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EXPORT CAPACITY CONFIGURATIONS FOR SALES PERFORMANCE IN THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET: A QUALITATIVE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To analyze configurations of export capacities in internationalized companies that generate high levels of export performance, measured by the sales indicator to the international market. Method: A sample of 50 exporting industries in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, was analyzed using the qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) method. **Main Results:** The results showed that companies with higher export performance, measured by sales volume, presented a combination of the following necessary and present conditions: "'Knowledge of Obstacles," "Level of Information," "Internal Export Structure," and "Costing Methodology." In addition, there was a non-necessary but present condition ("Product Adaptation") and a non-necessary but absent condition ("Effective Promotion"). **Relevance/Originality:** This study contributed the literature on export capacity by describing how the identified elements combine to increase export sales volume. The use of the QCA method, linked to the Most Similar, Different Outcome/Most Different, Similar Outcome (MSDO/MDSO) framework, is still underexplored in the fields of internationalization and international negotiations. **Theoretical/Methodological Contributions:** The research advanced Minervini's (2008) assumptions through an empirical investigation, stating that export capacity is not a static prescription of essential elements. **Social/Management Contributions:** The findings emphasize the importance of developing export capacity in companies aiming to enter foreign trade and highlight a configuration of conditions present in organizations that successfully undergo an internationalization process. Managerial decisions that can effectively contribute to export performance are prioritized.

Keywords: Internationalization, Export, International Negotiation.

CONFIGURAÇÕES DE CAPACIDADES EXPORTADORAS PARA DESEMPENHO DE VENDAS NO MERCADO INTERNACIONAL: UMA ANÁLISE QUALITATIVA COMPARATIVA

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RESUMO

Objetivo: Analisar as configurações da capacidade exportadora de empresas internacionalizadas que geram altos níveis de desempenho exportador, medido pelo indicador de vendas ao mercado internacional. **Método:** Analisou-se uma amostra de 50 indústrias exportadoras do estado do Rio Grande do Sul, Brasil, utilizando-se o método da análise qualitativa comparativa (QCA). **Principais Resultados:** Os resultados mostraram que as empresas com maior desempenho em exportação, medido em volume de vendas, apresentaram uma combinação das seguintes condições necessárias e presentes: "Conhecimento dos Obstáculos", "Nível de Informação", "Estrutura Interna de Exportação" e "Método de Elaboração de Custos". Além dessas condições necessárias, houve uma condição não necessária presente ("Adaptação do Produto") e uma condição não necessária ausente ("Promoção Eficaz"). **Relevância/Originalidade:** Este estudo contribuiu para o aprimoramento da literatura sobre a capacidade exportadora ao descrever como os elementos identificados se combinam para gerar aumento no volume de vendas nas exportações. O uso do método QCA, vinculado ao *Most Similar, Different Outcome/Most Different, Similar Outcome* (MSDO/MDSO), ainda é pouco explorado no campo da internacionalização e das negociações internacionais. **Contribuições Teóricas/Metodológicas:** A pesquisa avançou com os pressupostos de Minervini (2008) por meio de uma investigação empírica, afirmando que a capacidade exportadora não é uma prescrição estática de elementos essenciais. **Contribuições sociais/para a gestão:** Os achados ressaltam a importância do desenvolvimento da capacidade exportadora das empresas que desejam adentrar no comércio exterior e destacam uma configuração de condições presentes nas organizações que desenvolvem um processo de internacionalização bem-sucedido. Priorizam-se decisões gerenciais que possam contribuir efetivamente para o desempenho exportador.

Palavras-chave: Internacionalização, Exportação, Negociação Internacional.

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INTRODUCTION

Internationalization is an increasingly relevant topic, especially in emerging countries, as it significantly impacts business growth (Carneiro & Dib, 2007; Muñoz et al., 2022). This process involves integrating economic activities with markets outside the geographical borders of the home country (Bhaumik et al., 2019; Muñoz et al., 2022). Therefore, there is ongoing interest in understanding business internationalization, particularly in terms of export performance, which, according to Freixanet and Federo (2022), is primarily linked to the breadth and intensity of exports. Several authors have explored the best modes of market entry (Osland et al., 2001), the relevance of foreign markets (Magnani et al., 2018), strategic decisions for international expansion (Haapanen et al., 2020), the relationship between innovation and internationalization (Bansi et al., 2021), among other correlations different from those related to sales performance in international markets.

In general, studies acknowledge that entering foreign markets requires specific capabilities that contribute to the success of export activities (Minervini, 2008). Accordingly, various researchers have analyzed the relationship between innovation capability and export capability (Sjödin et al., 2016), dynamic export capabilities (Miocevic, 2021), technological capabilities (Araujo et al., 2019), and dynamic managerial capabilities, and how these elements relate to a company's international expansion (Haapanen et al., 2020), among others. Despite significant progress in understanding and identifying export capabilities, there are still limitations to be addressed. The combination of export capabilities results in export capacity, which, according to Minervini (2008), reflects a company's potential to think globally and understand its mission, vision, and values in the context of international decisions. Thus, Minervini (2008) identifies export capabilities as essential components of export capacity.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that many scholars have focused on studying these capabilities or elements in isolation, neglecting the interdependencies and interactions between them. Following the reasoning of Sjödin et al. (2016), who highlight the existence of configurations of different capabilities or elements for a company's internationalization, it is argued that studying capabilities collectively enhances the understanding of the decision-making and feasibility of internationalization as a process embedded in a system uniquely organized, structured, and configured for each organization. Consequently, it is fundamental that researchers explore the set of variables that can shape the export performance of internationalized companies (Carvalho & Avellar, 2020; Prado et al., 2022). The generation of a set of capability configurations provides insights more aligned with the complex reality of internationalized companies (Zhang et al., 2024), particularly those in organizations that develop a successful internationalization process.

A successful process, characterized by high export performance, can be measured by specific indicators. According to Franceschini et al. (2008), these indicators represent a process—or part of it—through its dimensions without any omissions or redundancies. Performance metrics are classified in different ways, with the most common distinction being between financial and non-financial. The latter is more traditionally utilized by companies to evaluate their performance due to its uniformity regarding the data to be quantified and executives' familiarity with this type of indicator (Marquezan et al., 2013). Among financial metrics, this research focuses on the volume of foreign sales. This measure provides uniform, quantifiable data across the studied organizations and is recognized by participants as an important performance indicator.

Considering the above, this study aimed to answer the following research question: What configurations of conditions related to export capabilities should be adopted to achieve a high level of export performance? The objective of this study was to analyze the configurations of export capabilities of internationalized companies in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. These companies achieve high levels of export performance, measured by their sales to the international market.

Regarding export capacity, this study adopts the definition and structure proposed by Minervini (2008), which includes ten essential elements classified into two dimensions: market knowledge and internal company structure. This framework is appropriate because various internal and external factors can impact the organization's success or failure in internationalization (Minervini, 2008; Sacramento, 2018).

To achieve the objective, a study was conducted with 50 exporting companies from Rio Grande do Sul using the crisp-set qualitative comparative analysis (csQCA) method. This article contributes to the literature by developing an empirical study of an export capability configuration. Specifically, the findings advance and contribute to Minervini's (2008) assumptions by revealing a combination of causal conditions that lead to success in the performance of exporting companies: a combination of Knowledge of Obstacles, Information Level, Internal Export Structure, and Cost Elaboration Method. Thus, export capability is not a static prescription of elements. Instead, it varies according to the products being exported, the destination countries, and the strategic needs of the companies involved in the process.

In addition to this introduction, the article is organized into five sections. The second section presents the theoretical framework, while the third describes the research method. The fourth section details the data analysis, and the fifth discusses the results. The final section provides the concluding remarks on the study.

1. INTERNATIONALIZATION OF COMPANIES: EXPORT CAPACITY

Companies seek profitability and expansion by exploring foreign markets. In this context, exporting is the predominant method of internationalization, encompassing two main facets: the intensity of export-related sales and the number of markets engaged abroad (Freixanet & Federo, 2022).

However, different capabilities are essential for the successful execution of companies' export activities (Carvalho & Avellar, 2020; Prado et al., 2022). Thus, this research defines export capacity as a company's potential to think globally and adapt to market demands throughout internationalization (Minervini, 2008).

To develop this capability, Minervini (2008) highlights the essential elements for a successful internationalization process. These elements are classified as factors of market knowledge and internal organizational structure, represented metaphorically as an iceberg. The iceberg metaphor illustrates that some elements (those above the surface, or at the tip of the iceberg) are more evident than others. At the tip of the iceberg are aspects related to government, with a focus on the country's competitiveness, exchange rate policy, customs procedures, insurance, and incentives. Mea while, the submerged part, which includes most of the essential elements for the success of the internationalization process, encompasses the dimensions of market knowledge and company structure (Minervini, 2008).

The market knowledge dimension includes *capabilities related to market selection*, entry channel selection, product adaptation, knowledge of obstacles, and financial management. Market selection capability involves the company's ability to determine the international markets where it wishes to operate (Minervini, 2008). This decision is based on the organization's objectives and affects the choice of countries and entry strategies for each (Galazova et al., 2019).

The capability related to the *selection of entry channels* involves planning the most appropriate way to enter a foreign market, including e-commerce, direct sales, mail-order sales, and export consortia, among others. Careful selection of entry modes, whether direct or indirect, is crucial to align with the company's strategy and maximize opportunities for success.

Product adaptations involve making adjustments to meet the cultural, ergonomic, climatic, and regulatory demands of different markets. *Understanding obstacles* entails analyzing the historical, cultural, and structural barriers of both the home country and the target market (Minervini, 2008). Aspects such as taxes, regulations, and sanitary and phytosanitary standards must be understood and adhered to in order to avoid rework and potential fines due to mistakes made during the export process (Hassan & Bhatti, 2023).

Finally, *financial management* capability is crucial for companies operating globally due to the legal and economic complexities that differ from the domestic scenario (Silva et al., 2013). Effective financial management enables the acquisition of resources to finance investments at the lowest cost and achieve planned goals. In internationalization, factors such as exchange rates, product value, and the economic landscape directly affect transactions (Oliveira et al., 2015).

The company's structural dimension includes capabilities related to *effective promotion*, information level, business integration, internal export structure, and cost elaboration methods. An effective promotion policy is fundamental for establishing priorities, identifying opportunities, and overcoming obstacles in the pursuit of a realistic strategy not only for market entry but also for necessary restructuring. This approach helps create new internal capabilities within organizations (Behl et al., 2023). Minervini (2008) emphasizes the importance of communication with international partners and image-building, which can be achieved through various promotional tools such as catalogs, labels, packaging, advertising, and participation in international trade fairs.

Another essential aspect when deciding to export is the *level of information*. The company must be prepared to handle various relevant information for successful internationalization, including international scenarios, regulations, agreements, promotion, finance, technical standards, and market research (Kydd, 2012; Mendes, 2020; Minervini, 2008). Beyond understanding the product, it is necessary to master cultural and political contexts to effectively manage the exchange of information.

Another condition that needs to be considered is *business integration*. The internationalization process requires the diffusion of an export-oriented culture and employee motivation. Having an organizational culture oriented towards export influences the strategic, tactical, and operational levels of the company, aiding in decision-making and results associated with export activities (Navarro-García et al., 2013). Therefore, preparing employees is fundamental, which requires training to face the challenges of the global market (Lima, 2016; Minervini, 2008; Nogueira et al., 2013). Collaboration between sectors is key to internationalization. Departments such as research, production, marketing, and finance must work as a team, understanding the importance of collaboration for the success of exports (Minervini, 2008).

Additionally, the *internal export structure* must be well-planned and qualified, considering factors such as objectives, markets, products, and cultural differences (Minervini, 2008; Pipkin, 2011). Identifying organizational weaknesses and learning from daily operations contribute to the development of strategies and the team (Pipkin, 2011).

Finally, the *cost elaboration method* is a crucial factor in export processes. According to Minervini (2008), it is necessary to calculate costs based on exchange rates, interest rates, competition, and trade barriers. Minervini (2020) emphasizes that exportation is an antidote, not a solution to a crisis, reinforcing that pursuing new markets enhances business competitiveness but is not an end in itself. The internationalization process, when driven solely by situational factors—such as responding to export incentives—lacks stability, as it relies on specific contextual factors. Addressing this factor in isolation, which is subject to change, overlooks other essential elements necessary for successful internationalization that may not be immediately apparent. The combination of these elements constitutes the companies' export capability, which varies according to their performance levels.

The following section describes the research method used to analyze the relationship between the configuration of export capability elements and export performance, which in this study, was measured by the indicator of sales to the international market.

2. METHOD

In recent years, many studies in the field of Applied Social Sciences have utilized the qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) method in different contexts. These include research on performance and technology management levels among companies in the Baja California wine industry cluster in Mexico (Rodríguez et al., 2021), combinations of drivers that favor the adoption of eco-innovation in meatpacking plants in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil (Dias & Braga, 2022), and governance and management of networks of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Brazil (Wegner et al., 2022), among others.

QCA is a case-oriented comparative approach designed to uncover the logical connections between combinations of causal conditions that produce a desired state or outcome. This configurational approach acknowledges that there is not necessarily a single best way to produce a result; instead, multiple configurations can achieve the same outcome. The method allows for the study of equifinality, meaning the possibility of achieving a result through different solutions and configurations (Kumar et al., 2022; Parente & Federo, 2019).

This method was initially developed to find consistent relationships among small samples, but it is now used for both small and large samples (Mello, 2021; Parente & Federo, 2019; Wegner et al., 2022). This study is based on the sequential application of two comparative methods. First, the most different, similar outcome/ most similar, different outcome (MDSO/MSDO, 2015) analysis was applied as a preliminary step to detect "crucial" or "key" conditions, as recommended by Ragin (2014). Subsequently, the csQCA method was used to identify which configurations of internal company structure and market knowledge are adopted to generate sales performance in the export activities of the companies in the research sample.

2.1. Case selection and research instrument

The sample consists of exporting companies located in Serra Gaúcha, a region in Southern Brazil comprising 52 municipalities. The most prominent and representative cities are Caxias do Sul, Bento Gonçalves, Nova Petrópolis, Gramado, Canela, and Cambará do Sul. Known for its strong economic presence in tourism, the region also excels in the agro-industrial sector and family agriculture, with a diverse array of exporting companies. The main production hubs in Serra Gaúcha are examples of pioneering technology. Over the past decade (2013–2023), data indicates that the Serra, Campos de Cima da Serra, Hortênsias, Vales do Caí, and Paranhana regions received BRL 2.2 billion in investments from the Southern Brazil Regional Development Bank (BRDE), accounting for 22% of the BRL 9.9 billion invested in the state during this period. Of these funds, BRL 767.4 million (81% in Serra) were allocated to manufacturing industry projects[1], mainly through innovation financing lines (Torres, 2023).

As an example of this strength, the main commercial partners for exports from Rio Grande do Sul in October 2023 were the United States (US$ 163.3 million, US$ 21.9 million less than in October 2022) and Argentina (US$ 91.3 million, US$ 1.1 million less than in October 2022), according to the surveyed sample from the state's manufacturing industry. In the cumulative total for 2023, the manufacturing industry of Rio Grande do Sul sold more to the United States and China (SESI, 2023). Thus, a sample was selected consisting of organizations from various sectors of the manufacturing industry in Serra Gaúcha, including food and beverage industries, furniture, leather, machinery and equipment, footwear, vehicle parts, elevators, and lighting (Portal da Indústria, 2024).

The companies were selected based on data available from institutions such as Centers of Industry, Commerce and Services (CIC, *Centros da Indústria, Comércio e Serviços*); Union of Furniture Industries of Bento Gonçalves (Sindmóveis, *Sindicato das Indústrias do Mobiliário de Bento Gonçalves*), and Brazilian Union of Viticulture (UVIBRA, *União Brasileira de Vitivinicultura*), which focuses on the Brazilian grape and wine production chain, among other entities and institutions related to the internationalization of companies.

For data collection, companies that operate internationally through both direct and indirect exports were pursued, regardless of their time and maturity in the segment. A questionnaire consisting of ten questions was used as the data collection instrument, based on the categories proposed by Minervini (2008), which divides export capacity into two sections: market knowledge and company structure, along with the outcome of sales volume performance generated by exports (Freixanet & Federo, 2022). The causal conditions of the study, as well as the outcome, were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (5) Strongly agree. The instrument was validated in terms of its content by four experts in the fields of internationalization and QCA methodology. Table 1 presents the questions used to measure causal conditions (elements of Export Capacity), outcomes, and QCA codes.

The questionnaire was directed to the employee responsible for foreign trade activities to ensure the highest accuracy and knowledge of the area. Eighty manufacturing industries in Rio Grande do Sul were contacted; of these, 52 agreed to answer the questions. After data preparation, 50 valid ques-

1 The manufacturing industry is a sector that transforms raw materials into final or intermediate products that will be further modified by other industries. The materials, substances, and components used by these industries come from agricultural production, mining, fishing, forestry extraction, and other industrial activities (Portal da Indústria, 2024).

Table 1. Causal conditions, outcome, and qualitative comparative analysis code.

Causal Conditions (Elements of Export Capacity)		**Questions**	**QCA Code**
Market Knowledge	Market Selection	My company conducts market research to select countries it will operate in.	CMSM
	Entry Channel Selection	My company objectively analyzes the best way to enter foreign markets, weighing the costs and risks, pros and cons that could arise from each mode of entry—whether direct or indirect.	CMSCI
	Product Adaptation	My company adapts its product for sale abroad according to the cultural, ergonomic, climatic, and regulatory factors of the destination country (assembly manuals, translations, packaging, colors, etc.).	CMAP
	Knowledge of Obstacles	My company understands tariff and non-tariff barriers, such as taxes, technical requirements, restrictive foreign regulations, certifications, and sanitary and phytosanitary standards in the countries where it negotiates its products.	CMCO
	Financial Management	In my company's financial management, investments (best allocation of resources) and financing (financial alternatives such as Advance Against Export Contracts, Advance Payment on Export Bills, Proex, special customs regimes like Drawback, among others) options are frequently used for export activities.	CMGF
Company Structure	Effective Promotion	My company implements promotion strategies, markets its products, and conducts marketing activities tailored to the specific needs of each country it operates in.	EEPE
	Information Level	My company knows about international market-related matters, such as logistical conditions, political and economic issues, consumer preferences (what competitors offer, what our company offers as an advantage, trends, maintaining open channels with customers, etc.).	EENI
	Business Integration	My company promotes export culture among its employees as an integrated business activity involving different sectors such as sales, engineering, finance, production, shipping, logistics, etc., through training and development.	EEIE
	Internal Export Structure	My company has a well-trained team capable of understanding and resolving issues related to export processes (structured department, international trade advisory, etc.).	EEEIE
	Cost Elaboration Method	My company has a specific price list for exports and applies discounts according to the market it is negotiating in, considering factors such as exchange rates, commercial terms (Incoterms*), payment terms (advance payment, documentary collection, letter of credit, etc.), inventory levels, competition, and barriers.	EEMEC
Outcome	Sales	Our company generates a high volume of export sales.	PFVendas

**International Commercial Terms*; QCA: qualitative comparative analysis; CMSM: Market Selection; CMSCI: Entry Channel Selection; CMAP: Product Adaptation; CMCO: Knowledge of Obstacles; CMGF: Financial Management; EEPE: Effective Promotion; EENI: Information Level; EEIE: Business Integration; EEEIE Internal Export Structure; EEMEC: Cost Estimation Method.
Source: Developed by the authors (2022).

tionnaires were obtained. The data were tabulated in an Excel spreadsheet and then imported into the fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) software for analysis.

2.2. Calibration

Given the number of conditions established in the model and the goal of reducing them to those truly

necessary for export performance, an MDSO/MSDO analysis was conducted. This analysis is recommended for situations where the number of conditions is high, which can limit the effectiveness of QCA analysis (Dias & Braga, 2022; Dias & Dias, 2022; Dias & Pedrozo, 2015). In this context, MDSO/MSDO helps reduce the causal conditions in the study using MDSO/MSDO software (Meur & Beumier, 2015; Ragin, 2014).

To apply the MDSO/MSDO analysis, it is necessary to dichotomize the data into 0 and 1. Therefore, Likert scale values of 1, 2, and 3 were assigned a score of 0 (failure) because respondents at these values disagreed with or were uncertain about the presence of a causal condition. Likert scale values of 4 and 5 were assigned a score of 1 (success) as they indicated high or total agreement with the evaluation requested by the item on the scale. This dichotomization method was chosen because the primary aim of the study was to observe cases with positive outcomes, i.e., situations of success. Thus, to understand cases that represent success, Likert scale levels 4 and 5 are the most appropriate as they clearly indicate successful outcomes in that condition. Consequently, Likert scale values 1, 2, and 3, which did not guarantee successful cases, were calibrated to 0. This approach did not hinder the analysis since the focus was on analyzing only successful outcomes.

After determining the main causal conditions with the dichotomized data, the analysis proceeded using the csQCA method. A fundamental aspect of csQCA is the "Boolean minimization" method, which simplifies complex expressions into more parsimonious and straightforward forms, aligning with the study's objective (Tamaki & Araújo, 2022, p. 141).

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This section presents the results obtained at each stage: MDSO/MSDO analysis and analysis of necessity and sufficiency for export sales performance based on the cases studied.

3.1. MDSO/MSDO analysis

Among the cases studied, 29 were identified as successful and 21 as unsuccessful (dichotomized as 1 = success and 0 = failure). The causal conditions were represented by five categories of market knowledge, five categories of company structure, and one outcome category (sales). Table 2 presents the dichotomized data utilized for the application of MDSO/MSDO.

After dichotomizing the data (Table 2), the analysis was conducted using the MDSO/MSDO software. The results, shown in Figure 1, present the most dif-

Table 2. Dichotomized data of causal variables: sales performance.

	Sales – outcome
PFVENDAS	111111111111111111111111111110000000000000000000000
Category: Market Knowledge – 5 variables	
CMSM	100111011111111111001011101011111101100000000001100
CMSCI	000111001111011011001011100110101111000100010001100110
CMAP	111011111111010110111110110111000111110100010100010
CMCO	111111111111011011111111111111111111111101101010010
CMGF	001011111111111011111111111101101100010000011001100110
Category: Company Structure – 5 variables	
EEPE	110011011110010101001011100111100110000001000000010
EENI	111111111111111111111111111111101111000111010000010
EEIE	101111100110011111000111101110101011001001010000010
EEEIE	101111111111110111111111111111100111010011010000010
EEMEC	001111111111111111111111111111111111111111001001010

CMSM: Market Selection; CMSCI: Entry Channel Selection; CMAP: Product Adaptation; CMCO: Knowledge of Obstacles; CMGF: Financial Management; EEPE: Effective Promotion; EENI: Information Level; EEIE: Business Integration; EEEIE Internal Export Structure; EEMEC: Cost Estimation Method.
Source: Developed based on dichotomized data (2022).

Outstanding pairs

«h» - written down once only

Zona 1

D0: h=1 (2,3) (2,4) (3,4) (2,7) (4,7) (2,13) (2,15) (15,16) (2,17) (2,18) (16,18) (4,19) (4,20) (2,22) (4,22) (2,24) (16,24) (4,26) (2,27) (13,28) (16,28) (13,29)
D1: h=2 (2,5) (2,6) (2,10) (2,11) (2,12) (1,13) (2,14) (1,15) (2,23) (2,25)
D2: h=2
D3: h=2
D4: h=2

Zona 2

D0: h=1 (32,42) (37,42) (31,43) (34,43) (35,43) (31,45) (35,45) (36,45) (31,46) (35,46) (42,47) (44,47) (31,48) (35,48) (46,48) (43,49) (45,49) (46,49) (47,49) (48,49) (31,50) (34,50) (35,50) (49,50)
D1: h=2 (34,39) (30,43) (36,43) (43,44) (34,45) (35,47) (42,48) (32,49) (30,50) (36,50) (44,50)
D2: h=2 (32,34) (32,35) (31,37) (31,38) (33,38) (30,39) (31,39) (31,40) (33,42) (40,42) (33,43) (32,44) (37,44) (30,45) (33,45) (44,45) (33,46) (34,46) (30,47) (31,47) (34,47) (36,47) (30,48) (36,48) (41,48) (44,48) (37,49) (39,49) (33,50)
D3: h=2
D4: h=2

Zona 3

S0: h=2 (8,30) (18,31) (24,31) (15,33) (9,34) (21,34) (28,49)
S1: h=2 (5,30) (6,30) (9,30) (10,30) (11,30) (12,30) (14,30) (19,30) (20,30) (21,30) (23,30) (25,30) (26,30) (4,31) (5,31) (6,31) (9,31) (10,31) (11,31) (14,31) (17,31) (21,31) (23,31) (25,31) (27,31) (4,33) (17,33) (27,33) (5,34) (6,34) (8,34) (10,34) (11,34) (12,34) (14,34) (18,34) (23,34) (24,34) (25,34) (28,34) (29,34) (28,35) (29,35) (4,36) (5,36) (6,36) (10,36) (11,36) (12,36) (14,36) (17,36) (23,36) (25,36) (29,36) (19,38) (20,38) (26,38) (3,44) (5,44) (6,44) (7,44) (10,44) (11,44) (12,44) (14,44) (17,44) (19,44) (20,44) (22,44) (23,44) (25,44) (26,44) (28,44) (3,49) (5,49) (6,49) (7,49) (9,49) (10,49) (11,49) (14,49) (17,49) (21,49) (22,49) (23,49) (25,49)
S2: h=2 (1,30) (2,30) (3,30) (7,30) (13,30) (16,30) (17,30) (18,30) (22,30) (24,30) (27,30) (28,30) (29,30) (8,31) (12,31) (13,31) (15,31) (28,31) (29,31) (13,32) (15,32) (5,33) (6,33) (10,33) (11,33) (12,33) (13,33) (14,33) (18,33) (23,33) (24,33) (25,33) (28,33) (29,33) (1,34) (3,34) (4,34) (7,34) (17,34) (19,34) (20,34) (22,34) (26,34) (27,34) (1,35) (3,35) (4,35) (5,35) (6,35) (7,35) (9,35) (10,35) (11,35) (12,35) (14,35) (17,35) (19,35) (20,35) (21,35) (22,35) (23,35) (25,35) (26,35) (1,36) (8,36) (9,36) (15,36) (16,36) (18,36) (21,36) (24,36) (28,36) (12,37) (19,37) (20,37) (26,37) (3,38) (7,38) (8,38) (9,38) (12,38) (17,38) (21,38) (22,38) (27,38) (3,39) (4,39) (7,39) (22,39) (27,39) (2,40) (3,41) (4,41) (7,41) (19,41) (20,41) (22,41) (26,41) (27,41) (1,42) (2,42) (3,42) (4,42) (7,42) (22,42) (27,42) (2,43) (8,44) (9,44) (15,44) (18,44) (21,44) (24,44) (29,44) (2,46) (13,47) (8,49) (12,49) (15,49) (18,49) (19,49) (20,49) (24,49) (26,49) (29,49) (2,50)
S3: h=2
S4: h=2

Source: Software fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA).

Figure 1. Most different, similar outcome/ most similar, different outcome pairs – sales performance.

ferent and most similar pairs in three distinct zones. Dias and Dias (2022, p. 4) explain that "Zone 1 represents the comparison between cases with the same outcome, specifically the comparison between cases that achieved the outcome 1 (Presence)." Similarly, "Zone 2 also represents the comparison between cases with the same outcome, but between cases that achieved 0 (Failure)". Conversely, "Zone 3 represents the comparison between cases with outcome 1 (Success) and cases with outcome 0 (Absence)" (Dias & Dias, 2022, p. 4).

The study utilized Zone 1 for the presentation of results, as suggested by Dias and Dias (2022) since this zone compares cases that achieved outcome 1 (Success). In this study, these cases represent those that were successful in export performance.

After comparing the pairs in Zone 1, which included pairs with maximum differences and an outcome of 1 (success in sales performance), six causal conditions were identified: Information Level (EENI—31 similarities among compared pairs), Knowledge of Obstacles (CMCO—23 pairs), Product Adaptation (CMAP—12 pairs), Internal Export Structure (EEEIE—12 pairs), Cost Estimation Method (EEMEC—12 pairs), and Effective Promotion (EEPE—12 pairs). These selected causal conditions helped explain the differences between success and failure in terms of sales performance in exports.

3.2. Necessity analysis for sales performance in exports

In the subsequent stage, the necessity analysis examined which of the conditions identified in the MDSO/MSDO analysis were essential for success or failure in generating export sales. For a condition to be considered necessary, the outcome cannot occur without it (Toshkov, 2016, p. 270).

To determine if a condition is necessary, the results of consistency and coverage indicators were analyzed. A condition is considered "necessary" or "almost necessary" when the consistency value is higher than or equal to 0.90, indicating that the outcome cannot be achieved without this condition (Rodrigo et al., 2022; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). Coverage values exceeding 0.5 further ensure the relevance of the conditions in question.

Table 3 presents the consistency and coverage values, identifying four necessary conditions (consistency above 0.90) for the presence of sales performance in exports. The first necessary condition is related to market knowledge: 'Knowledge of Obstacles' (CMCO). The other three are related to the company's structure: 'Information Level' (EENI), 'Internal Export Structure' (EEEIE), and 'Cost Estimation Method' (EEMEC). All necessary conditions have coverage values above 0.5, indicating their importance and non-trivial nature in ensuring successful export performance.

3.3. Sufficiency analysis for sales performance in exports

The fsQCA software, using the Truth Table algorithm, was employed to analyze sufficient conditions. A condition is considered sufficient "if, whenever it is present in all cases, the outcome is also present in those cases" (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 57). In other words, for a condition to be deemed sufficient, the outcome must always occur in its presence (Toshkov, 2016, p. 270). The assumptions of Schneider and Wagemann (2012) were followed in the sufficiency analysis, with a consistency criterion of 80% and a frequency of at least two successful cases per configuration. The solution consistency after editing the Truth Table was 80%, which is considered a high score by scholars using the QCA method (Marconatto et al., 2020; Raab et al., 2015). After the minimization process using the Truth Table, which resulted in a shorter and more parsimonious solution, an intermediate analysis was conducted with residuals included based on previous results.

Boolean minimization was performed using the fsQCA software, and logical remainders were introduced into the analysis (Rihoux & Meuer, 2009). No causal condition or remainder that contradicted the necessary conditions was selected, as no cases with these configurations were observed in this study, even though they are possible (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). The main findings are presented in Table 4.

The results obtained using the csQCA software (Table 4) indicate that the sample can be described by a consistent configuration with a consistency of 80%. The solution coverage reaches a value of 0.2758,

Table 3. Analysis of necessary conditions – outcome: sales.

Causal conditions (Elements of Export Capability)		**Tested Conditions**	**Consistency**	**Coverage**
Market Knowledge	Knowledge of Obstacles	CMCO	0.931035	0.642857
		~CMCO	0.068966	0.250000
	Product Adaptation	CMAP	0.793103	0.696970
		~CMAP	0.206897	0.352941
Company Structure	Information Level	EENI	1.000000	0.725000
		~EENI	0.000000	0.000000
	Effective Promotion	EEPE	0.586207	0.739130
		~EEPE	0.413793	0.444444
	Internal Export Structure	EEEIE	0.931035	0.729730
		~EEEIE	0.068966	0.153846
	Cost Elaboration Method	EEMEC	0.931035	0.642857
		~EEMEC	0.068966	0.250000

CMCO: Knowledge of Obstacles; CMAP: Product Adaptation; EENI: Information Level; EEPE: Effective Promotion; EEEIE Internal Export Structure; EEMEC: Cost Estimation Method.
Source: Software fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA).

Table 4. Key findings: configuration of variables adopted by companies for export capacity which generate higher sales volume in their exports.

Configuration		**Raw coverage**	**Unique coverage**	**Consistency**
1	CMCO*CMAP*EENI*~EEPE*EEEIE*EEMEC	0.275862	0.275862	0.8
Solution coverage: 0.275862				
Solution consistency: 0.8				

CMCO: Knowledge of Obstacles; CMAP: Product Adaptation; EENI: Information Level; EEPE: Effective Promotion; EEEIE Internal Export Structure; EEMEC: Cost Estimation Method.
Source: Software fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA).

meaning 27.58% of the cases studied are successful when applying this configuration. The value for solution consistency is 0.8, revealing that 80% of the companies that succeeded in export sales adopted the configuration described below. Additionally, raw coverage suggests that 27.58% of all cases with good export sales results contain this configuration.

CMCO * CMAP * EENI * ~EEPE * EEEIE * EEMEC → PFVENDA

The analysis of solutions indicates that the core conditions are 'Knowledge of Obstacles' (CMCO), 'Product Adaptation' (CMAP), 'Information Level' (EENI), absence of 'Effective Promotion' (EEPE), 'Internal Export Structure' (EEEIE), and 'Cost Estimation Method' (EEMEC).

4. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The export capability of firms, meaning their potential to operate in international markets, is determined by a wide array of elements and their combinations. Through QCA, it was possible to identify more than just a simple relationship between these elements and the success of organizations in foreign markets. This research found specific combinations of export capability elements (causal conditions) that are linked to export performance in terms of sales within a sample of exporting industries in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. This approach addresses a gap in the literature, which often focuses on the individual impact of variables on export performance, overlooking the complexity of interactions among various elements (Carvalho & Avellar, 2020; Prado et al., 2022; Sjödin et al., 2016).

Of the ten elements analyzed, distributed across two main dimensions—market knowledge and company structure (Minervini, 2008)—four are necessary conditions for firms with better sales performance in exports: 'Knowledge of Obstacles' (CMCO), 'Information Level' (EENI), 'Internal Export Structure' (EEEIE), and 'Cost Estimation Method' (EEMEC). On the other hand, 'Product Adaptation' (CMAP) was not a necessary condition but was present in successful exporting firms, while 'Effective Promotion' (EEPE) was a non-necessary condition that was absent in several successful cases. This indicates that the companies studied achieved good export results even without a strong promotion strategy, as shown in Table 5.

The analysis revealed that 'Product Adaptation' (CMAP), although present, is not a necessary causal condition for sales performance in the researched companies. This element involves adapting products to meet the cultural, ergonomic, climatic, and regulatory factors of destination countries (Minervini, 2008). Its classification as a non-necessary causal condition suggests that the impact of product adaptation may vary depending on the type of product or target market.

Some adaptations may be inherent to the manufacturing process, while others require changes in resources or procedures to make products suitable for export. For example, some certifications require that the production, collection, and storage processes meet the requirements of Islamic law (Cdial Halal, 2019). Thus, some adaptations are directly related to the product transformation process, while others indirectly influence the feasibility of exports.

Table 5. Configuration of export capability elements for sales performance in exports.

Causal Conditions (Elements of Export Capability)		**Sales**
Market Knowledge	Knowledge of Obstacles (CMCO)	●
	Product Adaptation (CMAP)	•
Company Structure	Effective Promotion (EEPE)	○
	Information Level (EENI)	●
	Internal Export Structure (EEEIE)	●
	Cost Elaboration Method (EEMEC)	●

● Necessary conditions present; • Unnecessary conditions present; ○ Necessary conditions absent.
Source: Developed by the authors (2022).

This finding underscores that while product adaptation is important, it is not a decisive factor in export performance. Previous studies have also observed this conflicting relationship. For some companies, adapting products to specific markets is necessary to comply with regulations or local preferences. However, other companies may achieve good performance without significant modifications, depending on their relationship with the target market. Abdi et al. (2024) suggest that the impact of product adaptation on performance depends on how directly a company engages with foreign markets. Thus, the effect of product adaptation can vary—positively or negatively—based on the exporter's dependence on local intermediaries and partners.

Another point concerns 'Effective Promotion' (EEPE), a non-necessary causal condition that was absent in the analyzed contexts. The absence of this condition provides important insights into export sales performance. This research indicates that strategies for advertising, product promotion, and marketing aimed at meeting the specific needs of importing countries are not essential for success in international sales for the studied companies. This finding is particularly interesting as it contrasts with research suggesting that promotion in foreign markets is crucial for expanding and maintaining a presence in global trade (Behl et al., 2023; Minervini, 2008).

However, Hultman and Oghazi (2024) explain that beyond the standardization or adaptation of international promotion strategies, companies that truly understand their international scenario—both at macro and micro levels—will be better equipped to determine the most effective promotional tactics, messages, and channels to reach and engage their target audiences cost-effectively.

Furthermore, the absence of effective promotion may be linked to the consolidation of distribution channels for international sales that are already operating at full capacity, eliminating the need for expansion into new markets. Another possible explanation is that while promotion is a valid approach to increasing brand and product visibility overseas, it must be part of a broader marketing strategy tailored to different target markets to be effective. This approach can result in significant costs for companies, reducing the feasibility of promotional activities (Kotler & Armstrong, 2007).

In this context, considering the Brazilian situation and particularly the companies studied, the complexity and costs involved in developing effective promotions may inhibit this element. This scenario highlights the need for public policies to promote Brazilian exports, such as those by the Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency (ApexBrasil). ApexBrasil works to promote Brazilian products and services abroad and attract foreign investment to strategic sectors of the Brazilian economy. This is achieved through initiatives such as encouraging participation in international trade fairs, business matchmaking events, commercial missions, and beyond (ApexBrasil, 2023).

For the configuration of necessary and present elements for export sales performance, we identified 'Knowledge of Barriers' (CMCO), 'Information Level' (EENI), 'Internal Export Structure' (EEEIE), and 'Cost Estimation Method' (EEMEC). Conversely, it was evident that the causal conditions 'Market Selection' (CMSM), 'Entry Channel Selection' (CMSCI), and 'Financial Management' (CMGF) did not correlate with sales outcomes. Additionally, although present, 'Product Adaptation' (CMAP) was found not to be a necessary causal condition for export sales volume performance.

These findings suggest vulnerabilities within the market knowledge dimension, which is crucial for international operations (Mostafiz et al., 2019). This dimension is essential for identifying internationalization opportunities (George et al., 2016), as well as investment openings (better resource allocation alternatives) and financing options (such as Advance Against Export Contracts [ACC], Advance Payment on Export Bills [ACE], the Export Financing Program [Proex), special customs regimes like Drawback, among others) within the 'Financial Management' (CMGF) element.

The analysis also showed a lack of causal connection between 'Business Integration' (EEIE) and sales outcomes. Minervini (2012) emphasizes the importance of spreading an internationalization culture within the organization. To develop effective export capabilities, companies need to thoroughly understand their internal environment and cultivate an export culture among employees at all strategic, tactical, and operational levels.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research utilized the QCA method to identify which configurations of export capability elements contribute to successful sales volume performance among exporting firms. This study is original in its contribution to the literature on export capability by describing how specific elements combine to increase export sales volume. Moreover, the use of csQCA associated with MSDO/MDSO in the field of internationalization and international negotiations is still underexplored. This method helps overcome some limitations of quantitative research in international business, which can sometimes be overly reductionist. QCA allows for uncovering complex relationships between sets of conditional factors and outcomes (Fainshmidt et al., 2020). Additionally, the method incorporates multiple explanatory factors, potentially assisting researchers in generating insights more aligned with the complex realities of international business than conventional research approaches (Fainshmidt et al., 2020).

The research findings identify a configuration of causal conditions that highlight the elements contributing to export success. This addresses the study's objective of determining which export capability configurations internationalized companies in Rio Grande do Sul should adopt to achieve high levels of financial performance, as measured by international market sales indicators.

In terms of theoretical contributions, this research advances Minervini's (2008) assumptions through an empirical and representative study of 50 exporting industries from Serra Gaúcha/RS. It reveals the configuration of export capability conditions that should be adopted to achieve high levels of export performance: 'Knowledge of Obstacles' (CMCO), 'Information Level' (EENI), 'Internal Export Structure' (EEEIE), and 'Cost Estimation Method' (EEMEC). Thus, it can be asserted that export capability is not a static set of elements, as Minervini (2008) described it. In addition to these necessary conditions, there is a present non-necessary condition, 'Product Adaptation' (CMAP) and an absent non-necessary condition, 'Effective Promotion' (EEPE).

Furthermore, the findings of this research challenge the narrow portrayal of export capability elements by highlighting the variability of practices within one of the export capability elements: 'Product Adaptation' (CMAP). That is, the same element can vary by levels of implementation intensity.

As managerial contributions, the research findings not only emphasize the importance of developing export capabilities for companies aiming to enter international trade but also highlight a configuration of conditions present in industries that successfully undertake internationalization. Emphasizing these conditions does not diminish the importance of others; rather, it prioritizes managerial decisions that can more effectively contribute to export performance.

The results highlighted that achieving higher performance in overseas sales requires a combination of international market knowledge and a robust internal structure. This is especially important for managers of internationalized organizations or those planning to enter foreign markets strategically, as well as for export managers and analysts in the tactical and operational sectors. Key elements include awareness of tariff and non-tariff barriers ('Knowledge of Obstacles' —CMCO) and 'Information Level'—EENI, respectively), addressing logistical conditions, political and economic issues, and consumer preferences in target countries. Additionally, it is essential to have a skilled team who understands export processes ('Internal Export Structure'—EEEIE) and to implement accurate, differentiated pricing strategies tailored to international markets ('Cost Estimation Method'—EEMEC).

The limitations of this study provide opportunities for future research. Since data collection focused on various industries in Rio Grande do Sul, the findings are specific to this state, and results obtained through the csQCA method may or may not demonstrate consistency if replicated elsewhere. Therefore, it is suggested that other researchers conduct similar studies in Rio Grande do Sul or other regions with different companies to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. Additionally, exploring segmented samples—such as export products, destination countries, and the strategic needs of companies like market entry, consolidation abroad, or re-entry into foreign markets—would be insightful. Future research could also investigate whether different segments exhibit similar configurations of essential conditions for successful exportation.

Furthermore, the limitation of the sample size which was constrained due to some companies' reluctance to participate, could be addressed through additional validation studies. Expanding the understanding of the elements constituting export capacity could involve extending the results of QCA to multiple case studies and conducting quantitative research to validate other elements of the export capacity model, such as Minervini's (2008) framework or other frameworks used in international negotiations.

Finally, empirical and longitudinal research using a processual approach (Langley, 1999) would enhance the understanding of how elements of export capacity behave over time, including their configuration and re-configuration. This approach would deepen and advance the findings of the current study.

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