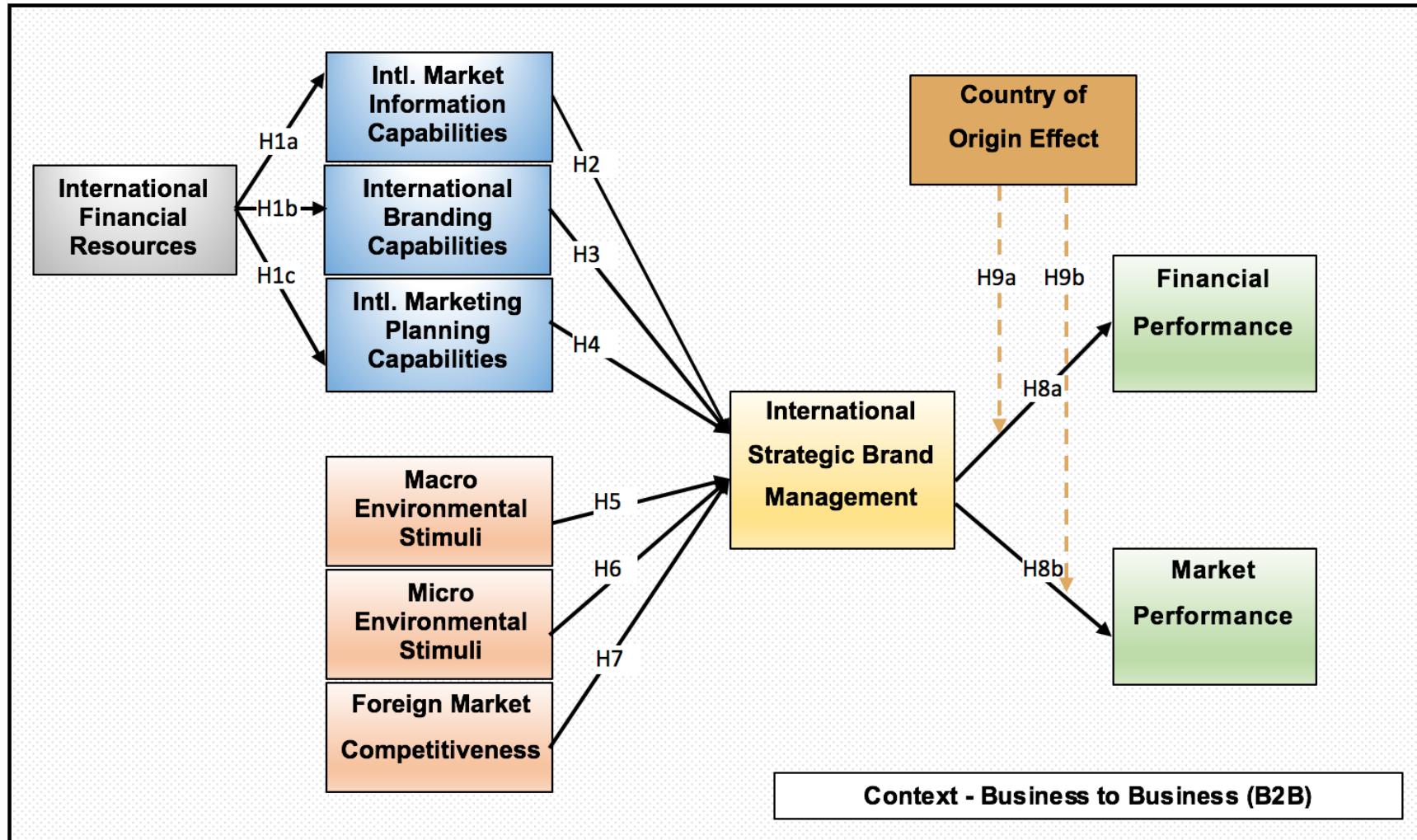


Fig 6.3 Research Model including Hypothesised Paths

6.4.2 Assessment of Structural Model Validity

The structural model was estimated with the same sample (n=208), yielding the following model fit results ($p < 0.001$) with 306 degrees of freedom and $\chi^2 = 480.120$. CFI=0.963, TLI=0.923, GFI=0.933, NFI=0.931, RMSEA=0.069. Collectively, these fit indices suggest that the structural model is acceptable. The structural coefficients linking financial resources and international capabilities (market information, branding and marketing planning) are all significant, additionally, the structural coefficients linking international capabilities (market branding and marketing planning) and the effects of micro environmental precipitating stimuli and foreign market competitiveness are also significant. Although positive, the effects of market information capabilities and macro environmental enabling stimuli on international strategic brand management are not found to be significant. Lastly, superior strategic brand management has been found to have a significant influence on both financial and market performance (see Table 6.41).

Table 6.41 Results from Hypothesised Direct Paths

Hypothesised Link			β	t-value	Sig.	Supported ?
H1(a)	International Financial Resources	→ International Market Information Capabilities	0.395	6.174	***	✓
H1(a)	International Financial Resources	→ International Branding Capabilities	0.135	1.970	**	✓
H1(c)	International Financial Resources	→ International Marketing Planning Capabilities	0.467	7.651	***	✓
H2	International Market Information Capabilities	→ International Strategic Brand Management	0.048	0.780		X
H3	International Branding Capabilities	→ International Strategic Brand Management	0.691	16.814	***	✓
H4	International Marketing Planning Capabilities	→ International Strategic Brand Management	0.250	4.049	***	✓
H5	Macro Environment Stimuli	→ International Strategic Brand Management	0.048	1.126		X
H6	Micro Environment Stimuli	→ International Strategic Brand Management	0.112	2.653	**	✓
H7	Foreign Market Competitiveness	→ International Strategic Brand Management	-0.069	-0.1928	**	✓
H8(a)	International Strategic Brand Management	→ Financial Performance	0.262	3.849	***	✓
H8(b)	International Strategic Brand Management	→ Market Performance	0.258	3.795	***	✓

*** p < 0.001; **p < 0.05; *p > 0.1

The squared multiple correlations or R^2 provides the percentage of variance explained by the predictor variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Table 6.42 reports the results for this study. Though a value of above 0.25 is suggested, there is agreement by many scholars that a suitable level is dependent on various circumstances. Though the R-squared suggests that around 80% of the variance in the performance dependant variables is not explained by the model, the performance relevance of this study of international strategic brand management

is comparable to prior studies (Katsikeas et al. 2006; Hultman et al. 2009) on marketing strategy and product strategy respectively. Interestingly, over 70% of the variance in strategic brand management has been explained by the model.

Marketing Planning Capabilities	0.218
Branding Capabilities	0.118
Market Information Capabilities	0.156
Strategic Brand Management	0.719
Market Performance	0.212
Financial Performance	0.195

Table 6.42 Squared Multiple Correlations - R^2

6.4.3 Moderation

The importance of moderators is a result of their ability to provide an enhanced understanding of the relationship between relevant independent variables and dependant variables (Walsh et al. 2008). Moderator variables can be defined as “variables that affect the strength of a relationship between an independent variable and a dependant variable” (Arnold, 1982). To test the moderating effect that Country of Origin has on the relationship between strategic brand management and firm performance outcomes, (specified in hypothesis 9a and 9a), SEM and multi-group analysis is used. The multi-group analysis approach taken uses a mixture regression model with 2 pre-specified classes (Wedel & DeSarbo, 2002). This approach permits the creation of different parameter values for each group for the model without the loss of statistical impact (Finch & Bronk, 2011). The first step was to change the composite variable into a categorical variable consisting of High and Low for COO effect. SPSS was used to first find the median for the COO variable using frequency statistics, COO (5.508), then recode the variable into different variables. This

approach is consistent with previous studies (e.g. Homburg & Giering, 2001; Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006). For COO, high equates to above 5.51 and above and low equates to all other values. This study follows a reliable accepted method (e.g. Walsh et al. 2008) and tests for moderation as two components. First, examining the general moderating effect on all the links within the model to establish if COO has an effect on the overall model, and then examining the moderator effect and direction of the moderation for the specific individual links between the focal constructs as specified in hypothesis 9a and 9b. To conduct the first analysis, a Chi-square difference test between a model in which all paths are restricted and one where they are all freed. This initial test indicates if a general moderating effect exists amongst the constructs within the model. The Chi-square difference of 46.740 does not indicate a significant (at the 0.05 level) general moderating effect. The following step is to consider the specific individual paths by restricting all paths apart from the path tested by hypothesis 9a and then separately, 9b. Though both individual paths were found to be positively influenced by high COO, there was not found to be a significant moderating effect by COO on either path at either 0.05 or 0.1 level (see Table 6.43).

			High	Low	x2	P	Hypothesis	Supported
Country of Origin Effect								
International Strategic Brand Management	→	Financial Performance	0.253	0.190	1.096	0.578	H9 (a)	Not Supported
International Strategic Brand Management	→	Market Performance	0.287	0.159	0.387	0.824	H9 (b)	Not Supported

Table 6.43 Results from Hypothesised Moderated Paths

6.5 Conclusions

This chapter has presented the findings from the Quantitative stage of this study and has reported various tests of the data and the results of the structural equation model. In conclusion, the hypothesised model provides a satisfactory explanation of the observed data. The psychometric properties of the measurement scales used for this study have been sufficiently assessed for reliability and validity using confirmatory factor analysis. Following a number of processes outlined within the chapter, the hypothesised model was evaluated using AMOS 24.0. The results indicate that most hypothesis are supported, two direct hypotheses were rejected, one internal (the effect of market information capabilities) and one external (the effect of macro environmental stimuli), on strategic brand management in a B2B context. Lastly, in relation to Country of Origin as a moderator within the model, it was not found to have a significant effect on the positive influence of superior international strategic brand management on firms' performance. The findings from the quantitative analysis were broadly supported by the findings from the qualitative analysis. A discussion around the findings follows in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7 – Discussion, Theoretical and Managerial Implications

7.1 Introduction

B2B marketing managers receive little guidance from marketing scholars on the question of whether investments into superior strategic management pays off in international business markets. This study presents the first comprehensive examination of international strategic brand management in a large sample of UK firms who have demonstrated successful export performance. There has been a general consensus that branding is just as important for B2B as B2C firms (c.f. Leek & Christodoulides, 2011; Glynn, 2012) and a trend towards more research into B2B branding concerns (Seyedghorban et al. 2016), likewise, there has been a growth in research relaying the importance of different aspects of branding within an international context (c.f. Whitelock & Fastoso, 2007; Chabowski et al. 2013). Yet, there has been sparse research to date specifically looking at international branding within a B2B context and little attention given to it as a deterministic factor in improving B2B firm performance. Against this backdrop, the focus of this study was to investigate and test the importance of strategic brand management for exporting firms, specifically in a B2B context. The study rests on the importance of internal antecedent capabilities and external environmental contingent effects on international strategic brand management, and the role of Country of Origin effect as a moderator of international strategic brand management influence on international firm performance.

The overall aim of this study was to:

Investigate international strategic brand management as a deterministic factor in superior firm performance within a B2B context.

This research aim was influenced by unexplored issues surrounding branding within the international literature and specifically, B2B brand management within an international context. To meet this overall aim five key objectives were set:

Objective 1: Develop a comprehensive model founded on pertinent theoretical perspectives which incorporates external and internal environmental variables influencing strategic brand management practices affecting firm performance in a B2B domain.

Objective 2: Uncover the impact of exporters resources and capabilities on international strategic brand management practices in a B2B context.

Objective 3: Clarify the impact of external environment factors on international strategic brand management practices in a B2B context.

Objective 4: Evaluate the extent to which successful UK B2B exporters benefit from improved international firm performance through effective strategic brand management practices

Objective 5: Investigate the significance attached to a B2B exporters country of origin as manifestation for achieving improved export performance through effective strategic brand management practices

To meet the overall aim and objectives of this study, a mixture of secondary and primary data as well as research methods was necessary. A review of the extant literature uncovered vital gaps which provided justification for the need for this research, and secondary information also provided the research instruments used in the primary data collection phase. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed and Chapters 5 and 6 respectively, have presented the findings. In line with the research aim and objectives of this thesis, this chapter will first provide a summary of findings, followed by a discussion about the theoretical implications and contribution of this study to the international B2B branding literature. Managerial implications that have emerged from the analysis are also provided and examined. Finally, limitations of the study are recognised and recommendations for future research avenues are suggested.

7.2 Overview of the Study's Findings

A review of this study's hypothesis which were tested indicates that most hypothesised effects were verified, with the emergence of some interesting findings. However, there were also some unanticipated findings which rejected the hypothesised effects and these are also worth consideration. Results generally suggest that certain internal and external environment factors influence the strength of a B2B firm's international strategic brand management and superior brand management has a direct positive effect on firm performance. However, the positive effect is not proven to be significantly moderated by the Country of Origin effect as was anticipated. An interesting general finding was that the majority (70%) of B2B exporting firms consider their corporate brand to be more important than their individual product/service brands. To the authors knowledge this is the first study to investigate this and calls into question previous international marketing research which

has utilised the widespread technique of using the export venture (specific product or service) when examining branding traits for B2B firms.

This study acknowledges potential shortcomings and criticisms levelled at the B2B branding field by addressing variances in the B2C and B2B domains. Most previous research has attempted to show that B2C models can be applied in a B2B context, however, they have been initially designed to reflect how consumers interact with branded products they purchase. This investigation augments previous international marketing research findings by moving from an export venture (e.g. product) approach to a 'branded house' strategy using a corporate umbrella for all of the products a company offers, which is consistent with B2B branding literature in non-international settings. Further, by linking specific marketing and branding capabilities with functional elements of B2B brand management, this research suggests both an extension and alternative paths to the existing branding literature in a B2B domain.

Overall, the qualitative data collected provided broad support for the conceptual framework first developed from a thorough review of the extant literature, therefore informing the creation of research hypothesis. Examples from B2B suppliers demonstrated international B2B brand management is crucial to initiating and expanding their strategic objectives. Moving away from more isolated and sometimes reductive views on dimensions of B2B branding, the conceptualisation moves towards a more strategic consideration of B2B suppliers' approaches to managing their branding efforts, specifically by aligning and utilising appropriate internal resources and capabilities while taking account of external environmental conditions to increase competitive advantage in global markets leading to improved international firm performance.

It is acknowledged, and should be highlighted, that this study assumes a supplier perspective in measuring the variables. Respondents were asked to provide assessments of the effectiveness of their branding activities for typical buyers. This approach overlooks that every different B2B firm will be faced with some heterogeneity regarding the buying process within its current and potential buyers. However, since external environmental factors can have a significant effect on the organisational buying process (Dwyer & Tanner, 2016), customers in specific markets will be expected to share certain traits. Therefore, B2B firms can, to some degree, be expected to have 'typical' customers. In addition, since branding activities affect all buyers simultaneously, export marketing managers in B2B firms will be expected to base their branding decisions on the perceptions of what may be a typical customer. Within this setting, this study has used the most appropriate approach for measuring characteristics of typical B2B buyers.

Previous empirical research on the effects of B2B branding, in general has produced mixed results but, it has typically focused on only one industry (Homburg 2010). Therefore, differing results may have stemmed from situational characteristics within the specific industries included within these studies. This study has used a multi-industry approach which is more commonly used within the international marketing literature, therefore heightening the ability to draw generalisations from the results.

The following sections will address each research objective and provide a summary of key findings along with a discussion of the theoretical implications and contribution to the academic community. In each section, a reminder of the objective, relevant hypothesis and where applicable test results will be provided. Triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative findings will be employed to increase cross validation (Jick, 1979) and support

the notion of completeness whereby a more comprehensive account of the area of enquiry can be gained by examining the results of both research methods (Bryman, 2006).

7.3 Addressing the Research Objectives: Discussion of the Key Findings, Theoretical Implications and Contributions from this Study

7.3.1 Objective 1

This section will discuss the key findings, theoretical implications and contributions from this study in relation to addressing the first research objective:

Objective 1: Develop a comprehensive model founded on pertinent theoretical perspectives which incorporates external and internal environmental variables influencing strategic brand management practices affecting international firm performance in a B2B domain.

This study has synthesised various streams of literature drawn from differing theoretical perspectives including the RBT and SCP to advance academic enquiry into improved international strategic brand management and consequent effects on export performance in a B2B domain. Figure 7.1 provides a reminder of the conceptual model developed and tested within this study; included is the hypothesised paths which will be discussed in relation to the forthcoming sections addressing objectives 2-5.

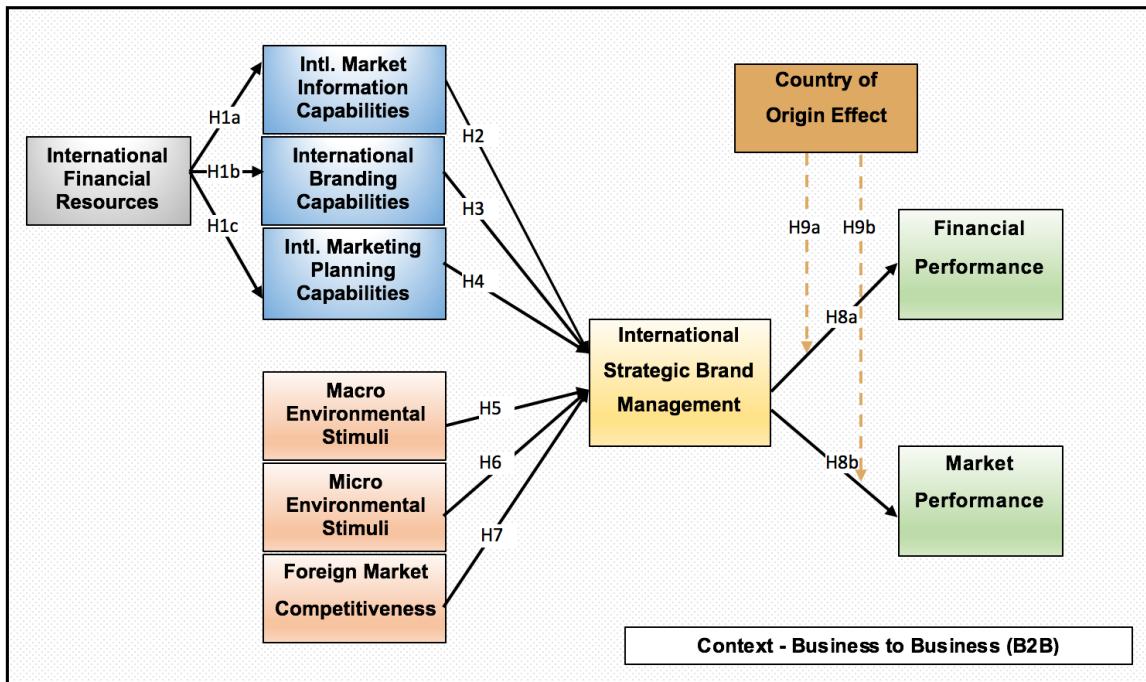


Figure 7.1 Research Model

Conceptual advances within different area of studies (domains) are critical entities around which the occurrence of key conceptual advances can happen (MacInnis, 2011). The development of a conceptual model advanced from the extant literature is a key contribution and provided a roadmap for this thesis while also meeting **Objective 1**. According to MacInnis (2011), conceptual advances in relation to theories of this nature are critical for both academics and managers since: 1) they help clarify the workings of the world around us and 2) by thought-provoking developments of understanding “why” conceptual relationships exist fosters better predictions of the outcomes which managers care about. Qualitative fieldwork facilitated the collection of primary data in order to thoroughly assess the model to: 1) examine the key constructs and 2) examine the inter-relationships between the constructs within the emergent model. The qualitative fieldwork therefore provided valuable support for this investigation and aided the formulation of clearly defined research

hypothesis which underpin the quantitative research stage of this thesis, which tested the inter-relationships within the model.

This study finds support for the overall export strategic brand management model, which accounts parsimoniously for a range of contingency contexts by considering simultaneous and holistic patterns of interlinkages between a firms overall internal environment, external environmental factors, brand management strategy and subsequent performance moderated by COO. The integrative conceptual framework establishes a foundation for the systematic development of theory relating to international branding activities, particularly strategic brand management within a B2B domain. Theoretically, the conceptual framework facilitates parsimonious conceptualisation, therefore, importantly provides the potential for extending the research by identifying additional constructs that could be added to further research within a more focused area of the framework, for example, export orientation. Theoretical development of the framework could also include brand value perceived by B2B customers in relation to a B2B exporters international branding capabilities and strategic brand management. Additionally, the inclusion of further external mediating variables on export performance such as, international B2B customer buying experience or foreign market characteristics.

By viewing RBT and SCP perspectives as complimentary instead of conflicting, it has allowed the formation of a more integrative model providing a completer explanation of International B2B brand management. Therefore, along with inter-firm relationships and the utilisation of specific branding capabilities to exploit available resources, subsequently the ability to achieve superior strategic brand management is also contingent on external environmental precipitating stimuli and turbulent competitive international market

environmental factors. It was recognised through the development of the conceptual model for this study that for any theory of business performance to be worthwhile, it must be dynamic (Porter, 1991); the conceptual framework advanced for this study is explicitly dynamic (c.f. Morgan et al. 2004).

Drawing heavily from RBT, this study has described and explored relevant resources and capabilities informing the development of the construct branding capabilities to specifically satisfy B2B markets. The additional attributes of the variable developed for B2B international branding capabilities inform marketing researchers with a lexicon for future efforts investigating B2B suppliers' international branding activities. This development of the B2B branding capabilities construct is considered by MacInnis, (2011) to be a significant entity within which conceptual advances can occur.

This section has discussed and examined how **Objective 1** has been addressed through the development of a compelling framework integrating multiple, dissimilar variables to explain their synergistic differential effects on strategic brand management and, consequently, export performance within a B2B domain. The following section will consider **Objective 2**.

7.3.2 Objective 2

This section will discuss the key findings, theoretical implications and contributions from this study in relation to addressing the second research objective:

Objective 2: Uncover the impact of exporters' resources and capabilities on international strategic brand management practices in a B2B context.

The Effects of International Financial Resources on International Marketing

Capabilities

Exporting is a strategic process that requires access to considerable financial resources (Wright et al. 2007; Banno et al. 2014), therefore the availability of financial resources has long been accepted to be a crucial requirement for successful exporting activity in targeted international markets (Ling-Yee & Ogunmokun, 2001; Morgan et al. 2006; Spyropoulou et al. 2011). It has been suggested within the literature that international B2B brands need to be created, and their formation is a complex practice involving a wide range of activities on behalf of the brand (e.g. Aaker, 2004; Wong & Merrilees, 2007, Kuhn et al. 2008). Due to the substantial working capital and financial requirements of these activities, the establishment and subsequent management of a solid international brand is an expensive process (c.f. Boulding et al. 1994; Spyropoulou et al. 2011; Keller, 2013).

The qualitative stage of the research provided broad support for the importance of financial resources to the development of strong international marketing and branding capabilities. For example, some firms identified that financial resource constraints were a key issue to developing their capabilities:

We have got a great product and great brand; our biggest problem is lack of cash
(R3).

Another example from the interviews was that there was support from respondents for the importance of having the ability to access additional international financial resources when needed (Spyropoulou et al. 2011):

Money will be used to grow the commercial side of the team which will be focused on accessing and growing external markets (R16).

Following the qualitative stage of the research, the below hypotheses were developed and subsequently tested within the quantitative stage of the research:

H1 (a). A firm's International Financial Resources are positively associated with the development of its International Market Information Capabilities

H1 (b). A firm's International Financial Resources are positively associated with the development of its International Branding Capabilities

H1 (c). A firm's International Financial Resources are positively associated with the development of its International Marketing Planning Capabilities

Hypothesised Link			β	t-value	Sig.	Supported ?
H1(a)	International Financial Resources	→	International Market Information Capabilities	0.395	6.174	*** ✓
H1(a)	International Financial Resources	→	International Branding Capabilities	0.135	1.970	** ✓
H1(c)	International Financial Resources	→	International Marketing Planning Capabilities	0.467	7.651	*** ✓

*** p < 0.001; **p < 0.05; *p > 0.1

As can be seen from the SEM results summarised on the previous page, a B2B firm's international financial resources were found to have a significant positive influence over their international capabilities; namely: market information capabilities, branding capabilities and marketing planning capabilities. This is perhaps not surprising given the relatively high working capital and financial liquidity requirements of B2B export operations (Spyropoulou et al. 2010). The findings are in line with previous research by Spyropoulou et al. (2010; 2011) looking at the effects of financial resources on relationship management capabilities, communications capabilities and branding advantage. This study

extends knowledge by focusing solely on a B2B context and confirming the effects of international financial resources on a set of international capabilities (market information, branding and marketing planning) which have not previously been empirically tested.

The results from this study provide a contribution to the international marketing literature by providing empirical confirmation that possession of suitable financial resources is advantageous to the deployment of market information, marketing planning and branding capabilities in export markets. These key findings are linked to suggestions in the international marketing literature that developing; 1) strong long-term market information capabilities is an expensive process (Eriksson et al. 1997); 2) developing robust branding capabilities is a costly endeavour (Keller & Lehmann, 2006) and 3) a considerable investment is required to support a firm's intention to build and support substantial comprehensive marketing planning capabilities (Gilligan & Wilson, 2009).

The Effects of International Market Information Capabilities on International Strategic Brand Management

Vorhies et al. (2005) interpret market information capabilities as a mid-level marketing capability, and brand management as a higher-level capability. Their research found market information capabilities has a significant positive effect on firm performance. However, they recommended further research should assess brand management, which this study has accomplished. Possessing capabilities in relation to marketing information processes are likely to positively influence strategic considerations for firms exporting and informational capabilities are the strongest drivers of shifts towards forms of differentiation in firm's competitive strategies in export markets (Kaleka & Morgan, 2017), therefore, it could be

predicted that these capabilities will act as a strong antecedent to a firm's strategic brand management.

The results from the qualitative stage of the study indicated the importance of international market information capabilities to being able to strategically manage their brand in overseas markets. There were examples whereby the analysis of market information was used by respondents to avoid any potential risks for the brand in overseas markets:

We're open to new things and open to new areas, having said that, it's all done based on bottom line and all done based on an awful lot of research and we don't do things on a whim so we are not up for risk that could have a negative impact on our brand or be detrimental to the rest of the business (R26).

There was also a degree of support found from the interviews for how respondents utilise the international market information knowledge they accumulate (Day, 1994):

We look at how the market is developing and we look at what opportunities there are for us or how we can better position or maintain our brand position (R4).

There was evidence that it may be difficult for firms to adequately build market information capabilities for all the markets they export to. In the case of the example below from (R4), two directors were expected to provide coverage for the Gulf region and Europe which both consist of multiple countries:

We have two sales directors, one is for the Gulf: he's also Lebanese but lives in the UK so he speaks Arabic; and we've got another one who does Europe. They look at

how the market is developing and look at what opportunities there are for us or how we can better position or maintain our brand position (R4).

However, there were also examples of B2B firms' which did not put the same emphasis on the potential benefits of international market information to their strategic brand management and there was evidence of some firms taking a different approach:

Part of our brand philosophy is to run faster than everyone else so they worry about us more than we worry about them (R14).

Following the qualitative stage of the research, the below hypothesis was developed and subsequently tested within the quantitative stage of the research.

H2. The development of a firm's International Market Information Capabilities are positively related to the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management

Hypothesised Link		β	t-value	Sig.	Supported ?
H2	International Market Information Capabilities → International Strategic Brand Management	0.048	0.780		X

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p > 0.1$

As can be seen from the SEM results summarised above, although there was found to be a positive link, a B2B firm's international market information capabilities were not found to exhibit a significant positive influence over their international strategic brand management practices.

It is contrary to expectations that the positive effect of this mid-level capability on strategic brand management should not be significant. Particularly so, given a continuous flow of valuable market information can act as an exploratory force motivating already differentiated firms to further refine their offerings unique features or devise novel ways of differentiation (Kaleka & Morgan, 2017), as would be found by the strategic way a firm manages their brand. One explanation for this non-significant path might be that the positive effects of the exporting firm's international market information capabilities on its strategic brand management are offset by the negative effect of the complexities and costs involved in acquiring and thoroughly analysing the available information for a wide range of export markets. In this study, only 21% of firms exported to under eleven markets and over 50% of firms were exporting to at least twenty-six markets. Therefore, the difficulties associated with acquiring and analysing adequate market information from a high number of export markets could be limiting firms' ability to achieve significant benefits by strategically managing their brand through their market information capabilities. Previous studies in the marketing and product development literature suggest that in more centralised and formalised organisations knowledge transfers can be less efficient and effective (e.g. Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Moenaert & Souder, 1990). Therefore, a further potential reason for the non-significant effect of market information capabilities on strategic brand management practices could also be explained by a lack of appropriate market information knowledge being efficiently transferred to brand management teams within some organisations. Further investigation into this relationship could be a future research concern.

The Effects of International Branding Capabilities on International Strategic Brand Management

The review of extant literature revealed the importance of B2B branding and agreement by many scholars on the benefits branding can also have in the B2B domain (Mudambi, 2002; Beverland et al. 2007; Leek & Christodoulides; Lilien & Grewal, 2012). It is recognised that the development and management of a firm's brand requires strong brand capabilities (Davcik & Sharma, 2016). Although there had previously been numerous studies examining B2B branding and various studies investigating branding capabilities (not specific to B2B markets), there had not been a comprehensive evaluation of the relationship between B2B brand capability development and strategic brand management leading to enhanced firm performance.

The results from the qualitative stage of the study indicated the vast majority of respondents were in agreement that international branding capabilities are essential to their exporting activities and that the development of these capabilities is consequently critical to the strategic management of their brands overseas. For example, the achievement of successful branding capabilities is the ability to use branding as an operational tool (Keller, 2013):

I'll deal with the intangible aspect of our brand, the intangible is our technical know-how, we employ guys that are the best in the industry. We know better, we have more knowledge and experience (R4).

There was support found for branding capabilities to play a prominent role when there is an integrated effort from all areas of the firm (Wong & Merrilees, 2007):

All the staff understand our brand, they know how and why we work (R29).

An important finding from the interviews was that international branding capabilities within a B2B context should also encompass the ability to reduce uncertainty within the purchase making decision for buyers (Mudambi et al. 2002). Successful B2B suppliers realise the need to reassure buyers and reduce any concerns or uncertainties they might have:

They have to be certain you can deliver on your brand's promises (R2).

The trust with our brand and our people and our products is an incredibly powerful thing, that really is the crux of our business (R32).

Following the qualitative stage of the research, the below hypothesis was developed and subsequently tested within the quantitative stage of the research:

H3. The development of a firm's International Branding Capabilities are positively related to the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management

Hypothesised Link		β	t-value	Sig.	Supported ?
H3	International Branding Capabilities	→ International Strategic Brand Management	0.691	16.814 ***	✓

*** p < 0.001; **p < 0.05; *p > 0.1

As can be seen from the SEM results summarised on the previous page, as was expected, robust branding capabilities was found to have a very significant influence on providing superior strategic brand management.

A thorough review of the literature had initially found that a potentially overlooked essential element within B2B branding capabilities is the ability for B2B brands to reduce uncertainty associated with the purchase making decision (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011; Lilien & Grewal, 2012). The need for this additional measure within the construct: international B2B branding capabilities was then supported by the qualitative stage of the research. This item was developed solely for use within the context of B2B branding, given one of the inherent characteristics of B2B markets is a focus on reducing uncertainty associated with the decision-making process (Mudambi et al. 2002; Lilien & Grewal, 2012). This was a key finding and serves to broaden and deepen academic understanding of the newly developed international B2B branding construct. This construct provides a valuable contribution for future research efforts examining international B2B branding.

International B2B brands serve several valuable functions (e.g. reduce risk, signify quality, engender trust), cumulatively targeted towards providing a competitive advantage in export markets. By establishing robust international branding capabilities, an exporting B2B supplier can hope to then strategically manage their brand, leading to stronger enduring relationships. Central to contemporary strategic thinking is the notion that to achieve improved firm performance requires a firm to gain and sustain a competitive advantage over competitors (Martin et al. 2017). Firms pursuing this competitive advantage are encouraged to develop distinctive capabilities (Day & Wensley, 1988); branding capabilities are central to this standpoint.

The Effects of International Marketing Planning Capabilities on International Strategic Brand Management

Marketing planning capabilities reflect a firm's ability to create and decide upon the most appropriate strategic decisions, taking account of alternative courses of marketing and branding actions (e.g. Slotegraaf & Dickson, 2004). Several studies have highlighted the importance of the link between firms' export strategy planning process and planned export marketing strategic content and subsequent export market performance (for review see Sousa et al. 2008). Yet, the link between marketing planning and strategic brand management in any domain has been an overlooked issue. Strategic brand management is a form of competitive strategy which involves planned patterns of capability deployments that support options about how the international firm will compete for its target buyers and achieve its desired goals (Murray et al. 2011)

The qualitative interviews in this study revealed that the vast majority of firms create and follow international marketing plans:

Our international marketing plan goes hand in hand with our business plan, we have a strategy and that strategy obviously includes how we can grow the company; growing the company is based on where can we find new overseas markets and implement our plans (R33).

We have a quarterly marketing meeting where we'll look at our market strategy for each of our top 3 sectors that we cover (R6).

Setting goals for export branding efforts had an important role to play:

I think our true goals now are to get the American market sorted: establishing our brand in America is our goal for the rest of this year, just to get that sorted before we even look at Oz, Canada..... (R11).

Following the qualitative stage of the research, the below hypothesis was developed and subsequently tested within the quantitative stage of the research:

H4. The development of a firm's International Marketing Planning Capabilities are positively related to the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management

Hypothesised Link		β	t-value	Sig.	Supported ?
H4	International Marketing Planning Capabilities → International Strategic Brand Management	0.250	4.049	***	✓

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p > 0.1$

As can be seen from the SEM results summarised above, the quantitative stage of this study found international marketing planning capabilities has a significant influence on a B2B firm's ability to foster superior international strategic brand management practices.

Key findings include: exporting firms that have strong planning skills and superior processes for learning about target export markets are more likely to make suitable strategic decisions in relation to the management of their brand, which will in turn lead to increased export performance. While it is not possible to attain perfect market foresight, strong international marketing planning capabilities should also serve to minimise the likelihood of unforeseen actions in by international buyers and competitors in response to the exporters realised strategic decisions (Slater & Narver, 1995). Therefore, by developing comprehensive international planning capabilities, this should minimise the difference between planned and

realised marketplace responses to strategic brand management practices. The marketing literature suggests that marketing planning capabilities relate to the ability of firms to conceive strategies that suitably align available resources and capabilities with marketplace conditions in ways that facilitate the firm to achieve its strategic objectives (e.g. Day & Wensley, 1988). The findings from both empirical stages of data collection within this thesis indicate that in the context of successful exports, international planning capabilities include the clear creation of exporting goals, and the skills and creativity with which strategies are developed to achieve them. Therefore, the appropriate deployment of international planning capabilities significantly affects exporters ability to achieve strategic objectives with regards to the management of their brand.

This section has provided a discussion and key findings derived from both qualitative and quantitative results in relation to addressing **Objective 2**. The following section will address the key findings and implications from **Objective 3**.

7.3.3 Objective 3

This section will discuss the key findings, theoretical implications and contributions from this study in relation to addressing the third research objective:

Objective 3: Clarify the impact of external environment factors on international strategic brand management practices in a B2B context.

Notable international scholars have explored the effects of external stimuli and external competitiveness on marketing strategy and firm performance (c.f. Leonidou et al. 2002; Sousa et al. 2008), but previous work has not addressed the effects of external environmental

factors on strategic brand management in any context. Further, studies have yet to address whether, and under what conditions such factors can affect a B2B firm's ability to attain superior brand management in overseas markets. Using theory from the structure conduct performance framework, this study has examined the effects of external environmental factors on a firm's international strategic brand management. Specifically, this study is novel in assessing both macro enabling and micro precipitating external environmental stimuli together with a potential negative constraint in terms of the intensity of competition on strategic brand management.

The Effects of Macro Environment Stimuli on International Strategic Brand Management

Given that a brand can be managed to respond to the uniqueness and special characteristics of foreign markets (Wong & Merrilees, 2007), the way a B2B brand is positioned and managed becomes critical in the international context. International brands need to take account of the macro-marketing environment, political, socio-economic and cultural environments in the different foreign markets considered (Ganesh & Oakenfull, 1999).

The qualitative stage of the study provided notable insights into external environment enabling conditions and their subsequent potential influence on the strategic management of the firm's brand. For example, the international marketing literature suggests variation in exchange rates can either encourage or discourage exporting to different markets (Cateora et al. 2012). As the follows quotes from the interviews displays this assertion was supported:

Change in the currency rate between the pound and the euro has affected our business, it's made it more difficult, particularly in areas where there's a lot of competition, Italy being a particular example (R8).

The dollar's been a nightmare because our export orders were pegged on dollar then you're going from Columbian peso to dollar, rand to dollar, rand to sterling but we pegged originally on the dollar (R15).

Another external environment example from the qualitative interviews was: the majority were found to have a relationship with government bodies such as UKTI and Scottish Development International (SDI), which provided exporting support (Kotabe & Helsen, 2011). There were varying degrees of positivity attributed to this relationship; however, the majority were affirmative:

UKTI also puts up export guarantees in certain countries around the world where you can tap in to make sure you're going to be paid, so there's a lot of positives (R22)

SDI have helped us with training, with events, with strategies, strategy meetings, strategic consultation, things like that, very very helpful (R15).

However, not all firms spoke positively about support from government agencies, there were examples whereby support which had been previously readily available had been withdrawn:

There were external factors that encouraged us to export and that was British government but that's all fallen away, they encouraged us and made it easy. You know members of the SDI used to do trade missions and they were funded, we did trade missions with BG {business gateway} and SE {Scottish Enterprise} but I never seen anybody from these organisations now (R4).

Following the qualitative stage of the research, the below hypothesis was developed and subsequently tested within the quantitative stage of the research:

H5. High levels of macro environmental stimuli have a positive effect on the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management

Hypothesised Link			β	t-value	Sig.	Supported ?
H5	Macro Environment Stimuli	→ International Strategic Brand Management	0.048	1.126		X

*** p < 0.001; **p < 0.05; *p > 0.1

As can be seen from the SEM results summarised above, surprisingly, macro environmental enabling stimuli failed to produce significant effects. This was unexpected since environmental forces that shape both the domestic (micro) and overseas (macro) environment which exports operate (Katsikeas et al. 2000) are essentially external factors beyond the control of the exporting organisation (Aaby & Slater 1989). The nonsignificant macro-environmental effects are a surprising finding given that Katsikeas et al. (1996) and Leonidou et al. (2002) observed that macro environmental enabling stimuli play a role in the strategy and performance of exporting firms. Although government regulations and policies may be a good predictor of potential exporting general strategies to follow (Kotabe & Helsen, 2011), the findings suggest this does not appear to be the case for the way B2B

firms strategically manage their brands. These findings provide a contribution to the current international marketing literature. Hultman et al. (2009) found macro environmental factors, such as regulatory conditions, are reasonably straightforward to interpret by exporting firms and do not require much in the way of continuing involvement, therefore the influence could be significant during the initiation of exporting activities. For this study, the participating exporting firms were all proven to be experienced and successful so this could partially explain the reason for a non-significant positive effect of macro environmental enabling conditions on strategic brand management. However, it should still be noted that a positive effect was still confirmed and future research including non-exporters or early stage inexperienced exporters may provide a different outcome.

The next section will discuss and assess the significance of micro external environment precipitating conditions on international strategic brand management practices.

The Effects of Micro Environment Stimuli on International Strategic Brand Management

The qualitative interviews provided a broad degree of support to concepts within the international marketing literature. For example, it has been suggested that intensifying domestic competition and a saturated domestic market are conditions which stimulate firms exporting activities (Katsikeas et al. 1996). Respondents supported this assertion:

We have a lot of competition within the UK (R17).

Within the UK the market is, in our view, quite saturated (R2).

A further example, provided by the receipt of an unsolicited order, can be viewed as external stimulus towards exporting opportunities (Doole & Lowe, 2008):

We were getting a lot of unexpected enquiries from America and that came out great
(R11).

Following the qualitative stage of the research, the below hypothesis was developed and subsequently tested within the quantitative stage of the research:

H6. High levels of micro environmental stimuli have a positive effect on the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management

Hypothesised Link			β	t-value	Sig.	Supported ?
H6	Micro Environment Stimuli	→ International Strategic Brand Management	0.112	2.653	**	✓

*** p < 0.001; **p < 0.05; *p > 0.1

Converse to the macro environmental findings, micro environmental precipitating stimuli was confirmed to have a significant positive effect on strategic brand management for B2B exporters. Evidence from both the extant literature and the qualitative stage of the research indicated a significant effect would be the outcome since it had been established that if the domestic market is becoming too competitive or saturated then this can provide stimulation for firms to expand their exporting activities, therefore providing motivation for them to seek to establish a stronger long term competitive advantage in new markets by adopting a strategic approach to managing their brand (Matanda & Ewing, 2012). Faced with similar micro environmental conditions, it could be possible for B2B exporters to adopt an approach of standardisation of their strategic brand management across foreign markets in order to

take advantage of economies of scale since such practices can be costly and time consuming (Leonidou et al. 2013b). Additionally, firms that already have a strong strategic brand management system in place in their home market might be pushed (stimulated) by deteriorating domestic market conditions. However, as a result of this they could be better positioned to succeed in managing their strategic branding efforts overseas, harmonising their brand strategy across country markets (Douglas et al. 2001) and use this as a differentiation advantage over their foreign market competitors. Given the amount of internal resources and capabilities required to develop a superior strategic brand management system, it is also unlikely for a firm with no brand presence in the home market to pursue such a path for a specific foreign market.

The following section will discuss and assess the significance of the effect of foreign market competitiveness on international strategic brand management practices.

The Effects of Foreign Market Competitiveness on International Strategic Brand Management

High levels of competitive intensity can be expected to create marketplace uncertainty and create an environment where it is more difficult to determine and execute strategic options (e.g. brand management) designed to deal with uncertainty (Kumar et al. 2011). This was the first study to investigate the direct effects of foreign market competitive intensity on a B2B firms' strategic brand management in overseas markets.

The results from the qualitative stage of this study indicated that competitive intensity does play a significant role in a firm's strategic brand management in overseas markets:

We have to intensely compete with several companies which are bigger than us (R8).

We're in a difficult scenario right now because the market's slightly depressed:

people are looking for the cheapest, but historically our brand's what sold it (R20).

Following the qualitative stage of the research, the below hypothesis was developed and subsequently tested within the quantitative stage of the research:

H7. High levels of competitive intensity have a direct negative effect on the achievement of superior International Strategic Brand Management

Hypothesised Link							Supported
			β	t-value	Sig.	?	
H7	Foreign Market Competitiveness	→	International Strategic Brand Management	-0.069	-0.1928	**	✓
***	$p < 0.001$	**	$p < 0.05$	* $p > 0.1$			

A central premise in SCP theory is that structural forces in an industry establish the degree of competitive rivalry faced in a market, which has a strong impact on a firm's performance (McGahan and Porter 1997). The significant importance of the role of foreign market competitiveness on an exporting B2B firm's ability to achieve superior strategic brand management has also been confirmed. The evidence from the quantitative stage of the research suggests that, as originally hypothesised, higher levels of foreign market competitiveness significantly impede a firm's ability to strategically manage its brand in foreign markets. When competitive intensity is low, a B2B exporter may be in a better position to translate intended strategic goals into realised strategic positions since there is less uncertainty to contend with (Spyropoulou et al. 2017), therefore low competitive

intensity allows a firm to pursue and achieve superior strategic management of its brand overseas. Since a characteristic of B2B markets is ‘longer term relationships’ (Snehota & Hakansson, 1995; Ford et al. 2002), it could be suggested that buyers are less inclined to switch, however, the fact remains that competitive intensity ultimately leads to price competition which, in turn, leads to a reduction in the profits earned by all suppliers to a market (Porter 1980). There was evidence from the qualitative interviews that even firms with strong brands in overseas markets could in some cases lose out on business to suppliers providing a cheaper alternative, though there was also evidence from the interviews of cases whereby suppliers see their buyers return a number of years later due to a loss of quality. This could be an interesting area to investigate further: long term effects of B2B brands gaining the trust of buyers to return following a period of leaving to have a relationship with a cheaper priced supplier. In addition, when competition is intense, the B2B firm has to continuously attempt to anticipate and respond to its competitor’s actions, and therefore the results of its own planned behaviour are more difficult to accurately predict (Murray et al. 2011). As a result, it could be more difficult for the B2B exporter to achieve superior strategic brand management and realise its goals with respect to achieving positional advantages over competitors.

The prior sections have provided discussions in relation to **Objective 3** which entailed an examination of the findings from external environmental factors effects on international strategic brand management. The next section will now examine the key findings and implications from research **Objective 4**.

7.3.4 Objective 4

This section will discuss the key findings, theoretical implications and contributions from this study in relation to addressing the fourth research objective:

Objective 4: Evaluate the extent to which successful UK B2B exporters benefit from improved international firm performance through effective strategic brand management practices

Strategic brand management involves the design and implementation of integrated marketing and branding programs (Keller, 2013). Strong brands are important to a company's long term financial success and brands are progressively becoming viewed as one of a company's most important assets (Rosenbaum-Elliott et al. 2011. p.90).

Therefore, it has become almost imperative for B2B firms to pursue international branding in their market offerings which requires strong brand management practices (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). There has been a lack of empirical evidence to guide managers' strategic brand decisions (Hill et al. 2005). Given the importance of brands to strategic marketing theory explanations of a firm's performance and the significant resources that firms expend on brand building and brand management, this is an important gap in marketing knowledge (Morgan & Rego, 2009).

The qualitative stage of this study found widespread support for the importance of international strategic brand management in successful B2B exporting firms. There was evidence of strategic brand management playing a central role within their exporting activities:

It's a long-term approach we take to managing our brand, (R19).

It is very strategic the way we manage our brand (R6).

The strategy was very much: let's focus our branding on the core export markets, the top 10, certainly the top 15 and drive the sales there and enter the other markets but not spend as much time and attention there. So, it was not a case of expanding the number of markets, it was about growing our brand presence in the markets we had (R13).

You have to ensure that you're building and managing your brand image in foreign markets. (R22).

One firm clearly articulated the importance of managing their brand and the central position it takes within their firm, consequently all marketing activities are determined on the basis of what benefits they can bring to the brand:

Our business just now, it tells its own story, everything we do is about our brand (R27).

The majority of respondents expressed that their international branding efforts were managed to provide improved performance outcomes:

Our brand is based on performance and reliability (R34).

Following the qualitative stage of the research, the below hypotheses were developed and subsequently tested within the quantitative stage of the research:

H8 (a). Superiority in International Strategic Brand Management is positively associated with a firm's Financial Performance in overseas markets

H8 (b). Superiority in International Strategic Brand Management is positively associated with a firm's Market Performance in overseas markets

Hypothesised Link			β	t-value	Sig.	Supported ?
H8(a)	International Strategic Brand Management	→ Financial Performance	0.262	3.849	***	✓
H8(b)	International Strategic Brand Management	→ Market Performance	0.258	3.795	***	✓

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p > 0.1$

As can be seen from the SEM results summarised on the previous page, the significant positive influence international strategic brand management has on export performance was verified through the quantitative stage of this thesis.

A key finding from this study is that it has clearly articulated the justification for placing strategic brand management as a significant determinant of export performance within a B2B context. This study is the first to test the influence of international strategic brand management practices on firm's financial and market performance outcomes in a B2B context. Therefore, providing an important contribution to a combination of both B2B branding and international marketing streams of literature. Branding variables have previously been found to be positively related to overall export performance (Leonidou et al. 2002). However, this study has demonstrated that the meticulous formulation and development of B2B brands will not fulfil their potential impact without appropriate, effective and strategic management of the brand (Merrilees et al. 2013). "Brand

Management is the organisational framework that systematically manages the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of the brand strategy" (Kotler & Pfoertsch, 2006). Historically, studies have treated branding in a general fashion without reference to strategic brand management as a specific dimension (e.g. Namiki, 1988; 1994). As a consequence, when examining the association between branding and export performance, it was not possible to specify how significantly strategic brand management influences performance. This study is the first to address this important issue and the findings convey that superior strategic brand management is a significant positive determinant of financial and market export performance.

This study shows that strategic brand management is strongly related to export performance in business markets. This effect is found while controlling for a number of different attributes of both the key informant (position, number of years in this position) and the firm (e.g. number of employees, turnover, percentage of turnover attributed to exporting, number of years trading, number of years exporting, region of UK firm is based, brand architecture, goods versus services). Consequently, this study contributes to the growing streams of literature within B2B branding and international branding (together: international B2B branding), by showing that the creation of superior strategic brand management is indeed associated with export performance in the B2B domain. Importantly, in contrast to findings presented within earlier studies within the international branding and B2B branding streams of literature, findings from this study are based on a multi-industry sample inclusive of both goods and services providers. Therefore, the author believes this study is the first to allow for generalisable statements about B2B branding, specifically B2B branding capabilities and strategic brand management within export markets.

This section has provided a discussion and key findings derived from both qualitative and quantitative results in relation to addressing **Objective 4**. The following section will discuss key findings and implications with regards to COO as a moderator of the positive relationship between international strategic brand management and export performance. Therefore, addressing **Objective 5**.

7.3.5 Objective 5

This section will discuss the key findings, theoretical implications and contributions from this study in relation to addressing the final research objective:

Objective 5: Investigate the significance attached to a B2B exporters country of origin as manifestation for achieving improved export performance through effective strategic brand management practices

The use of COO has been linked to the positive contribution of secondary associations to brands and it has been suggested international firms should adopt the approach to develop strong brands that leverage secondary COO associations wherever possible (Abimbola, 2001).

The qualitative stage of this study found general support for COO; however, this varied in terms of the expected contribution COO could make: some firms did not see the benefit or could only see the benefit in certain industries. Furthermore, there was a feeling conveyed that the potential positive effects of COO on a UK exporters B2B brand are actually diminishing. The following statements provide a brief summary of these sentiments,

beginning first with a statement from a firm (R17) that believed COO was relevant to their overseas trade:

The UK certainly has a reputation for producing high quality goods; so being a UK company is certainly relevant (R17).

However, the following statement from (R6) provides a contrary viewpoint and as a firm they did not see any tangible benefits from being based in the UK:

I wouldn't say country of origin is a big benefit to us (R6).

Lastly, the following statement from (R2) implies that COO used to be a significant factor but this is no longer the case as a UK exporter:

It helps, but it's not the nirvana it used to be (R2).

Following the qualitative stage of the research, the below hypothesis was developed and subsequently tested within the quantitative stage of the research:

H9 (a). High levels of Country of Origin Effect have a positive effect on the association between International Strategic Brand Management and a firm's Financial Performance in overseas markets

H9 (b). High levels of Country of Origin Effect have a positive effect on the association between International Strategic Brand Management and a firm's Market Performance in overseas markets

		High	Low	x2	P	Hypothesis	Supported
Country of Origin Effect							
International Strategic Brand Management	→	Financial Performance	0.253	0.190	1.096	0.578	H9 (a)
International Strategic Brand Management	→	Market Performance	0.287	0.159	0.387	0.824	H9 (b)

Results from Hypothesised Moderated Paths

As can be seen from the SEM results summarised above, COO was not found to have a significant moderation effect on the relationship between international strategic brand management and either financial or market export performance.

This study heeds the clarion call of Chabowski et al. (2013) for scholars to examine whether the COO of a brand can contribute to performance. There has been over fifty years of research into COO related issues cumulating in the publication of hundreds of articles in a variety of academic journals (Samiee, 2010). The literature broadly comes to the conclusion that both consumer and industrial markets can be influenced by COO cues which can affect buyer choice (Samiee, 2010). However, the vast majority of previous studies have looked at COO from the B2C perspective. Previous research has shown that B2B branding of certain goods (fasteners) weren't subject to a COO effect when exporting from Taiwan (Chen et al. 2011). La et al. (2009) found only some aspects of COO provided a moderating effect on B2B professional service firms based in Australia.

An important academic contribution was delivered by the fact that this was the first international multi-industry B2B branding study to examine the moderating effect of COO on the link between international strategic brand management and export performance for

both goods and services. Given the amount of different types of research within the previous literature on the COO effect and the reasonable support found from the qualitative stage of this study, it was surprising and a key finding to discover no significant COO moderation effect was present. The findings did suggest a positive COO effect; however, it was not significant even at the $P < 0.1$ level. This insignificant relationship implies that COO is not a significant factor in strategically managing and building brand perceptions in the minds of B2B buyers. There could be a number of reasons for this; one suggestion is that branding already enhances the strength of the relationships found in B2B markets and therefore this takes precedent over COO, making its effects supplementary instead of meaningful. Since the creation of brand value is dyadic in nature, requiring both the buyer and the seller to create brand equity, arguably there is a need to include COO within future research activities to see if sellers are misconstruing the importance of COO effect or if indeed buyers agree that in the case of B2B branding, COO is not a significant moderator of the effects of the strategic management of a firm's brand on performance outcomes. Maheswaran (1994) found expert buyers rely on specific product attributes such as perceived quality during the purchase decision making process while novices tend to be reliant on COO stereotypes. This study investigated B2B exporters that are both experienced and successful which are likely to have built up long term relationships with experienced expert buyers (Snehota and Hakansson, 1995). Therefore, the moderating influence of COO on the effect of strategic brand management on export performance could be significant when considering novice B2B buyers during the initial years of building these important international B2B buyer seller relationships.

Resultant from the analysis within this study of the COO moderation effect within the research framework, findings can be integrated with previous results in the B2B branding

literature. For example, this multi-industry study inclusive of goods and services has found no significant moderation effect between strategic brand management and export performance. This discovery is consistent with the findings of Chen et al. (2011), showing a non-significant COO moderation effect of branding for B2B exporting firms in newly industrialised economies for one product line (fastener products). It is extremely interesting that findings are contrary to previous B2C literature regarding COO significant moderating effects in export markets, albeit the previous studies have looked at different aspects of branding activities.

The previous sections have provided discussions and an examination of the findings structured around the research objectives. Key findings and contributions to the academic community have been established. The following section will now assess the practical implications from these findings for managers.

7. 4 Managerial Implications

It is acknowledged that a B2B firm's brand is a potential source of future profits in foreign markets (Kapferer, 2012). Yet, many practitioners in B2B markets are still uncertain as to whether the high, and sometimes prohibitive, investments generally related with building and establishing robust branding capabilities and superior strategic brand management in overseas markets really pay off; this study addresses this issue. It provides confirmation that in a B2B context: international strategic brand management can provide an opportunity for firms to differentiate themselves and the products or services they supply, allowing them to build their brand equity and gain a competitive advantage over competitors in overseas markets. Therefore, this study provides a calibration of the performance benefits resultant from the effective execution of international brand management strategies that should

encourage B2B exporters to pay more attention to brand management issues than is normally the case.

This study highlights and considers a number of practical insights for B2B firms wishing to develop their exporting activities. Since the importance of superior strategic brand management has been established as a prerequisite leading to improved export performance, a central tenet of any B2B firm's export strategy should be their effective strategic brand management. International financial resource constraints mean it is essential for B2B exporters to be able to set priorities. Therefore, the identification of key international marketing and branding capabilities which can enable them to exploit their financial resources for optimal benefits is critical. With this in mind, practitioners are advised to prioritise the development of robust international marketing planning capabilities and international branding capabilities. This will allow them to focus on the essence of their brand and communicate their brand image through the effective strategic management of their brand to business customers evoking positive brand associations and enhanced perceived brand value.

The scant empirical attention to the effects of external environmental factors on international strategic brand management in the literature provides little or no guidance even to those managers who recognise the need to address this issue within their firm. This study has shown that certain external environmental conditions are more strongly associated with the ability to achieve superior strategic brand management than others. Therefore, export managers must analyse and mobilise information systems to better understand the complete dynamics of the micro environmental precipitating conditions and the direct effects of a highly competitive foreign market on their ability to achieve superior strategic brand

management benefits. These analyses are important because there is a significant negative association between a highly competitive turbulent marketplace and their ability to achieve and maintain superior strategic brand management leading to competitive advantage. Subsequently, the attainment of this knowledge can assist export managers decision-making process in choosing which export markets to enter and maintain their brands. Furthermore, managers should have a clear understanding of the micro environmental precipitating conditions that can influence their firm's ability to strategically manage their brands in overseas markets. By doing so they can hope to take advantage of the significant positive link between certain micro environmental conditions and their potential ability to effectively manage their brand.

The results from this study suggest that in their efforts to enhance the positive effects of international strategic brand management practices on performance outcomes, managers within exporting firms should not focus too much consideration on COO. The results from this study support previous findings (Chen et al. 2012) in suggesting COO has not become an important moderator of international branding activities ability to achieve increased export performance within a B2B context. Therefore, export managers' efforts should focus on developing their branding capabilities and brand management strategies which will be more dependable and beneficial to the firm, with respect to international buyers, than the moderate perceived rewards ensuing from their home country associations.

7.5 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The study findings should be regarded in the context of certain limitations that need to be taken into consideration, some of which offer fruitful avenues for future research. First, this research was conducted specifically in the context of B2B exporting activities for firms based in the UK. Therefore, the present empirical findings are, strictly speaking, limited to the activities of UK exporters, for this reason, care should be taken when applying these to other empirical settings. Given this limitation and the fact the moderating variable COO takes account of the UK setting, further studies replicated in different country contexts would help establish: 1) generalisability through comparative analysis between B2B exporters in different regions and 2) determination of the COO effect in different regions for this specific research area.

A further limitation is: empirical data conducted in this study was collected only from experienced successful B2B companies which were already effectively exporting, consequently, this doesn't account for non-exporters which plan to initiate exporting, or for poor exporters which are struggling to accomplish successful exporting. Therefore, longitudinal studies including both current exporters and businesses planning to initiate exporting activities in a B2B setting would permit investigation into: 1) the role of temporal effects on the associations of the constructs within the emerging framework and 2) measuring export performance for businesses initiating exporting with differing levels of international resources and capabilities and strategic brand management processes against other existing effective exporters.

Although a great number of studies have sought to identify the marketing variables that are conducive to superior export performance, research into low export performance has been

fundamentally neglected. Research into low performing B2B exporting firms could identify the strategic brand management determinants of export failure and reveal where faults occur. It would also be advantageous to investigate this issue for firms within the initial early stages of exporting since this is when there is a greater risk of failure (Welch & Wiedersheim, 1980).

The empirical data collected from the interviews within the qualitative stage of this study provided a preliminary picture of all the variables presented within the research framework, therefore supporting the ability to examine and confirm the suitability of the constructs and the interrelationships supporting the creation of research hypotheses. Following this, the quantitative large-scale UK wide B2B exporter survey further examined the research framework and tested the research hypotheses. This research has provided a comprehensive B2B supplier perspective to strategic brand management; however, branding literature suggests brand value is dyadic in nature and implies both the exporter and importer contribute to building firms' international brand equity. Consequently, brand value is not only determined by effective strategic brand management by the B2B supplier, but also by business customers' perception of the brand in question. So, to fully investigate the impact of a firms international branding efforts and to promote further development of the conceptual framework, a novel and original approach is suggested.

It is recommended to broaden the scope of investigation to include the views of importers in assessing the attractiveness (competitiveness) of competing exporters brands for their business. Furthermore, incorporating buyers from different cultural backgrounds will allow for future research to assess how culture affects buyers' perception of UK B2B brands in terms of B2B branding dimensions such as quality, trust and reduction of uncertainty within

their purchasing decision making processes. Differences between perceptions could then also be compared by including importers from both established mature markets like the USA and European countries; for instance, Italy and Germany against emerging markets such as Brazil, Russia, India and China (BRIC nations). This provides scope for an abundance of future research and the potential for sizable future breakthroughs for the benefit of both academics and managers approaching strategic brand management. This would also answer the question of, are there differences in perceptions or does a ‘typical’ B2B customer exist across different cultures and regions of markets in different stages of their development.

7.6 Conclusions

This section will provide conclusions for the thesis which summarise the key academic contributions in a clear and concise manner. The preceding managerial implications section has delivered a valuable contribution to UK suppliers of overseas B2B customers by highlighting a number of practical insights of the brand related variables affecting export performance, which in turn can help them realise how they can improve their export performance through appropriate strategic brand management strategies.

The significant role of branding for increasing a firm’s performance is firmly established for B2C firms, albeit less so when considering branding within an international context. However, the differences between: 1) consumer markets and industrial markets and 2) B2C brand management compared with managing B2B brands in an international context, prevent the application of findings from B2C branding to the B2B domain. Therefore, this thesis was interested in investigating the clear gap that exists when considering B2B strategic brand management and exporting performance. There were a number of areas of

originality within this thesis. Previous B2B branding research has been mainly conducted from the buyers' perspective (e.g. Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Juntunen et al. 2010; Zablah et al. 2010) and until this study there had been little undertaken from the supplier standpoint. Contrary to most contemporary international marketing research which uses the export venture as the primary unit of analysis (Chen et al. 2016), the unit of analysis for this study was at the firm level which is the most appropriate for examining B2B corporate brands (Mudambi, 2002).

This study makes a number of theoretical contributions to enhance our understanding of international strategic brand management in the B2B context. Firstly, a new theoretical model has been introduced, investigated and rigorously tested. The international strategic brand management model was based on a synthesis of RBT and SCP theoretical perspectives. The principal focus was placed on strategic brand management as the central determinant for improved export performance in a B2B domain. This model outlines both internal and external environmental antecedents capable of influencing a B2B exporters ability to achieve superior strategic brand management and the impact of effective international strategic brand management on a B2B firm's key performance outcomes. Therefore, delivering a theoretical addition to the broad domains of both B2B and international marketing literature. Specifically, improving, advancing and bringing together B2B branding and international branding literature which can underpin future research efforts in this field where research into international brand management is scant (Morgan et al. 2018).

An important objective of this research was to establish the impact of exporters' resources and capabilities on international strategic brand management practices in a B2B context.

Previous studies have established the importance of international financial resources and their positive influence on relationship management capabilities, communications capabilities and branding advantage (Spyropoulou et al. 2010; 2011). This study extends knowledge by focusing solely on a B2B context and provides a valuable contribution to the international marketing literature by providing empirical confirmation that possession of suitable financial resources is advantageous to the deployment of market information, marketing planning and branding capabilities in export markets. A surprising finding was that there was not found to be a significant effect between market information capabilities and strategic brand management. This was especially unexpected given a continuous flow of valuable market information can act as an exploratory force motivating already differentiated firms to further refine their offerings unique features or devise novel ways of differentiation (Kaleka & Morgan, 2017), as would be found by the strategic way a firm manages their brand.

This study uncovered an overlooked essential item within the B2B international branding capabilities construct is the ability for B2B brands to reduce uncertainty associated with the purchase making decision (Leek & Christodoulides, 2011; Lilien & Grewal, 2012). The development of a new measure for international branding capabilities is a key contribution and will support and improve the validity of future research efforts examining international B2B branding. This study was the first to test the relationship between international branding capabilities and international strategic brand management in a B2B context, as anticipated there was found to be a strong link. By establishing this positive relationship and utilising the newly developed international branding capabilities construct, this finding provides as a strong foundation upon which future research efforts can be advanced. This study has established that B2B exporters that have strong planning

skills and superior processes for learning about target export markets can be expected to make appropriate strategic decisions in relation to the management of their brand, which will in turn lead to increased export performance. This insight provides a further contribution in terms of identifying and confirming the key capabilities which positively influence B2B firms' international strategic brand management practices.

A further important objective of this research was to establish the impact of external environment factors on international strategic brand management practices in a B2B context. The effects of external stimuli and external competitiveness on marketing strategy and firm performance has been explored by leading international marketing scholars (c.f. Leonidou et al. 2002; Sousa et al. 2008); however, previous work has not addressed the effects of external environmental factors on strategic brand management in any context. For this study, a surprising finding and key contribution to the current international marketing literature was that macro environmental enabling stimuli failed to significantly influence strategic brand management. This was unexpected since environmental forces that shape both the domestic (micro) and overseas (macro) environment which exports operate (Katsikeas et al. 2000) are essentially external factors beyond the control of the exporting organisation (Aaby & Slater 1989). Converse to the macro environmental findings, micro environmental precipitating stimuli was confirmed to have a significant positive effect on strategic brand management for B2B exporters. If the domestic market is becoming too competitive or saturated then this can provide stimulation for firms to expand their exporting activities, therefore providing motivation for them to seek to establish a stronger long term competitive advantage in new markets by adopting a strategic approach to managing their brand (Matanda & Ewing, 2012). An additional key finding when considering the external environment is the important role of foreign market

competitiveness on an exporting B2B firm's ability to achieve superior strategic brand management was also confirmed. When competitive intensity is low, a B2B exporter can translate intended strategic goals into realised strategic positions since there is less uncertainty to contend with (Spyropoulou et al. 2017), therefore low competitive intensity permits a B2B exporter to pursue and achieve superior strategic management of its brand overseas.

A pivotal finding from this study is that it has clearly articulated the justification for placing strategic brand management as a significant determinant of export performance within a B2B context. This study was the first to test the influence of international strategic brand management practices on firm's financial and market performance outcomes in a B2B context. Therefore, providing an important contribution to a combination of both B2B branding and international marketing streams of literature. Branding variables have previously been found to be positively related to overall export performance (Leonidou et al. 2002). However, this study has established that the meticulous formulation and development of B2B brands will not achieve their potential impact without appropriate, effective and strategic management of the brand (Merrilees et al. 2013).

Lastly, this study has provided an important academic contribution by responding to calls to examine whether the COO of a brand can contribute to performance (Chabowski et al. 2013). This was the first international multi-industry B2B branding study to examine the moderating effect of COO on the link between international strategic brand management and export performance for both goods and services. It was surprising and a final key finding to discover no significant COO moderation effect was present.

The aim of this study was to investigate international strategic brand management as a deterministic factor in superior firm performance within a B2B context. The research addressed five key research objectives and included an extensive review of the extant literature, a set of 34 interviews and a multi-industry survey with more than 200 successful UK B2B exporters. Firstly, a comprehensive model was developed, founded on pertinent theoretical perspectives which incorporates external and internal environmental variables influencing strategic brand management practices affecting international firm performance in a B2B domain. Secondly, the impact of exporters' resources and capabilities on international strategic brand management practices in a B2B context was uncovered. Thirdly, the impact of external environment factors on international strategic brand management practices in a B2B context was clarified. Fourthly, the extent to which successful UK B2B exporters benefit from improved international firm performance through effective strategic brand management practices was established. Finally, the significance attached to a B2B exporters' country of origin as manifestation for achieving improved export performance through effective strategic brand management practices was investigated. This thesis has concluded by providing a comprehensive overview of the managerial implications for B2B practitioners and limitations of the research along with recommendations for future research. To conclude, a comprehensive summary of the key theoretical contributions this research was presented.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Invitation Letter to Participate in Interviews



[Date]

[Interviewee Name] [Address]

Dear [Interviewee Name]:

My name is Keith Pyper and I am currently undertaking research as part of my PhD within the Marketing Department of Strathclyde Business School. I would like to invite you to participate in a new project, which will investigate exporting and branding best practises in relation to export performance. The UK Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) is funding this exciting and significant project. In terms of research structure, along with a comprehensive review of previous literature, a series of interviews will be conducted with eligible companies that fit within the project criteria.

The main criteria for companies eligible to take part are: -

- Based in the UK and currently exporting goods/services overseas in a Business-to-Business (B2B) capacity.
- Have not taken any breaks from exporting

Your company has been identified as potentially meeting the project criteria, if you can confirm this and would like to be involved then please confirm by email, phone or post and I can arrange an interview. Interviews can be conducted at your company, at Strathclyde University or at any other site that is convenient within your scheduling. The interviews will take around 45-60 minutes and all company information/data collected will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Participants will be provided with a copy of future publications resulting from this research.

I sincerely hope that you will consider participating in this important effort to increase understanding of how to improve exporting performance for businesses in the UK. Please feel free to contact me as specified below with any questions or to clarify your contribution.

Best Regards,
Keith Pyper,
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Appendix 2– Interview Protocol – Topic Guide

Context of the questions is past five years unless otherwise discussed

Section 1 General situational / background (firm and key respondent)

Some initial questions will be about you and your company exporting background

- *Can you confirm your company currently exports goods to companies overseas and has acquired new export customers within the past five years?*
- *What is your position within the firm?*
- *How long have you held this position?*
- *Which industry does your company operate?*
- *How many years has your company been exporting?*
- *Has the company taken any breaks from exporting since it first began?*
- *How many markets does your company export to?*

Section 2 Resources and Capabilities

These questions relate to key resources and capabilities your company possess

INFO - If required to simply translate what mean by resources and capabilities.

Resources: the tangible or intangible *assets* a firm possesses or has access to.

Capabilities: the intangible *processes* (such as skills, abilities, know-how, expertise, designs, management, etc.) with which a firm exploits Resources in the execution of its day-to-day operations.

Can you please discuss how important financial resources are to your company?

Potential areas for follow up questions/probes – (prompt where appropriate in relation to capabilities)

- Level of financial resources available
- Access to capital
- Speed of acquiring and deploying financial resources
- Size of financial resources devoted to your company's exporting activities
- Ability to find additional financial resources when needed

Can you please discuss how important marketing/branding capabilities are to your company?

Potential areas for follow up questions/probes – (prompt where appropriate in relation to international brand management)

International Marketing Planning Capabilities

- Export marketing planning skills
- Set clear export marketing goals
- Formulate creative export marketing strategies
- Thorough export marketing planning processes

International Market Information Capabilities

- Gather information about export customers and competitors
- Use market research skills to develop effective export marketing programs
- Track international customer wants and needs
- Make full use of international marketing research information
- Analyse export market information

International Branding Capabilities

- Utilise available resources to present a simple brand meaning for international customers
- Use branding as an operational tool
- Able to communicate a consistent brand meaning to international customers
- Treat company brand(s) as an asset
- Staff understand and support the brand(s) meaning and values
- Company uses branding to reduce uncertainty for buyers

Section 3 External Stimuli

This next group of questions addresses external environmental influences and how they impact the management of your international brand and export performance

Can you please discuss how external environment opportunities have stimulated your company to pro-actively increase exporting?

Potential areas for follow up questions/probes (prompt where appropriate in relation to international brand management)

- Attractive government export policies
- National export promotion policies (UK envoys)
- Attractive profits and growth in new markets
- Our products unique features international customers would love
- UK government has set favorable exchange rates for international trade
- Opportunity to increase number of countries have as markets
- Reducing market related risk

- New legislation allowing our products to be sold in overseas markets

Can you please discuss how changing conditions in the external environment have stimulated your company to re-actively increase exporting?

Potential areas for follow up questions/probes (prompt where appropriate in relation to international brand management)

- Diminishing domestic sales
- Saturated domestic market
- Intensifying domestic competition
- Unsolicited orders from abroad
- Production capacity availability
- Economies resulting from additional orders
- Managerial beliefs about the importance of exporting
- Managerial export experience

Can you please discuss the influence of foreign market competitiveness on your exporting activities in your main overseas markets?

Potential areas for follow up questions/probes – (prompt where appropriate in relation to brand management and performance)

- Competition is cut-throat
- There are many “promotion” wars
- Price competition is a hallmark
- Regular (daily/weekly) new competitive moves

Section 3 Strategic brand management in export markets

Could you please discuss your company’s strategy for managing your brand in overseas markets?

Potential areas for follow up questions/probes – (prompt where appropriate in relation to export performance)

- Commit significant investments to manage brand(s) internationally
- Invest more resources in brand management than international competitors in main export markets
- Possess a well-coordinated multidisciplinary team to manage brand(s) internationally
- Plan marketing actions taking into account the possible repercussions for the brand image
- Management of brand(s) internationally from a medium and long-term perspective

Section 4 Export Performance and the effects of country of origin

Could you please discuss how successful has your export performance has been?

Potential areas for follow up questions/probes - (prompt where appropriate in relation to brand management strategies)

- Market performance

- Market share growth
- Growth in sales revenue
- Acquiring new customers
- Increasing sales to existing customers

- Financial performance

- Export venture profitability
- Return on Investment (ROI)
- Export venture margins
- Reaching export venture financial goals

Could you please discuss what influence being a UK based company has on your exporting and export performance?

Potential areas for follow up questions/probes - (prompt where appropriate in relation to international brand management strategies and performance)

- Influences?

- People from the UK are proud to achieve high standards
- People from the UK are known as being hardworking
- The UK has a raised standard of living
- The UK has a well-educated workforce
- UK companies have high technical skills

Section 5 Closing Questions

- What is the size of your firm, in terms of employees and annual turnover?
- What proportion of total sales are export sales?
- Check to ensure all areas have been covered
- Any additional information interviewee would like to give or questions they may have

Thank interviewee

Appendix 3 – Postal Information Sheet



[Date]

[Firm Name]

Contact for Queen's Award:

Dear [Key Informant Name],

My name is Keith Pyper and I am currently undertaking research as part of my PhD within the Marketing Department of Strathclyde Business School. I would like to invite you to participate in a new project, which will investigate exporting and branding best practises in relation to export performance. The UK Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) is funding this exciting and significant project.

In terms of research structure, a comprehensive review of previous literature and a set of interviews which have already been undertaken. The participants of this survey stage of the research are a select group consisting only of successful Queen's Award winners for International Trade from 2012 to 2016.

Your company meets the project criteria; therefore, you will be sent an email link to the secure project survey on Monday 13th June. The title of the email will be "**Queen's Award Winners Project**". The domain from which the survey will be sent is noreply@qemailserver.com and the reply email keith.pyper@strath.ac.uk It may be useful to add the domain to your contacts list ahead of Monday 13th to avoid any issues receiving the next communication.

In most cases the next communication will be addressed to the email of your registered media contact within the Queens Award official press book. Please could you advise if a different email address or contact should be used. The online survey will take around 20 minutes to complete and all company information/data collected will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous within the findings.

Following the completion of the research, participants will be provided with a copy of any subsequent publications.

We sincerely hope that you will participate in this important effort to establish critical branding success factors associated with effective export performance. Please feel free to contact me as specified below with any questions or to clarify your contribution.

Best Regards,

Keith Pyper, ESRC Funded
PhD Researcher/Tutor
Department of Marketing
Keith.pyper@strath.ac.uk
Tel: 0141 553 6198/07914953642

Professor Spiros Gounaris,
Department of Marketing
(Head of Department)
spiros.gounaris@strath.ac.uk
Tel: 0141 548 3233

Appendix 4 Queen's Awards Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility Criteria for Any Queens Award Category

Your organisation (business or non-profit) must:

- be based in the UK (including the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) and file its Company Tax Returns with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)
- be a self-contained enterprise that markets its own products or services and is under its own management
- have at least 2 full-time UK employees or part-time equivalents
- demonstrate strong corporate social responsibility

Each of the award categories has additional entry criteria.

Specific Additional Criteria for Queens Award for International Trade

To apply for the International Trade award, you must also:

- have made a minimum of £100,000 in overseas sales in the first year of your entry and show year-on-year growth
- show that your organisation has achieved outstanding growth in overseas earnings relative to your business size and sector
- show steep year-on-year growth (without dips) in overseas sales over 3 years - or substantial year-on-year growth (without dips) over 6 years

Eligibility Criteria for Queens Award in International Trade (Gov.UK, 2016)

Appendix 5 Individual Item - Descriptives

Table 1 Financial Resources

Financial Resources	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Level of financial resources available	4.37	1.455	-0.343	-0.213
Access to capital	4.44	1.483	-0.407	-0.345
Speed of acquiring and deploying financial resources	4.63	1.394	-0.46	-0.132
Size of financial resources devoted to your company's exporting activities	4.38	1.537	-0.328	-0.564
Ability to find additional financial resources when needed	4.56	1.467	-0.454	-0.071

Table 2 International Marketing Planning Capabilities

International Marketing Planning Capabilities	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Export marketing planning skills	4.75	1.205	-0.22	-0.14
Setting clear export marketing goals	4.91	1.238	-0.303	0.072
Formulating creative export marketing strategies	4.85	1.214	-0.339	0.166
Thoroughness of export marketing planning processes	5.07	1.15	-488	0.359

Table 3 International Branding Capabilities

International Branding Capabilities	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Our company utilises available resources to present a simple brand meaning for our international customers	5.16	1.307	-0.703	0.256
Our company uses branding as an operational tool	4.92	1.384	-0.523	-0.304
Our company is able to communicate a consistent brand meaning to our international customers	5.38	1.257	-0.838	0.806
Our company treats our brand(s) as an asset	5.8	1.258	-1.054	0.54
Our staff understand and support our brand(s) meaning and values	5.42	1.221	-0.583	-0.85
Our company uses branding to reduce uncertainty for buyers within the transaction process	5.23	1.443	-0.83	0.393

Table 4 International Market Information Capabilities

International Market Information Capabilities	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Gathering information about export customers and competitors	4.84	1.225	-0.385	-0.118
Using market research skills to develop effective export marketing programs	4.83	1.199	-0.221	0.167
Tracking international customer wants and needs	4.55	1.246	-0.129	-0.277
Making full use of international marketing research information	4.93	1.348	-0.478	-0.118
Analysing export market information	4.75	1.281	-0.474	0.169

Table 5 Macro Environmental Stimuli - Enabling Conditions

Macro Environmental Stimuli - Enabling Conditions	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Attractive government export incentives	2.75	1.845	0.698	-0.704
National export promotion policies, such as UK trade envoys to markets you have acquired new customers	2.9	1.828	0.593	-0.778
Attractive profit and growth opportunities in the markets we acquired new customers	5.65	1.367	-1.506	2.516
Possession of unique products/provider of unique services appropriate for serving the needs of new customers in export markets	5.54	1.535	-1.386	1.648
Advantageous fluctuation of exchange rates	3.73	1.733	-0.015	-0.93
Opportunity to increase the number of country markets	4.95	1.533	-0.747	0.124
New legislation allowing our products/services to be legally sold in newly acquired international markets	3.32	2.042	0.364	-1.214

Table 6 Micro Environmental Stimuli - Precipitating Conditions

Micro Environmental Stimuli - Precipitating Conditions	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Diminishing domestic sales	3.17	1.728	0.331	-0.923
Saturated domestic market	3.37	1.855	0.244	-1.063
Intensifying domestic competition	3	1.735	0.445	-0.892
Unsolicited orders from abroad	3.37	1.756	0.086	-1.158
Production capacity availability	3.35	1.892	0.161	-1.199
Economies resulting from additional orders	4.14	1.76	-0.424	-0.725
Managerial beliefs about the importance of exporting	5	1.784	-0.734	-0.351

Table 7 Foreign Market Competitiveness

Foreign Market Competitiveness	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Competition in this export market is cut-throat	4.28	1.666	-0.231	-0.728
There are many “promotion” wars in this export market	3.46	1.696	0.195	-0.877
Price competition is the hallmark of this export market	3.89	2.926	-0.056	-0.888
One hears of a new competitive move in this export market almost every day.	2.83	2.83	0.62	-0.708

Table 8 Strategic Brand Management

Strategic Brand Management	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Our company commits significant investments to manage our brand(s) internationally	4.69	1.549	-0.348	-0.732
Our company invests more resources in brand management than our international competitors in our main export markets	3.83	1.621	0.215	-0.67
Our company has a well-coordinated multidisciplinary team to manage our brand(s) internationally	4.11	1.682	-0.137	-0.916
Our company plans its marketing actions by taking into account the possible repercussions for the brand image	4.92	1.419	-0.693	-0.97
Our company manage our brand(s) internationally from a medium and long-term perspective	5.17	1.379	-0.728	0.205

Table 9 Country of Origin Effect

Country of Origin Effect	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
People from the UK are proud to achieve high standards	5.47	1.154	-0.614	0.175
People from the UK are known as being hardworking	4.63	1.404	-0.385	0.027
The UK has a raised standard of living	5.6	1.146	-0.824	0.433
The UK has a well-educated workforce	5.24	1.265	-0.684	0.299
UK companies have high technical skills	5.59	1.168	-0.866	0.578

Table 10 International Financial Performance

International Financial Performance	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Export profitability	5.21	1.173	-0.492	0.602
Return on Investment (ROI)	5.13	1.184	-0.475	0.451
Export margins	5.06	1.198	-0.418	-0.117
Reaching export financial goals	5.14	1.218	-0.578	0.535

Table 11 International Market Performance

International Market Performance	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Market share growth	5.13	1.188	-0.473	0.289
Growth in sales revenue	5.17	1.239	-0.364	-0.248
Acquiring new customers	5.27	1.186	-0.423	-0.129
Increasing sales to existing customers	5.15	1.197	-0.342	-0.053

Appendix 6 - Copy of Questionnaire

Please indicate your position within the company?

- CEO
- Managing Director
- Export Manager
- Marketing Manager
- Other (please specify) _____

How many years have you held this position?

How many employees does your company have in total?

- 1-10
- 11-50
- 51-250
- 251-500
- more than 500

Which industry(s) does your company operate within?

- Automotive & Parts
- Chemicals
- Construction
- Digital, Creative & Information Services
- Education
- Electronics
- Engineering
- Financial & Insurance Services
- Food
- Metal
- Pharmaceuticals
- Real Estate
- Research & Development
- Scientific
- Spirits
- Technology
- Textiles
- Other (please specify) _____

Does your company export goods or services?

- Goods
- Services
- Both Goods & Services

Are your exports mainly for use by?

- Other businesses
- End consumers

How many years has your company been trading?

When did your company first start exporting from the UK? (for example, 2010)

How many markets does your company currently export to? (please consider countries as opposed to regions as export markets) approximate if accurate figure difficult to confirm

Please rate the importance of the following Environmental Export Stimuli to your company in the past 3 years, using a seven-point scale running 1 (no importance) to 7 (extremely important).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Attractive government export incentives	<input type="radio"/>						
National export promotion policies, such as UK trade envoys to markets we have acquired new customers.	<input type="radio"/>						
Attractive profit and growth opportunities in the markets we acquired new customers	<input type="radio"/>						
Possession of unique products/provider of unique services appropriate for serving the needs of new customers in export markets	<input type="radio"/>						
Advantageous fluctuation of exchange rates	<input type="radio"/>						
Opportunity to increase the number of country markets	<input type="radio"/>						
New legislation allowing our products/services to be legally sold in newly acquired international markets	<input type="radio"/>						
Diminishing domestic sales	<input type="radio"/>						
Saturated domestic market	<input type="radio"/>						
Intensifying domestic competition	<input type="radio"/>						
Unsolicited orders from abroad	<input type="radio"/>						
Production capacity availability	<input type="radio"/>						
Economies resulting from additional orders	<input type="radio"/>						
Managerial beliefs about the importance of exporting	<input type="radio"/>						

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning the competitive environment in your company's main export market. Seven-point scale running 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Competition in this export market is cut-throat	<input type="radio"/>						
There are many "promotion" wars in this export market	<input type="radio"/>						
Price competition is the hallmark of this export market	<input type="radio"/>						
One hears of a new competitive move in this export market almost every day.	<input type="radio"/>						

Please rate your company's Export Financial resources relative to your major competitors (in your most important export markets) using a seven-point scale running 1 (Much Worse than Competitors) to 7 (Much Better than Competitors) in the following areas:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Level of financial resources available	<input type="radio"/>						
Access to capital	<input type="radio"/>						
Speed of acquiring and deploying financial resources	<input type="radio"/>						
Size of financial resources devoted to your company's exporting activities	<input type="radio"/>						
Ability to find additional financial resources when needed	<input type="radio"/>						

Internationally, Is your most important brand your company brand or a specific branded product or service?

- Company Brand
- Product / Service Brand

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your company's current international branding capabilities? Seven-point scale running 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Our company utilises available resources to present a simple brand meaning for our international customers	<input type="radio"/>						
Our company uses branding as an operational tool	<input type="radio"/>						
Our company is able to communicate a consistent brand meaning to our international customers	<input type="radio"/>						
Our company treats our brand(s) as an asset	<input type="radio"/>						
Our staff understand and support our brand(s) meaning and values	<input type="radio"/>						
Our company uses branding to reduce uncertainty for buyers within the transaction process	<input type="radio"/>						

To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding your company's current international strategic brand management? Seven-point scale running 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Our company commits significant investments to manage our brand(s) internationally	<input type="radio"/>						
Our company invests more resources in brand management than our international competitors in our main export markets	<input type="radio"/>						
Our company has a well-coordinated multidisciplinary team to manage our brand(s) internationally	<input type="radio"/>						
Our company plans its marketing actions by taking into account the possible repercussions for the brand image	<input type="radio"/>						
Our company manage our brand(s) internationally from a medium and long-term perspective	<input type="radio"/>						

Please rate your company's export marketing planning capabilities, relative to your major competitors (in your most important export markets) in the following areas: Seven-point scale running 1 (Much Worse than Competitors) to 7 (Much Better than Competitors).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Export marketing planning skills	<input type="radio"/>						
Setting clear export marketing goals	<input type="radio"/>						
Formulating creative export marketing strategies	<input type="radio"/>						
Thoroughness of export marketing planning processes	<input type="radio"/>						

Please rate your company's export market information capabilities, relative to your major competitors (in your most important export markets) in the following areas: Seven-point scale running 1 (Much Worse than Competitors) to 7 (Much Better than Competitors).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Gathering information about export customers and competitors	<input type="radio"/>						
Using market research skills to develop effective export marketing programs	<input type="radio"/>						
Tracking international customer wants and needs	<input type="radio"/>						
Making full use of international marketing research information	<input type="radio"/>						
Analysing export market information	<input type="radio"/>						

Please indicate the importance you attach to each of the following factors as a benefit of being a UK based company compared with your main overseas competitors? Seven-point scale running 1 (No effect) to 7 (Very Important).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People from the UK are proud to achieve high standards	<input type="radio"/>						
People from the UK are known as being hardworking	<input type="radio"/>						
The UK has a raised standard of living	<input type="radio"/>						
The UK has a well-educated workforce	<input type="radio"/>						
UK companies have high technical skills	<input type="radio"/>						

Please evaluate the performance of your company's exporting activities over the past year relative to your major competitors (in your most important export markets). Seven-point scale running 1 (Much Worse than Competitors) to 7 (Much Better than Competitors).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Market share growth	<input type="radio"/>						
Growth in sales revenue	<input type="radio"/>						
Acquiring new customers	<input type="radio"/>						
Increasing sales to existing customers	<input type="radio"/>						
Export profitability	<input type="radio"/>						
Return on Investment (ROI)	<input type="radio"/>						
Export margins	<input type="radio"/>						
Reaching export financial goals	<input type="radio"/>						

What was your company's annual turnover in the past 12 months? £

- 0-500,000 (1)
- 501,000-1,000,000 (2)
- 1,000,001 - 5,000,000 (3)
- 5,000,001-10,000,000 (4)
- 10,000,001-25,000,000 (5)
- 25,000,001-50,000,000 (6)
- Above 50 million (7)

Approximately what percentage of your company's overall turnover is from exporting compared with the domestic market?

Appendix 7 Common Method Bias – Common Latent Factor Approach

