



# Informasjonsadferd og internasjonalisering

Sluttrapport fra prosjektet "The importance of relations in successful exporting of food products from Norway", finansiert av Norges Forskningsråd

av

Carl Arthur Solberg

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**Handelshøyskolen BI**  
Institutt for markedsføring

Carl Arthur Solberg:  
*Informasjonsadferd og internasjonalisering*

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## Forord

Denne rapporten oppsummerer de viktigste funn og konklusjoner fra våre undersøkelser i prosjektet ”The importance of relations in successful exporting of food products from Norway”, finansiert av Norges Forskningsråd. Rapporten utgis i Norsk Eksportbarometers rapportserie. Tre personer ved Handelshøyskolen BI har vært aktivt involvert i prosjektet:

Førsteamanuensis Carl Arthur Solberg (prosjektleder)  
Professor Geir Gripsrud  
Stipendiat (senere amanuensis) Arne Morten Ulvnes

Rapporten baserer seg i hovedsak på tre innlegg som er presentert på internasjonale konferanser:

Gripsrud, Geir, Carl Arthur Solberg og Arne Morten Ulvnes. 1999. “Exporters information collection behavior: An exploratory study”, Proceedings from the 14<sup>th</sup> IMP Conference, Dublin, Ireland, September 1999.

Gripsrud, Geir, Carl Arthur Solberg og Arne Morten Ulvnes. 2000. ”The role of trust in shaping information collection behavior of exporters”. Proceedings from the 15<sup>th</sup> EIBA Conference, Maastricht, Netherlands, December 2000.

Solberg, Carl Arthur. 2001. “Market information and the role of networks”, Proceedings from the 17<sup>th</sup> IMP, Conference Oslo, Norway, September 2001.

Disse bidragene blir gjengitt i sin helhet i denne rapporten. I tillegg har vi presentert papers på IMP konferansen i Turku (Åbo), Finland (september 1998) og EMAC konferansen, Bergen, Norge (mai 2000). Disse bidragene er ikke inkludert i denne rapporten da de i stor grad kan ses på som forarbeider til de øvrige bidragene. Rapporten har også inkludert noen avsnitt som vi vil karakterisere som forarbeider til videre forskning. Dette gjelder spesielt avsnitt 4.3 og 5.3.

Vi vil med dette takke Norges Forskningsråd for den støtte som de har gitt til prosjektet. Vi vil også takke Inger Johanne Langeland og Tor Korneliussen for deres medvirkning til datainnsamling i prosjektets innledende faser.

Sandvika, mars 2003

## Norsk eksportbarometer

Norsk Eksportbarometer er et prosjekt ved Handelshøyskolen BI som har som mål å utvikle og formidle kunnskap om internasjonalisering av norsk næringsliv. Fokus rettes spesielt mot forhold som kan forklare bedrifters strategivalg i internasjonale markeder. I tillegg analyseres også følgene av slike valg som f.eks. lønnsomhet. Eksportbarometeret ble startet opp i 2003 og har per mars 2003 gitt ut to rapporter:

Norske bedrifter i global konkurranse  
Informasjonsadferd og internasjonalisering

Eksportbarometeret har fått støtte til oppstart fra Globaliseringsprogrammet, et samarbeidsprosjekt mellom Handelshøyskolen BI, Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt og TIK-senteret ved Universitetet i Oslo, støttet av Norges Forskningsråd.

Eksportbarometeret ledes av førsteamanuensis Carl Arthur Solberg. Han har gjennom sitt arbeid i Norges Eksportråd og Saga Petrokjemi as & co (i dag Borealis), og gjennom forskning og konsulentarbeid opparbeidet dyp innsikt i norsk næringslivs utfordringer på en stadig mer global arena. Solberg har skrevet læreboken "Internasjonal markedsføring" (Universitetsforlaget), som i sin sjette utgave er den ledende i Norge på sitt felt.

Eksportbarometeret har to prosjektmedarbeidere: Liv Karin Slåttebrekk og Birgitte Kristiansen. Slåttebrekk er doktorgradsstipendiat ved Handelshøyskolen BI og Kristiansen er forskningsassistent.

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## 1. Innledning

Formålet med studien er å identifisere og analysere kritiske faktorer som i eksportør - partnerkjeden påvirker eksportørens resultater i markedet. Spesiell vekt vil bli lagt på den rolle som markedspartneren spiller i informasjonsinnsamlingen. Informasjon kan deles inn i mange ulike kategorier. Vi har i deler av vårt arbeide delt inn informasjon i to: informasjon for markedsbeslutninger og informasjon for kontroll av partneren. Konseptuelt sett er dette distinkte begreper; likevel er de ofte vanskelig å skille fra hverandre fordi selve informasjonsinnhentingene ofte skjer gjennom uformelle kanaler med flere formål for øyet (Benito et al 1993).

Mens det er forsket en hel del rundt informasjonsadferd i eksportbedrifter (Walters 1983; Benito et al 1993; Koh et al 1993; McAuley 1993; Hart et al 1994; Diamantopoulos og Souchon 1996, 1997), er det i liten grad satt fokus på den rolle som eksportørens partner spiller i denne forbindelse. Vi har sett at partneren<sup>1</sup> er en av hovedkildene til markedsinformasjon for (norske) eksportører (Benito et al 1993). Det er imidlertid uklart hvilke effekter denne informasjonen har på eksportøren i forhold til informasjon fra andre kilder (sekundærdata, markedsanalyser, kilder fra andre nettverkspartnere).

For å belyse disse spørsmålene har vi tatt utgangspunkt i fem teoretiske litteraturstrenger: internasjonalisering, markedsorientering, nettverksteori og transaksjonskostnadsteori og prinsippal/agentteori. Vi vil i neste kapittel kort redegjøre for disse og hvordan de kan bidra til å identifisere relevante forskningsspørsmål og hypoteser. I kapittel tre vil vi oppsummere resultatene fra første studie. Dette er en eksplorativ studie som ble foretatt for å identifisere mulige mønstre i informasjonsadferden til norske matvareeksportører. I kapittel fire gjengis noen av hovedkonklusjonene fra en survey gjennomført for å teste ut enkelte hypoteser utviklet i kjølvannet av litteraturgjennomgangen og den eksplorative studien. Her vil særlig effekten av ulike kilder for informasjon bli testet. Videre vil kapittel fem kort beskrive en informasjonsadferdsmodell for eksportbedrifter. Her setter vi såkalt "objektiv" markedsinformasjon gjennom markedsforskning opp mot informasjon oppnådd gjennom nettverk.

Kapittel seks vil trekke opp noen konklusjoner for videre forskning og diskuterer implikasjoner for ledere.

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<sup>1</sup> I denne rapporten bruker vi begrepet partner som et samlebegrep for lokale salgs- og markedsføringsrepresentanter i internasjonale markeder, det være seg agent, distributør, eget salgskontor etc.

## 2. Teoretisk plattform

I skjæringspunktet mellom partnerforhold i internasjonale markeder og informasjonsadferd ligger mange ulike teoristrenger. Siden vi diskuterer internasjonalisering, begynner vi vår teorigjennomgang med bidrag fra den såkalte "Uppsala-skolen", som postulerer at bedrifter skrittvis øker sitt internasjonale engasjement. Utgangspunktet for denne litteraturstrengen er at bedrifter – gjennom markedsaktiviteter først i nærmarkeder, siden stadig lengre ut – gradvis bygger opp kunnskap, både om markeder og om selve internasjonaliseringsprosessen som sådan (Johanson og Vahlne 1977, 1990; Sharma og Majkgård 2000). Parallelt med denne kunnskapsoppbyggingen vil bedriften også ta stadig dypere engasjement mht. inngangsstrategier – fra salg gjennom uavhengige mellommenn til salg gjennom egne salgskontorer og til slutt egen lokal produksjon. Figur 1 viser skjematisk hvordan markedsaktiviteter bidrar til tilbakeføring av informasjon, som i sin tur "avleirer" seg som markedskunnskap.



Figur 1: Markedsaktiviteter og markedskunnskap i eksport

Kunnskap er her et mer generelt begrep enn informasjon. Seringhaus og Rosson (1990) argumenterer at "bedrifter som er kunnskapsrike om eksport vil være i stand til å avgjøre hvilken informasjon som bør samles inn og hvordan bruke denne.... Kunnskap er på en måte en spesiell ressurs som er tilstede i varierende grad i ulike bedrifter. Som andre ressurser, må vi erkjenne at, uten dyrking og fornyelse, vil eksportkunnskap bli uttømt over tid". (side 154-155; norsk oversettelse).

I forhold til vår problemstilling, bidrar denne litteraturen til å kaste lys over hvordan kunnskap gjennom erfaringer i markedet gradvis bygges opp i organisasjonen. Særlig vekt legges på den uformelle informasjonsinnhentingen (Benito et al 1993). Den ser ikke på informasjonsadferd som sådan, men betrakter den snarere som et slags "biprodukt" til internasjonaliseringsprosessen. Dette står i kontrast til markedsorienteringslitteraturen som fra 1990 fikk en oppblomstring gjennom bidragene til Kohli og Jaowrski (1990) og Narver og Slater (1990). Her legges det ikke bare vekt på informasjon som sådan, men også hvilken type informasjon (konkurrenter,



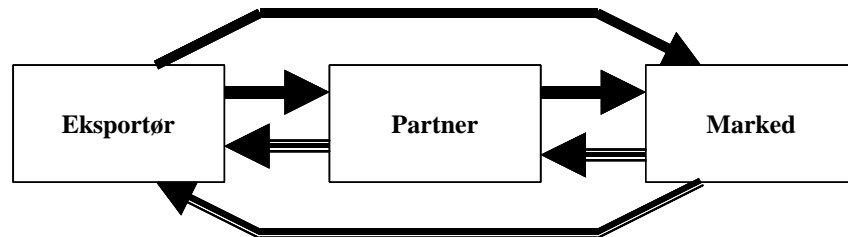
kundeadfærd og preferanser, teknologisk utvikling, myndighetenes rolle etc) og hvordan den bearbejdes internt i organisasjonen – både mht. spredning internt og hvilke beslutninger som tas i kjølvannet av informasjonsinnhenting. Etter hvert har markedsorienteringslitteraturen blitt stadig bearbejdet, og et sett med ulike måleskalaer er utviklet (Deshpandé og Farley 1996, Sandvik 1997).

Felles for internasjonalerings- og markedsorienteringslitteraturen er vekten som legges på informasjonsinnhenting og kunnskapsgenerering. Men det er også forskjeller. Markedsorienteringslitteraturen spesifiserer hvilken type informasjon som bør innhentes, men er ikke så opptatt av måten hvorpå denne informasjonen innhentes. I tillegg er den meget mer rigorøs i sine modeller og måleinstrumenter. Internasjonaleringslitteraturen på sin side er mer opptatt av selve læringsprosessen som følge av erfaringsbasert kunnskapsoppbygging, der denne mer er implisitt antatt enn eksplisitt spesifisert.

Vi har sett at det meste av informasjonen fra internasjonale markeder innhentes gjennom markedspartneren i utlandet (Benito et al 1993). Dette innebærer at eksportøren, for å få tilgang til den informasjonen som partneren har bygget opp, aktivt må forholde seg til denne partneren. Dette krever både ressurser og innsikt hos eksportøren og mekanismer som sikrer informasjonsgjennomgang fra markedet gjennom partneren frem til eksportør. Figur 2 a og b viser skjematisk hvilke konsekvenser det kan ha for eksportøren mht. informasjonstilgang når slike mekanismer ikke er (a) / er (b) etablert. I figur 2a ser vi at det meste av markedsaktivitetene og feedback fra markedet tilfaller partneren. I figur 2b har eksportøren, fordi han har mer ressurser, et relativt større ansvar mht. aktiviteter, både gjennom partner og direkte til marked, og sikrer seg også mekanismer for kunnskapsoverføring.



Figur 2 a: Begrenset læring fra marked



Figur 2b: Rik læring fra marked

Dette leder oss til to ulike – men relaterte teoristrenger: transaksjonskostnadsteori - TCA -(Williamson 1985) og prinsipal-agent teori – P-A (Eisenhardt 1989). Begge tar utgangspunkt i informasjonsasymmetri der – i vårt tilfelle - partneren har større kunnskap om kritiske markedsforhold enn eksportøren. Slik kunnskap vil partneren kunne bruke opportunistisk til fordel for seg selv, men ikke nødvendigvis til fordel for eksportøren. Mens TCA diskuterer under hvilke forhold ulike styringsformer (integrasjon eller markedsstyring) er mest effektive, tar P-A for seg selve kontrakten mellom partene – enten de er integrert eller ikke. Hovedhensikten i begge tilfelle er å få kontroll med partneren slik at han ikke opptrer opportunistisk, og/eller slik at kostnadene ved transaksjonene (f.eks. informasjonskostnadene) reduseres til det minimale. TCA søker slik kontroll gjennom eierskap. P-A søker å oppnå slik kontroll gjennom målsamstemmighet enten *ex ante* gjennom seleksjon av partner, eller *ex post* ved hjelp av ulike incentiver det være seg fast godtgjørelse eller bonusbaserte ordninger / provisjon. I førstnevnte tilfelle foretas kontrollen hierarkisk og mekanismer for å sikre informasjon for denne kontrollen må etableres. I P-A må eksportøren få informasjon som gjør at slike incentiver kan honoreres.

Risikoen for opportunistisk adferd vil alltid være tilstede. Mht. informasjon vil det dreie seg om informasjon som *ikke* deles fordi den ikke antas å være interessant, eller verre, muligheter som byr seg for å holde deler av denne tilbake, eller forvrengte informasjonen (Jensen og Meckling 1976). Hovedproblemet blir da redusert effektivitet – eller i TCA terminologi økte transaksjonskostnader, og P-A terminologi økte agentkostnader. Fra disse litteraturstrengene kan man avlede at under visse forhold (usikkerhet og høye spesifikke investeringer) vil eksportøren søke informasjon fra andre kilder for å sjekke adferden til partneren.

Stump og Heide (1996) foreslår tre generiske styringsformer av markedskanaler: partnervalg, incentiver og styring (*monitoring*). Gjennom nitid valg av partner kan man f.eks. *ex ante* sikre seg at partneren i en viss utstrekning

deler mål og strategi med eksportøren, og at han har tilstrekkelig med ressurser og på andre måter passer inn i eksportørens markedsstrategi. Problemet for mange eksportører er at partnervalg ofte foretas på et relativt tilfeldig grunnlag (Welch og Wiedersheim-Paul 1978), fordi informasjonskostnadene for å sikre seg den rette partneren er relativt høye. Dette gjelder ikke bare for partnervalg, men blir først synlig i denne forbindelse.

En ting er eksportørens lokale partner i det enkelte marked; noe annet er hele nettverket som eksportøren har tilgang til. Rangan (1998) hevder at business nettverk er bedre i stand til å sikre den nødvendige informasjonen enn såkalt "objektiv markedsinformasjon" gjennom (kostbare) markedsanalyser. Han siterer Granovetter (1985, p. 490) som hevder at informasjon gjennom nettverk er "bedre .. av fire grunner: (1) den er billig; (2) man har bedre tillit til egen informasjon – den er rikere, mer detaljert og mer eksakt; (3) individer som man relaterer seg til på regelmessig basis har et økonomisk incentiv til å være troverdige; og (4) bortsett fra økonomiske motiv, kontinuerlige økonomiske relasjoner blir ofte supplert med et sosialt innhold som har i seg sterke forventninger om tillit og fravær av opportuniste" (vår oversettelse).

I følge Burt (1992) er informasjon gjennom nettverk sterkt å foretrekke. "Gitt at det er en grense for hvor meget informasjon en person kan prosessere, blir nettverket et effektivt "screening"-verktøy. Det representerer en hel "hær" med personer som bearbeider informasjon og som kan påkalle din oppmerksomhet til sentrale bruddstykker i hele puslespillet. Det holder deg oppdatert på nye muligheter og advarer deg mot overhengende trusler. Denne annenhånds informasjon er ofte uklar eller unøyaktig, men tjener som tegn for noe som bør undersøkes grundigere" (p. 62, vår oversettelse).

Et sentralt begrep i denne sammenheng er tillit. Tillit leder til at man utveksler informasjon og at man avstår fra mulighetene til å opptre opportunistisk. Snarere enn opportuniste som er fokus i TCA og P-A, står etablering av tillit gjennom gjensidige investeringer i troverdige engasjement (*credible commitments*) sentralt hos Morgan og Hunt (1994). De karakteriserer 'commitment' som en tro på at partnere i en varig relasjon med hverandre er så viktig at den "fortjener maksimum av anstrengelser for å opprettholde den" (side 23, vår oversettelse). Blant slike anstrengelser bør vi inkludere partnerens villighet til å dele informasjon med eksportøren som bidrar til å sette sistnevnte i stand til å fatte tilfredsstillende beslutninger.

Et annet relevant begrep er "the strength of weak ties" (Granovetter 1973, 1982). Granovetter hentyder her til viktigheten av å ha alternative informasjonskilder gjennom f.eks. det vi kan kalle sekundære nettverk, som man

ikke dyrker i det daglige. Slik alternativ informasjon kan bidra til å gi eksportøren et mer helhetlig perspektiv og korrigerende ensidig informasjon fra primære kilder som markedspartneren jo har vist seg å være (Benito et al 1993). Det vil også "alltid" være en fare for at tette relasjoner til kun én partner i hvert marked leder eksportøren inn i et strategisk blindspor der man går glipp av markedsmuligheter som oppstår i andre deler av markedet.

Disse bidragene viser at nettverk og erfaring er to viktige pilarer i informasjonsadferden til eksportører. Den mer eksakte markedsinformasjon som oppnåes gjennom markedsanalyser blir ofte mer abstrakt og avhenger av brukerens evne til å klart definere hvilken informasjon som skal innhentes og hvordan den best kan anvendes i beslutninger. I en internasjonal setting er det ikke åpenbart at dette er like lett, og særlig vil dette være tilfelle for bedrifter med få ressurser. Her kommer vi også inn på problemet med etnosentrisk definerte analyseprosjekter som tar utgangspunkt i egen problemforståelse fra erfaringer fra hjemlandet, og som totalt kan gå glipp av hovedpoenget når man søker å overføre disse til eksportmarkeder (Ricks 1983, Solberg 1999). Videre er det påvist at markedsanalyser i stor grad blir brukt til å bekrefte det man allerede vet (Diamantopoulos og Souchon 1999), eller at når konklusjonene går mot "vedtatte sannheter", så blir de ikke trodd (Caplan, Morrison and Stambaugh 1975). Dermed risikerer man at markedsanalyser får en mer begrenset verdi, med mindre disse er vel integrert i hele beslutningsprosessen i bedriften.

Vi vil kort summere opp denne oversikten over teoretiske bidrag til vår problemstilling: Eksportører forholder seg hovedsaklig til sine markedspartnerne mht. informasjonstilfang blant annet pga. begrensede ressurser. Dette innebærer en risiko for opportunistisk adferd fra partnerens side. Eksportøren har tre muligheter for å motvirke en slik mulig utvikling:

1. Investere i relasjonen og utvikle et tillitsfullt samarbeid som gjør at opportunistisk adferd blir (både sosialt og økonomisk) svært vanskelig for partneren. På denne måten kan eksportøren sikre seg rimelig informasjonstilfang for sine beslutninger.
2. Problemet med denne tilnærmingen er at slike relasjonsinvesteringer bør sikres og at tillit (ifølge TCA) kan være en for svak sikringsmekanisme. En slik mekanisme kan være kontroll gjennom eierskap, eller gjennom avhengighet (makt).
3. En tredje mulighet er å skaffe informasjon fra *andre kilder* for å kontrollere partneren. Dette kan være gjennom nettverk, sekundære kilder eller gjennom dedikerte markedsanalyser.

Videre kan vi slå fast at eksportører med mer enn en kilde til informasjon fra markedet kan forventes å ha bedre resultat enn dem som kun lener seg mot sin markedspartner. Vi vil i de neste kapitlene presentere ulike bidrag der disse sammenhengene blir undersøkt mer i detalj.

### 3. Informasjonsadferd hos norske matvareeksportører – en eksplorativ undersøkelse

#### 3.1 Innledning

I denne innledende studien ønsket vi å undersøke praksis hos norske eksportører med hensyn til informasjon fra internasjonale markeder der særlig vekt ble lagt på forholdet til utvalgte markedspartnere i utlandet. Hovedhensikten er å avdekke forhold internt i bedriftene i bransjen mht. informasjonsadferd, som kan danne grunnlag for senere analyser.

Vi gjennomførte dybdeintervjuer med 12 norske eksportører av matvarer og gikk nærmere inn på 30 av deres markedspartnere. Tabell 3.1 gir en oversikt over bedriftene i utvalget.

Tabell 3.1: Oversikt over utvalget i den eksplorative undersøkelsen

Bedrift	Produkter	Salg Mill.NOK	Eksportandel ca. %
Arcus	Brennevin	580	15
Glea	Fisk	60	90
Jangaard	Fisk	820	99
Kortnes	Planter	8	10
Norway Seafood	Fisk	2.500	90
Norsk Hydro Seafood	Fisk	1.600	90
Pals	Bakerivarer	250	10
Pelagic	Fisk	200	100
Norway Royal Salmon	Fisk	750	90
Trøndermat	Hermetikk	250	10
Tine	Meierivarer	2.500*	10*
West Fish	Fisk	1.800	90

\*Omsetning av osteprodukter

Tabellen viser at vi har fanget opp et varierende mønster av mateksportører. Fiskerinæringen står naturlig sentralt i dette bilde, men også andre aktører fra mer landbruksbasert næringsmiddelproduksjon er vel representert. Vi har med både store aktører med en omsetning på flere milliarder kroner, og svært små – ned mot 7 millioner kroner. Videre er både tunge eksportører – som omsetter mer enn 90% av salget i utlandet – og ”lette” eksportører, med kun 10% salg utenlands.

Vi har undersøkt fire ulike områder innen informasjonsadferd: (1) informasjon for partnervalg, (2) innhenting av markedsinformasjon, (3) distribusjon og bearbeiding av markedsinformasjon og (4) arbeide og relasjoner med og kontroll av partner. Vi vil gjengi enkelte utdrag fra våre intervjuer og søke å relatere disse til teoristrengene omtalt ovenfor.

### **3.2 Informasjon for partnervalg**

I en "perfekt verden" bør eksportører søke partner der man undersøker flere alternativ, innhenter opplysninger fra flere kilder om deres egnethet og troverdighet, gjennomfører intervjuer med de mest lovende og så til slutt foretar det endelige valg. Vi har imidlertid sett hvordan mange eksportører lar tilfeldighetene råde ved sine partnervalg (Welch og Wiedersheim-Paul 1978). Dette gjelder også flere av våre intervjuobjekter, som f.eks. makrell-eksportøren som gjennom en tilfeldig kontakt i oljebransjen (en nordmann gift med en rumener) arrangerte møter med et antall rumenske handelsbedrifter.

"Vi møtte en 7-8 personer og tenkte at 'hvis vi kan få tak på en eller to av dem so er du en heldig mann!' Du vet, du treffer alltid en masse folk, men de fleste av dem faller jo fra på en eller annen måte. Vel, et halvt år gikk og en av dem vi traff og hans partner kom og besøkte oss i Norge. De kjøpte rundt 160 tonn og har kommet tilbake flere ganger for å kjøpe mer.... Vi hadde ingen andre referanser enn at vedkommende hadde en seriøs partner, en lokal Dole dealer. Han viste oss et stort lagerlokale for bananer og vi tenkte at 'hvis han ha råd til dette, bør han også være i stand til å betale våre regninger!!'. Og han har da også betalt punktlig hittil; det høres litt rart ut – gjør det ikke? .... Vi gjorde en sjekk på den norske oljemannen. Min sønn arbeider i Statoil og han sjekket gjennom sitt nettverk og kunne fortelle at mannen var ok!"

I et annet tilfelle (tomatplanteeksportør) erfarte vi at bedriftslederens engasjement i styret i frukt- og grønnsaksgrossisten BAMA ledet ham til kontakter i Sverige, der han gjennom nye kontakter kom i inngrep med det som skulle bli hans til da viktigste eksportkunde. Han hadde blitt invitert til å holde et foredrag på et årsmøte for gartnere i Göteborg, og var derefter blitt oppsøkt av flere interessenter.

I begge tilfelle (makrelleksportør og tomatplanteeksportør) ser vi hvordan tilfeldigheter tilsynelatende avgjør valg av partner. Nettverket som begge disse hadde – dels gjennom familie og dels gjennom styreverv – gav dem muligheter som ellers ikke ville ha oppstått. Vi kan kanskje snarere snakke om "strukturelle tilfeldigheter", der bedriftsledere, fordi de er involvert i et

spesielt nettverk, gis muligheten til å utnytte de strukturer som nettverket tilbyr.

I et annet tilfelle, eksportør av bakerivarer, ønsket man å etablere kontakter i Frankrike og Spania. Bedriften tok oppskriftsmessig kontakt med Norges Eksportråd som sjekket ulike markedsmuligheter og fikk arrangert møter med et knippe potensielle partnere.

”Vår erfaring gjennom Norges Eksportråd [illustrerer problemene med å finne den rette partneren gjennom et strukturelt opplegg]. Dette var ikke pga Norges Eksportråd... De undersøker potensielle partnere ... vel, det er fjorten av dem i Frankrike og markedet ser sånn og slik ut etc... Da de prøvde dette i Frankrike og også i en viss grad i Spania og Italia, da så vi store potensial for våre produkter, hvordan introdusere oss i disse markedene og hvordan få en viss markedsandel... Vel vi har kanskje ikke vært så profesjonelle – vi har forsøkt, men vi har vel egentlig ikke lyktes noe særlig”

Dette betyr ikke nødvendigvis at en strukturert fremgangsmåte ikke vil lykkes. Det kan imidlertid innebære at når man gjennom et sett med kriterier tar sikte på å finne den ”ideelle” partner, så vil man vanskelig finne vedkommende og at det ofte er helt andre parametere som vil avgjøre det ”lykkelige valg”. Det kan også bety at for virkelig å finne frem til en god partner, må bedriften selv satse helhjertet; det synes ikke å være tilfelle for vedkommende bakerivareprodusent. I et annet tilfelle fikk en eksportør en henvendelse fra en potensiell kunde i Estland, basert på tips fra eksportørens kunde i Sverige. Henvendelsen ble positivt behandlet hos eksportøren og etter diverse tilpasninger og justeringer har bedriften i dag utviklet et årlig salg på rundt 1 million kroner til denne kunden.

Gjennom erfaringer fra våre intervjuer vil vi antyde mulige sammenhenger mellom ulike typer bedrifter og måten hvorpå valg av partner foregår:

Nettverk er hovedsakelig brukt i forbindelse med råvarer, og først og fremst for bedrifter som har operert i internasjonale markeder en tid, og gjennom dette fått etablert et relevant nettverk. En grunn til dette kan være at råvaremarkeder er relativt gjennomsiktige og enhetlige med mange aktører. Jo flere potensielle partnere, jo mer kostbart vil det være å finne den rette gjennom en bevisst og møysommelig prosess. Da synes det mer kostnads-effektivt å nære gode relasjoner med et begrenset antall kontakter i nettverk, og gjennom den tillit som dermed bygges opp søke råd og informasjon. For mindre bedrifter gjelder i prinsippet det samme, men nettverket er her mer begrenset.

Når det gjelder ferdigvarer er det tilsynelatende klare forskjeller mellom eksportører med store ressurser og de mindre veletablerte. Sistnevnte har begrensede ressurser til å følge opp i en strukturert prosess (ref. bakerivare-eksportøren). Derimot vil de kunne opptre strukturert når de får seriøse (men tilfeldige) henvendelser fra utlandet. Reaksjon på tilfeldige henvendelser er lite ressurskrevende og den screening-prosedyr som følger i kjølvannet av henvendelsen blir meget målrettet og dermed kostnadseffektiv. Bedrifter med større eksportengasjement har ressurser og nettverk som de kan anvende i sitt mer bevisste partnersøk. Siden de opererer i ferdigvaremarkedet, er antall aktører ofte mindre (enn for råvarer) og det blir lettere å identifisere aktuelle partnere.

### **3.3 Innhenting av markedsinformasjon**

Vi kan på bred basis si at partneren spiller en overveldende rolle mht. anskaffelse av informasjon for markedsbeslutninger. Vi siterer nedenfor en uttalelse fra en fiskeeksportør (merkevare) for å illustrere dette:

”Gjennom relasjonen som du bygger på det personlige plan med den enkelte distributør vil du uunngåelig få god markedsinformasjon som naturligvis ikke blir borte (så lenge relasjonene vedlikeholdes). På den annen side tar det tid å bygge slike relasjoner. Skulle vi starte fra scratch [med en ny partner], vil det minst ta oss to år før vi kan komme på samme informasjonsnivå igjen”.

Her spiller også avstand fra markedet inn, selv om moderne telekommunikasjonsterknologi sterkt har bidratt til å redusere betydningen av denne. En fiskeeksportør til oversjøiske markeder forteller hvordan han løser dette problemet (avstand).

”Det er ikke like lett å ha personlige relasjoner med vår agent i Congo som det er i Portugal. Men han kommer ofte hit og vi er i kontakt med ham per satellitt-telefon mer eller mindre daglig. Vi forsøker å besøke ham så ofte som mulig, men vi må prioritere markeder. Med Mexico for eksempel handler vi mest over telefon”

Selv om partneren står sentralt i informasjonsbildet, er også flere eksportører i direkte kontakt med enkeltkunder. En fiskeeksportør forteller at

” agenten har det meste av kontakten med kundene, men vi snakker med disse titt og ofte for å undersøke hvordan det går. Hvis det er problemer med kvaliteten, går vi direkte til kundene. I Hellas f.eks. vi har kunder



som ønsker å handle direkte med oss. Det er greit for oss, men vi betaler alltid provisjon til agenten uansett, og tar hensyn til det i prisen”.

Et viktig poeng i denne sammenheng er at eksportøren betaler provisjon til agenten selv om sistnevnte ikke har hatt en direkte finger med i spillet. Dette, vil vi hevde, bidrar til å styrke relasjonene og å åpne kommunikasjonskanalene mellom de to partene, og kan ses på som en investering i relasjonen fra eksportørens side.

Respondentene bruker kun i unntakstilfelle analysebyråer eller sekundærdata for å fange opp informasjon på kontinuerlig basis. En større fiskeeksportør (merkevare) hevder at de av og til behøver en større ”sak”, og nevnte en undersøkelse de gjennomførte i samarbeid med sin distributør i Tyskland: ”Markedet er her ganske komplisert og vi trengte å ta et nærmere blikk for å se hvor vi kunne vokse i fremtiden”. Også en stor lakseeksportør har gjennomført en større undersøkelse i Europa gjennom Norges Eksportråd for å sjekke preferanser, lojalitet, trender etc.

En eksportør hevder at *sekundærdata* er med på å ”frame the mind” snarere enn å gi innspill til konkrete markedsbeslutninger. En relativt stor fiskeeksportør hevder at de må differensiere sin datainnhenting avhengig av i hvilken del av forretningene de har behov.

”For å oppsummere: jo mindre bearbeidet fisken er, jo mer er vi avhengig av personlige relasjoner. Markedet for mindre bearbeidet fisk er ganske åpent og alle kjenner til prisnivået. De kan ikke lure en person mer enn en gang!! Det er basert på tillit og personlige relasjoner. I markeder der vi leverer mer bearbeidet vare er vi mer avhengig av en profesjonell organisasjon med klare krav om leveringstider, ferdigheter – og naturligvis pris. Det er snarere en industriell virksomhet, mer profesjonell. Dette er hvorfor du ser så mange ulike løsninger i våre ulike markeder. Men vi har også blitt tvunget til å analysere markedene våre mer i detalj, jo nærmere vi kommer sluttbrukeren og kjedene”.

Ut fra denne diskusjonen kan vi trekke frem fire ulike kategorier med markedsinformasjon.

- Informasjon fra distributører som gjelder den daglige virksomhet og for planleggingsformål.
- Informasjon fra kunder angående produkttilpasninger og ”trouble shooting”.
- Informasjon fra sekundærkilder for å ”frame the mind”.

- Informasjon gjennom surveys gjennomført av eksterne analysebyråer for mer strategiske formål.

Hovedkonklusjonen er at distributøren/partneren spiller en helt sentral rolle. Enkelte, kanskje de større og mer erfarne eksportørene, søker også informasjon gjennom direkte kontakt med kundene (leddet etter distributør). Denne direktekontakten kan bidra til å forsure forholdet mellom partene, med mindre eksportøren spiller med helt åpne kort. Da vil det kunne ha en ”oppdragende” effekt på distributøren – ved at han vil opptre mindre opportunistisk fordi informasjonsasymmetrien blir redusert.

Vi har også sett tegn til at eksportører av mindre bearbejdede varer i større grad lener seg mot sitt nettverk (partnere, kunder) for informasjon. Pris og volum er her viktig informasjon (mer enn for ferdigvare/merkevare) for beslutninger, og denne type informasjon oppnåes typisk i kontakt med kunder, agenter/distributører i forhandlinger, diskusjoner, møter etc. Jo nærmere man kommer sluttbrukeren, jo mer kompleks kanalstrukturen og jo mer segmentert markedene er, jo mer uensartet de ulike kundekravene er, jo mer vanskelig er det også å få tak på relevant og presis informasjon fra nettverket. Da vil man måtte ty til konkrete markedsanalyser for å få svar.

### **3.4 Distribusjon og bearbejding av markedsinformasjon**

Distribusjon av markedsinformasjon i organisasjonen er en nøkkeldimensjon i Kohli og Jaworski's (1990) markedsorienterings-rammeverk. Vårt generelle inntrykk er at de fleste eksportører har ”dårlig samvittighet” når dette spørsmålet kommer på bane. Kommentarer som ”vi kunne nok ha gjort mer”, jeg er ikke så aktiv mht å informere min agent”, eller ”det er ganske ustrukturert”, reflekterer holdningene til de fleste av våre respondenter. Et unntak kan gjøres for enkelte av de større foretakene som bearbejder informasjonen i formelle rapporter og anvender disse bevisst i planprosessen.

”Aktivitetsrapporter utarbejdes for denne regionen – som for alle andre regioner – og distribueres siden til ledelsen. Rapportene er basert på tilgjengelig markedsstatistikk og på salgsutvikling etc, og på problemer som måtte ha oppstått. Vi rapporterer månedlig om disse forhold. ... Rapportene brukes av ledelsen i deres diskusjoner om fremtidige strategier og blir også rapportert til styret og alt det der... Du kan si at det ligger i blodet på folk. Vi har svært strenge tidsfrister pga rapport-systemet videre oppover linjen...”.

På den annen side har mange av bedriftene en relativt tett uformell møteaktivitet der man deler informasjon med hverandre. Vårt inntrykk er at

markedsinformasjon ikke blir innsamlet for spesielle formål, for spesielle beslutninger. Snarere ser vi at bedriftene gjennom uformelle samtaler og møter gradvis bygger opp det vi kan kalle for en *markedsforståelse* gjennom sin interaksjon med distributører og kunder. En av de mindre eksportørene hevder at

”det er meget ustrukturert, men vi har fordelen av å være en liten bedrift så... Jeg kan hevde at vi for eksempel.... at hvis vi skal produsere for eksport en dag, så vet alle det, inklusive produksjonsoperatørene. Kanskje er vi *for* markedsorienterte, det ser ikke ut til å være noen spesiell struktur...”

Hovedinntrykket er at de fleste av bedriftene har et relativt proaktivt forhold til spredning av informasjon, men de føler at de kunne gjøre meget mer. Små bedrifter arbeider mer uformelt enn store. Mangel på formell informasjonsbearbeiding og rutiner mht. spredning av informasjon er delvis oppveiet av regulær møtevirksomhet og uformell informasjonsdeling. Selv om mønsteret ikke er klart, kan det synes som om ferdigvareeksportørene i større grad involverer andre deler av organisasjonen (enn markedsavdelingen) gjennom planprosessen. Hovedgrunnen for slike forskjeller kan ligge i den mer fragmenterte produksjonsprosessen av ferdigvarer, som henvender seg til et mer segmentert marked og krever mer tilpasning av produktene. Derfor kan vi hevde at markedsorientering, vedrørende spredning av informasjon, typisk vil innebære forskjellige praksiser både mht. størrelse og type produkter.

### **3.5 Arbeide med og kontroll av partner**

Kontroll av partner skjer normalt gjennom månedlige eller annenhver månedlige rapporter. Hovedinntrykket er at det er få tilfelle av konflikter i forbindelse med kontroll. Snarere ser vi at hovedregelen er en atmosfære av tillit og samarbeid. Et eksempel som representerer de mer veletablerte eksportørene nevnes nedenfor:

”Fra Litauen mottar vi månedlige rapporter om salgsutvikling, og hvis det skjer noe spesielt i markedet, blir vi innformet om det, enten skriftlig eller muntlig, så vi blir stadig oppdatert om dette. Vi forsøker også å arrangere møter lokalt i markedet for å – gjennom disse møtene – fange opp det som skjer. Vi føler at dette er meget viktig. Både jeg og min assistent reiser. Jeg reiser ganske meget så jeg har en assistent som trår til – enten på egen hånd eller sammen med meg. Jeg føler at disse regelmessige møtene der du føler pulsen på utviklingen er den viktigste måten vi blir oppdatert på, enten vi snakker om salgsselskaper eller distributører”.

Partneren kan med andre ord ses på mer eller mindre som en integrert del av organisasjonen, der kontrollinformasjon blir åpent utvekslet, enten man snakker om salgsselskap eller uavhengig partner. Personlige relasjoner ses på som avgjørende i begge tilfelle, ”slik at man lett kan overkomme uoverensstemmelser”.

Følgende utsagn kommer fra en mindre eksportør med bred kontaktflate i markedet, både gjennom kundebesøk og generelt godt utviklet nettverk i næringen:

”Vi har egentlig ikke etablert et system som sådan for kontroll av våre agenter. Vi vil ganske snart finne ut om agenten jobber godt eller ikke. Selger han fisk eller selger han ikke?? Ofte besøker vi kundene direkte og vi oppdager da ganske raskt om kjemien mellom agent og kunden ikke er der..... Vanligvis skriver vi kontrakt som gjelder kun for de to-tre første årene. Siden har vi ingen kontrakt, det er kun ’business as usual’. Hvis noe skjer, er hverken vi eller agenten bundet, fordi vi ikke har kontrakt. Det er til deres fordel fordi de er helt klar over at vi kjenner alle kundene og at hvis vi skulle ønske det så kan vi gå dirkete til kundene”.

Vi kan legge til at i dette spesielle tilfelle har eksportør og hans agenter lange relasjoner, ofte arvet fra deres respektive fedre. Andre eksportører kan føye til at de bruker sitt nettverk aktivt, f.eks. konkurrenter som man møter på messer eller konferanser, eller sekundærdata tilgjengelig i markedet.

”Når du begynner å arbeide med en importør – selv om vi mottar 80-90% av informasjonen gjennom denne, er vi klar over den mulige fellen [å stole for meget på ham for denne type informasjon]. Det er alltid et spørsmål om hvor mange ressurser du skal bruke på denne type jobb. Vår eksportavdeling er liten og vi bør heller jobbe for å få ordre og tjene penger... Hvis vi er i et etablert marked, vil jeg tro at vi – pga begrensede ressurser – vil holde oss til den informasjonen vi får fra importøren”

”Vi trenger andre kanaler for å korrigere vår partner, gjennom newsletters og analyser som er tilgjengelige i markedet. På denne måten får vi en balansert diskusjon... Vi får faktisk informasjon om det japanske markedet som vi senere gir til vår agent for å holde ham oppdatert om hva vi vet... slik at han vet at vi faktisk har et bredere informasjonstilfang enn det som han sender til oss”.

Kontrollbehovet er i mange tilfelle redusert fordi det er et så gjennomsettlig marked og fordi man på denne måten pålegger seg en viss selvdisiplin i handelsleddene. Alt i alt har vi inntrykk av at de konfliktorienterte holdninger som beskrives i TCA og P-A litteraturen er fraværende i de aller fleste eksportør-partner-relasjoner som vi har observert. Snarere enn å kontrollere sine partnere for opportuniste, arbeider de fleste med å bygge tette og tillitsfulle relasjoner. Hvis det av en eller annen grunn skulle være vanskelig å samarbeide med en partner, ja da avslutter man samarbeidet uten mer snakk. Men

”det ville være en pinlig prosess, fordi vi har utviklet så nære familieaktige relasjoner med dem, så det ville ikke være enkelt å ta en slik beslutning [å ende relasjonen]. Det er følelsesmessig vanskelig. Og så har du kjøperne i Italia som i sin tur har tette relasjoner til vår agent i Italia...”

Bytte av partner innebærer vanligvis et set-back på ett år, ja enkelte hevder at det vil ta ”år” å bygge seg opp etter et brudd. Dette avhenger delvis av markedet. I Japan og Italia vil det ta mange år, mens det i Norden kanskje tar mindre enn ett år.

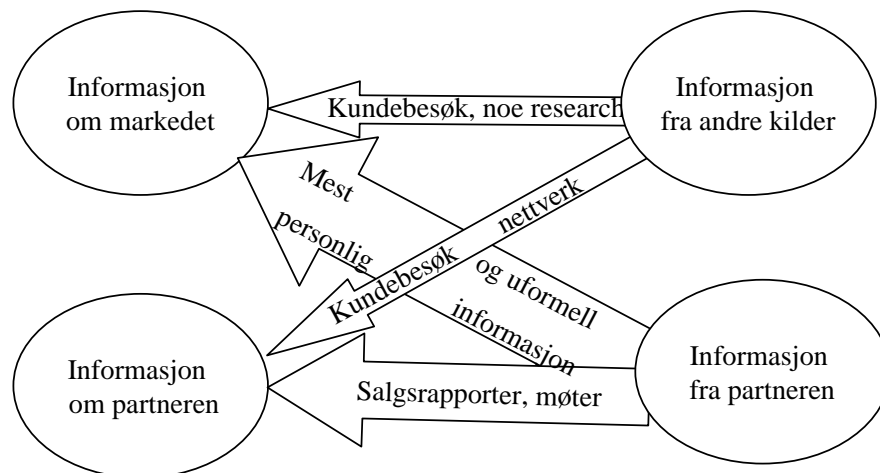
Enkelte eksportører er slått av de kulturelle forskjellene mht. hvordan man bør behandle sine lokale representanter. En lakseeksportør hevder å ha en åpen og tillitsfull relasjon med sin japanske partner, der de utveksler informasjon begge veier. Eksportøren skaffer tilveie statistikk fra Eksportutvalget for fisk, newsletters og diverse annen tilgjengelig informasjon i markedet, og diskuterer dette åpent med japanerne. Samtidig hevder de at de spiller med helt åpne kort mht. kostnader, slaktemønster etc.

”De vet at vi arbeider med biologi og at ulike størrelser er klare for slakt til det og det tidspunkt, så de foreslår nye leveransmodeller hele tiden..... I Europa er dette annerledes. Med en gang vi spør om feedback, blir de mistenksomme og de lurer på om noe er galt og om de bør kreve en rabatt. Det er vanskelig å få feedback”.

### **3.6 Oppsummering og diskusjon**

Vi har observert at partneren er den alt overveiende sentrale kilde til informasjon, både mht. kontroll av aktivitetene (og for å motvirke opportuniste) og til informasjon for konkrete markedsbeslutninger. Selv om det er vanskelig å skille kontrollinformasjon fra markedsinformasjon, har disse ulike perspektiv og innhold. Problemet med en slik distinksjon er at innsamlingen ofte foregår på samme tid, enten man mottar newsletters fra eksterne kilder, møter kunder i markedet eller får månedlige rapporter fra

sine partnere ute. Vi kan si at de plasseres i ulike ”arkiv” når informasjonen mottas i organisasjonen. Figur 3.1 viser skjematisk hvilke innformasjonsstrømmer som man kan tenke seg i dette tilfelle.



Figur 3.1: Skjematisk oversikt over informasjonsflyt. (Pilens tykkelse angir betydning)

Vi har kunnet spore noen mønstre mht. hvilke faktorer som avgjør informasjonsadferden til bedriftene. Følgende forhold synes å spille inn:

- Produkttype (råvare eller bearbeidet)
- Avstand
- Bedriftens ressurser
- Tillit

Når det gjelder type produkt, noterer vi oss at råvaremarkeder med mange aktører og relativt ensartet produkt, vil informasjonskildene typisk være nettverket og den lokale markedspartneren. Jo mer man nærmer seg merkevarer og bearbeidede produkter, jo mer vil bedriften måtte ty til markedsanalyser. Dette gjelder enten vi snakker om informasjon for markedsbeslutninger eller for screening av partnere. En mulig årsak til et slikt mønster kan være at i råvaremarkeder ligger meget av informasjonen ”innbakt” i pris og voluminformasjon som relativt lett kan oppnåes gjennom samtaler i nettverket og tilgjengelig statistikk. Videre er det så mange aktører som opererer i denne delen av markedet at for partnersøk vil arbeid gjennom nettverk være mer kostnadseffektivt enn å gå ”vitenskapelig” til verks.

Avstand, både fysisk og kulturell vil også avgjøre hvordan informasjon innhentes og bearbeides. Vi har sett hvordan IKT gjør geografisk avstand mindre (Congo). Likevel vil dette spille inn. Vi har også kunnet konstatere hvordan ulike kulturer opplever informasjon forskjellig, der – om vi skal tro vedkommende lakseeksportør - japanske importører tydeligvis har et mer ydmykt forhold til informasjonsutveksling enn europeiske. Dette kan få betydning for hvordan man behandler relasjonene med partnere fra ulike kulturer – også mht. informasjon.

Vi har allerede sett hvordan bedriftens ressurser (i form av eksportengasjement) spiller inn. Jo mer ressurser, jo mer formell informasjon og jo mer research. En bedrift med lite eksportengasjement belager seg kanskje mer på tilfeldige henvendelser og på det som vi har kalt for ”strukturelle tilfeldigheter” enn på et utstrakt nettverk eller analyse. Igjen synes dette mer kostnadseffektivt fordi bedrifter med lite engasjement i utlandet har begrenset innsikt i ”hvor man skal begynne å lete” (partnersøk). Når det gjelder markedsinformasjon, vil kostnadseffektiviteten ved å lene seg mot markedspartneren øke jo mindre engasjement bedriften har. Igjen antas årsaken å være begrensede ressurser og evne til å tolke informasjon mottatt gjennom f.eks. objektiv markedsanalyse eller andre kilder. Partneren har – kan vi si – ferdigtygget informasjonen og gitt den mening på en annen og mer relevant måte enn det man får fra mer ”objektiv markedsanalyse”.

Da kommer vi til den siste faktoren som vi vil trekke frem: tillit til markedspartneren. Vi har sett at de fleste av våre respondenter har utviklet et relativt godt tillitsfullt forhold til sine partnere ute og at de samtidig mottar det meste av informasjonen fra disse, både markeds- og kontrollinformasjon. Vi har også sett hvordan eksportører inkluderer selv uavhengige distributører i sin ”indre krets” mht. informasjonsdeling. Enkelte eksportører foretar en ekstern sjekk på informasjon mottatt fra partneren, nærmest ”for å være sikker”. Videre har vi også sett at informasjon som er lett tilgjengelig gjennom nettverket bidrar til å holde partneren ”i tøylene”, ganske enkelt fordi han, pga. gjennomsiktligheten i bransjen, vil ha mer å miste ved å opptre opportunistisk (Granovetter 1985). Dermed kan vi postulere at jo mer tillit man har til sin partner, jo mer vil man henvende seg til denne for informasjon – for både markeds- og kontrollformål. Vi kan videre anta at mindre bedrifter (med færre ressurser) i større grad vil gjøre dette, fordi det vil være mer kostnadseffektivt. På den annen side kan vi konkludere at tilliten øker med tilfang av informasjon fra tredjepart, når man gjennom denne informasjonen får bekreftelse på partnerens lojalitet og dyktighet i markedet.

## 4. Hvilke forhold avgjør informasjonsadferden til eksportører?

### 4.1 Innledning

Dette kapittel vil referere fra en telefonsurvey som vi foretok blant 285 norske eksportører innen bio-industriell næringsvirksomhet i Norge i 1999-2000. Denne ble gjennomført av Norsk statistikk AS. Disse ble tilfeldig valgt ut fra 1089 bedrifter registrert i Kompass Norge (1999), komplettert med en liste mottatt fra eksportutvalget for fisk. Fordelingen mellom de ulike deler av bio-næringen er som følger:

Tabell 4.1: Fordeling av utvalget på ulike næringer

Fiskeindustri	151
Skogsindustri	117
Jordbruksbasert industri	17
<b>Totalt</b>	<b>285</b>

Vi stilte en rekke spørsmål angående informasjonsadferd, om ulike relasjonelle forhold som f.eks. tillit, integrasjon, relasjonens lengde, samt om forhold som markedsstruktur, bearbeidingsgrad, etc. for å kunne teste ut ulike hypoteser om informasjonsadferd. Artikkelen, "The role of trust in shaping information collection behavior of exporters", som finnes i vedlegg gir et mer detaljert bilde av noen av disse hypotesetestingene. Kapitlet innleder med en oppsummering av de viktigste funnene i denne artikkelen. De påfølgende avsnittene vil teste ut enkelte av de hypoteser som er fremstilt i oppsummeringen i kapittel 3 – om bearbeidingsgrad, kulturelle forskjeller, bedriftens ressurser / eksportengasjement.

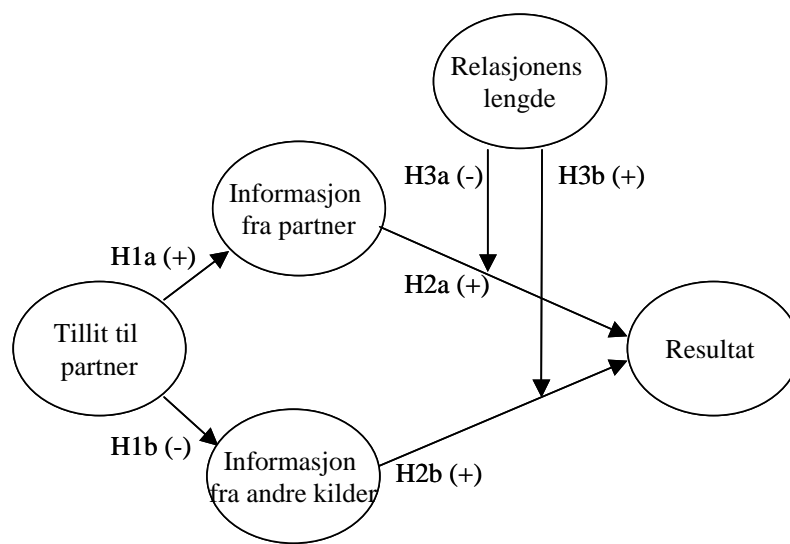
### 4.2 Tillit til partner og informasjonsadferd hos eksportører

Med utgangspunkt i våre funn i den eksplorative undersøkelsen, koblet med relevant litteratur innen interorganisatoriske relasjoner, har vi utviklet en modell som vi ønsket å teste. Modellen er vist i figur 4.1

Hovedhypotesen bak denne modellen er at økt informasjon generelt sett vil bidra til bedret resultat fra eksportmarkedsaktivitetene. Mer spesifikt antar vi at tillit til partner styrer informasjonssøkingen til eksportøren (hypotesene H1a og H1b). Jo mer tillit eksportøren har til partneren, jo mer vil han søke informasjon fra denne. Videre – selv om økt informasjon fra partner bidrar positivt til resultat fra eksportvirksomheten (H2a) - vil det likevel lønne seg å søke informasjon fra tredjepart (H2b). Modellen postulerer også at jo



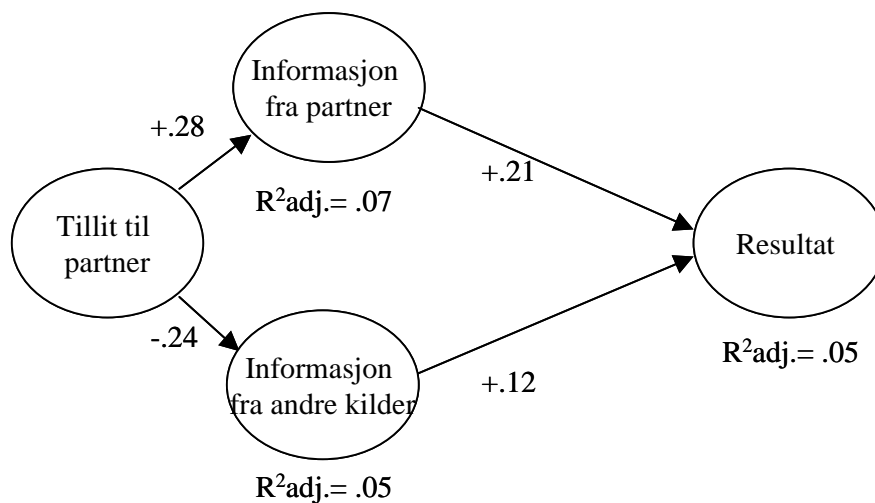
lenger relasjonen varer jo bedre effekt vil informasjon fra andre kilder ha (H3 a og b).



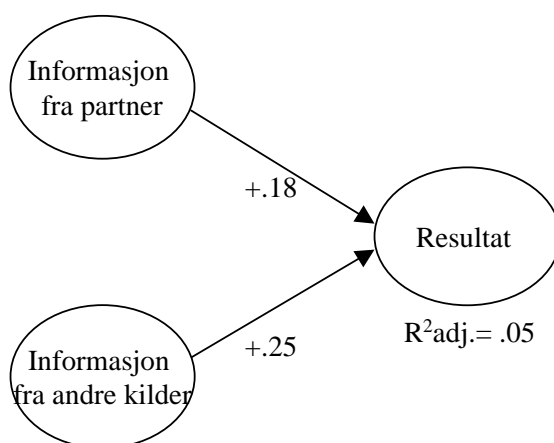
Figur 4.1: Tillit til partner og informasjonsadferd i eksport

Målene på de ulike faktorene i modellen (constructs) er beskrevet i artikkelen, "The role of trust in shaping information collection behavior of exporters". De baserer seg delvis på hevdvunne mål fra litteraturen. Dette gjelder tillit (Moorman Zaltman og Deshpandé 1992), og eksportresultat (Styles 1998). Når det gjelder relasjonslengde har vi delt utvalget i to mer eller mindre like deler, og landet på fem år som en grense. Eksportører med mindre enn fem års relasjon med en partner har dermed relativt korte relasjoner og de med mer enn fem år er klassifisert som eksportører med lange relasjoner. Hva angår informasjon ble dette målt med fire spørsmål: 1) i hvilken grad er informasjon om markedet innhentet fra partner, 2) fra andre kilder; og 3) i hvilken grad er informasjon om partner innhentet fra partneren selv, og 4) fra andre kilder. Gjennom såkalte faktoranalyser etablerte vi at de to informasjonskildene – partner og andre kilder – blir oppfattet som distinkte kilder, mens skillet mht. selve *informasjonsinnholdet* (om marked eller om partner) ikke blir like klart oppfattet.

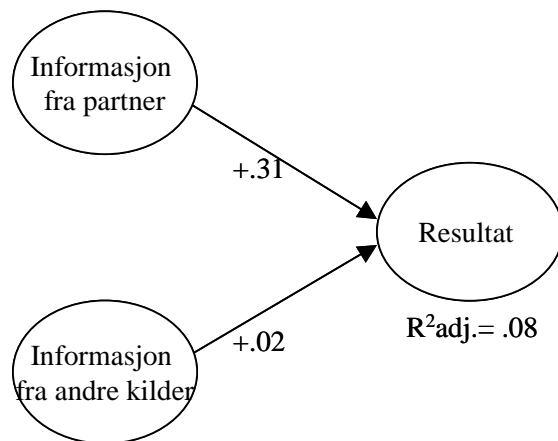
Vi kjørte regresjonsanalyser for å teste ut disse hypotesene. Resultatene er vist i figur 4.2 a - c.



Figur 4.2 a: Test av hovedmodellen



Figur 4.2 b: Informasjonskildens virkning på resultat ved lange relasjoner med partner



Figur 4.2 c: Informasjonskildens virkning på på resultat ved korte relasjoner med partner

Resultatene viser at alle hypotesene får støtte av analysen<sup>2</sup>. Enkelte forhold i analysen krever kommentarer. For det første konstaterer vi at både tillit og informasjonsadferd står sentralt. Imidlertid er forklaringskraften relativt svak: en justert  $R^2$  ( $R^2_{adj.}$ ) på mellom 0.05 og 0.08 innebærer at de valgte faktorer kun påvirker den avhengige variabelen (henholdsvis informasjon fra partner, fra andre kilder og resultat) med mellom 5 og 8%. Imidlertid viser resultatene at det er signifikante utslag og at vi dermed kan fastslå at tillit spiller en begrenset, men likevel avgjørende rolle. Vi finner det imidlertid ikke oppsiktsvekkende at informasjon har begrenset direkte virkning på eksportresultatene, da vi vet fra annen forskning at andre forhold (f.eks. ledelsens engasjement i eksportarbeidet, strategi, eksterne forhold) i stor grad påvirker bedriftens resultat (se f.eks. Solberg et al 2002).

Den viktigste konklusjonen som vi kan trekke er ikke uventet at det lønner seg å innhente informasjon fra eksportmarkeder – både fra partner og andre kilder! At informasjon fra partneren generelt sett har større virkning på resultatene informasjon fra andre kilder kan forklares ved at denne informasjonen er meget ”økonomisk”: så lenge man har tillit til partneren er dette en meget kostnadseffektiv informasjonskanal. Vi kan også slutte at *for mye tillit* kan lede til at eksportøren i for stor grad lener seg mot partneren i utlandet.

<sup>2</sup> Alle beta-koeffisienter (bortsett fra 0.02 mellom info fra andre kilder og resultat i figur 4.2c) er signifikante på 0,05 nivå eller bedre.

Da kan man lettere bli utsatt for opportunistisk adferd fra sistnevnte. De som da likevel innhenter informasjon fra andre kilder ser ut til å tjene på det.

Vi kan også konstatere at relasjonens lengde har en avgjørende betydning for *effekten* av å hente informasjon fra partner henholdsvis fra andre kilder. Jo kortere relasjonen har vart jo mindre verd blir andre kilder, og omvendt jo lengre den har vart jo mer verd blir disse informasjonskildene. Dette kan tolkes dit hen at eksportører som har lang erfaring fra et marked, har bedre forutsetninger til å kjenne til hvilke andre kilder som er kritiske for dens beslutninger. Dermed får de anledning på en kostnadseffektiv måte både til å kryss-sjekke partnerens informasjon, og å få et generelt sett bredere perspektiv på sin markedsposisjon. En eksportør som nettopp har innledet et samarbeid med en partner og som ikke kjenner markedet godt fra før, vil – om han innhenter alternativ informasjon – måtte bruke uforholdsmessig mye ressurser til dette i forhold til gevinsten.

Som en oppsummering kan vi konkludere at tillit står sentralt i informasjonsadferden til norske eksportører (av bio-produkter), og at informasjon i sin tur står sentralt når strategien utformes og resultatene ”i den andre enden” skal måles. Det kritiske for eksportøren blir da å finne mekanismer som utvikler gjensidig tillit og utveksling av informasjon. Her kan mange trekke på de erfaringer som vi tidligere har referert i kapittel 3.

#### ***4.3 Kultur, bearbeiding og ressurser som forklaringsvariabler***

Vi har sett hvordan tillit til partner påvirker informasjonsadferden til eksportører. Vi vil i dette avsnitt se om også andre forhold vil påvirke slik adferd. Vi gjør det med enkle regresjons- og ANOVA-tester, der vi måler om bruk av informasjonskilder er korrelert med eller påvirkes av kulturelle forhold, produktets bearbeidingsgrad eller bedriftens ressurser / eksportengasjement. Vi opererer her med fem ulike typer informasjon, som er målt som følger (se tabell 4.1):

*Tabell 4.2: Mål på informasjonsadferd*

1. Informasjon om *marked* fra representant (alfa=0.80)
  - Dere diskuterer regelmessig med representanten hvordan dere bør tilfredsstille kundenes behov og ønsker i dette markedet
  - Dere diskuterer regelmessig med representanten nye muligheter i dette markedet
  - Dere diskuterer regelmessig med representanten deres konkurransesituasjon i dette markedet
  - Totalt sett føler dere at dere får tilfredsstillende informasjon fra representanten om dette markedet.

2. Informasjon *om marked* andre kilder (nettverk, kunder) (alfa= 0.67)
  - Informasjonen om markedet er ofte fremskaffet gjennom uformelle kanaler fra andre enn deres representant
  - Dere har et nettverk av partnere og forretningsforbindelser som kan gi dere troverdig markedsinformasjon
  - Dere møter med de viktigste kundene regelmessig for å finne ut hvordan produktene fungerer
  - Personer fra forskjellige avdelinger er i direkte kontakt med kunder for å lære hvordan disse kan betjenes bedre
  - Dere diskuterer konkurransesituasjonen med de viktigste kundene
  
3. Informasjon gjennom markedsanalyser (alfa=0,55)
  - Dere gjennomfører regelmessig markedsanalyser ved hjelp av eksterne konsulenter
  - Ved større beslutninger foretar dere som regel en egen uavhengig markedsundersøkelse
  - Totalt sett føler dere at dere får tilfredsstillende informasjon om markedsutviklingen fra andre kilder enn representanten
  
4. Informasjon *om representant* fra representanten selv (alfa=0,73)
  - Dere har gode rapporteringssystem der representanten regelmessig gir dere relevant informasjon om forhold som salg, inntjening, markedsutvikling etc.
  - Dere har jevnlig kontakt med representanten for å holde dere løpende orientert om markeds og salgsarbeid
  - Totalt sett føler dere at dere får tilfredsstillende informasjon om representantens virksomhet fra representanten selv
  
5. Informasjon *om representant* fra andre kilder (alfa=0,70)
  - Dere diskuterer jevnlig med deres viktigste kunder virksomheten til representanten
  - Dere har et godt utviklet nettverk i markedet som gir verdifull informasjon om representanten
  - Det hender en gang i blant at dere sjekker den informasjonen som dere mottar fra representanten med andre informasjonskilder
  - Informasjon *om representant* fra
  - Totalt sett føler dere at dere får tilfredsstillende informasjon om representanten fra andre kilder enn representanten selv.

Alle mål bortsett fra markedsanalysemålene gir tilfredsstillende reliabilitetskoeffisienter (Cronbach alfa; tester om faktoren uttrykker et konsistent mål). Dette innebærer at de målene vi har på markedsanalyse ikke fullt fanger opp

det vi er på jakt etter. Vi har likevel valgt å bruke disse målene videre i analysen. Dels er de eneste vi har på markedsanalyse, og dels er ikke en alfa på 0,55 "katastrofalt" dårlig.

#### 4.3.1 Kultur

Under våre eksplorative undersøkelser referert i kapitel 3 fikk vi indikasjoner på at kultur vil spille inn i forhold til tillit og kommunikasjon med utenlandsk partner. Vi vil i dette avsnitt redegjøre for mulige sammenhenger mellom kultur og eksportørens informasjonsadferd, og vil i denne forbindelse ta utgangspunkt i Hofstede's (1980) fire kulturelle dimensjoner: maktdistanse, usikkerhetsunnvikelse, maskulinitet og individualisme. Hofstede (1980) rapporterer som kjent fra sin undersøkelse av ansatte i IBM i 40 – senere 50 – land over hele verden, og identifiserer disse fire dimensjonene i organisatoriske forhold i hvert enkelt land. Hofstede har blitt kritisert for meget av sitt arbeid bla. fordi man hevder at disse dimensjonene i seg selv er definert med ett spesielt kulturelt ståsted (Hofstede er nederlandsk). Likevel er disse dimensjonene brukt i en rekke vitenskapelige undersøkelser. Hovedhypotesen er her at kulturelle dimensjoner vil påvirke bedriftens adferd (*in casu* informasjonsadferd) i forhold til sine partnere.

For å teste ut dette har vi kjørt regresjonsanalyser der den avhengige variabelen er adferd (informasjonsinnhenting fra representant og andre kilder), mens de fire kulturdimensjonene står som påvirkere til denne adferden (uavhengige variabler). Vi kjørte først regresjoner med kulturelle forskjeller målt som kulturell avstand (Kogut og Singh 1989), men fant at dette ikke slo ut på adferden. Derimot finner vi flere utslagsgivende resultater mht. kulturdimensjonen som sådan. Tabell 4.3 gjengir resultatene fra analysen.

Tabell 4.3 Kulturelle dimensjoners påvirkning på informasjonsadferd.  
 Multippel regresjon - Tallene indikerer betaverdier

\* = p-verdi <0.10, \*\* = p-verdi <0.05, \*\*\* = p-verdi <0.01

Uavhengige Variable	Avhengige Variable				
	Markedsinfo fra rep. Betaverdier	Markedsinfo fra andre Betaverdier	Markedsanalyse Betaverdier	Kontrollinfo fra rep. Betaverdier	Kontrollinfo fra andre Betaverdier
Individualisme	-.158	-.085	.094	-.090	.068
Maktdistanse	.334***	.302**	.223**	.319**	1.119
Usikkerhetsunnavvikelse	.493***	.365**	.202	.408**	-.477
Maskulinitet	.198*	.165	.126	.091	.654
<i>Modell/ANOVA verdier</i>					
R <sup>2</sup>	.042	.034	.033	.033	.014
F-verdi	2.252	1.810	1.984	1.764	.706
P-verdi	.065*	.128	.098*	.137	.589

Tabellen viser at det er først og fremst maktdistanse og usikkerhetsunnavvikelse som påvirker adferden til bedriftene. Generelt sett kan vi si at i land med høy maktdistanse vil (norske) eksportører innhente informasjon fra alle kilder. Videre jo lavere usikkerhetsunnavvikelse i landet, jo mer vil vi søke informasjon. De andre dimensjonene synes å påvirke adferden i ubetydelig grad (bortsett fra maskulinitet mht. markedsinformasjon fra representant). Vi ser også at det er representanten som kilde for *markedsinformasjon* som i størst grad påvirkes av kulturdimensjonene samlet sett. Likeledes ser vi at disse kulturelle dimensjonene ikke i vesentlig grad (ingen statistisk signifikans) påvirker *kontrollinformasjon* fra andre kilder. Til slutt må vi slå fast at R<sup>2</sup> i alle tilfellene er svært lav. Det betyr at selv om den kulturelle påvirkningen på informasjonsadferd kan være utslagsgivende, så er den ikke stor.

Vi kan dermed slå fast at enkelte kulturelle dimensjoner har en viss påvirkning på bedriftens informasjonsadferd. I land med høy maktdistanse vil folk flest akseptere ulikheter og innfinne seg med at enkelte har mer makt enn andre og innrette seg deretter. Umiddelbart kan det være vanskelig å se hvorfor denne dimensjonen spiller så sterkt inn. En spekulasjon er at mulig det i slike samfunn er enklere å identifisere nøkkelinformanter med ansvar, og at disse kan uttale seg med en større grad av sikkerhet enn i land med mindre maktdistanse. I så fall vil denne tilgangen sannsynligvis kun være

åpen for deres likemenn (f.eks. administrerende direktør/daglig leder i den norske eksportbedriften).

Samfunn med høy usikkerhetsunnavikelse søker gjerne å unngå usikre og ambivalente situasjoner. ”Det fundamentale spørsmål er her hvordan et samfunn reagerer på det faktum at tiden bare går en vei and at denne fremtiden er ukjent, enten man søker å kontrollere fremtiden eller lar den bare komme” (Hofstede 1984, side 84, vår oversettelse). Høy usikkerhetsunnavikelse innebærer at man søke regler og normer for sin adferd for å redusere denne. At man i mindre grad søker informasjon der dette trekk er fremtredende kan tentativt forklares med at folk ikke ”kan svare på konkrete spørsmål”, eller at usikkerheten leder til vage svar fra kildene og dermed også en følelse av lav informasjonsverdi for eksportøren. Dermed vil eksportøren heller ikke legge ned store anstrengelser i å få tak i informasjon fra disse kildene.

Vi kan konkludere at *kulturforskjeller ikke* innvirker på bedriftens informasjonsadferd, men at kultur som sådan i en viss utstrekning gjør det. ”Mekanismene” som leder maktavstand og usikkerhetsunnavikelse til å påvirke direkte er ikke klarlagt og bør utredes videre. Forståelsen av slike mekanismer kan være viktig når man skal vurdere hvilke informasjonskilder som skal anvendes og hvordan man bør forholde seg til disse.

#### 4.3.2 Bearbeiding

Hovedhypotesen er i dette tilfelle: bedrifter med høy bearbeidingsgrad innhenter mer markedsinformasjon gjennom markedsanalyser enn bedrifter som hovedsakelig er råvarebasert. Råvareprodusentene på den annen side vil søke informasjon gjennom nettverket. Bakgrunnen for en slik hypotese er at i råvaremarkeder ligger meget av informasjonen ”innbakt” i pris og voluminformasjon som relativt lett kan oppnåes gjennom samtaler i nettverket og tilgjengelig statistikk. Videre er det så mange aktører som opererer i denne delen av markedet at for partnersøk vil arbeid gjennom nettverk være mer kostnadseffektivt enn å gå ”vitenskapelig” til verks. På den annen side krever eksportører av bearbeidede produkter mer detaljert informasjon om kundeadferd og konkurranseposisjon i ulike markedssegmenter for bedre å finjustere sin produkttilpasning og markedsføring. Vi vil derfor postulere at de større grad enn råvareprodusenter foretar markedsanalyser.

For å måle grad av bearbeiding stilte vi tre spørsmål om (Likert-skala – helt enig/helt uenig):

1. Dere er en typisk råvareleverandør til dette markedet



2. Bearbeidingsgraden på deres produkter er minimal
3. Produktet blir i stor grad videreforedlet av kundene før det går til sluttbruker i markedet.

En reliabilitets-analyse viser en god intern konsistens blandt disse (Cronbach alfa på 0,81).

Videre delte vi inn utvalget i tre deler, se tabell 4.4

*Tabell 4.4 Fordeling over utvalget mht. bearbeiding*

	Antall	Gjennom- snitt*	Gj.snitt eksp. andel
Leverandører med høy bearbeiding	97	1,2	38%
Leverandører med middels bearbeiding	67	2,5	50%
Råvareleverandører	105	4,4	65%

\*scores fra 1= høy bearbeiding til 5 = råvarer

For å teste hypotesen kjørte vi en ANOVA-analyse<sup>3</sup> med utgangspunkt i disse tre gruppene. Resultatene er vist i tabell 4.5.

*Tabell 4.5: Informasjonsadferd i forhold til bearbeidingsgrad*  
(Gjennomsnitt: scores fra 1=i liten grad til 5=i høy grad)

	Høy	Middels	Lav	P-verdi
Informasjon om marked fra				
- representant	4,2	4,0	4,2	ns
- andre kilder (nettverk, kunder)	3,4	3,6	3,5	ns
Informasjon gjennom markedsanalyser	2,0	2,3	2,1	ns
Informasjon om representant fra				
- representanten selv	4,1	3,7	4,0	ns
- andre kilder	2,8	3,0	3,0	ns

Hovedkonklusjonen fra tabell 4.5 er at vi ikke finner støtte for vår hypotese. Det ser ikke ut til å være ulikheter mellom de tre gruppene mht. informasjonskilder. Det er en svak tendens til at gruppen bedrifter med middels bearbeiding skiller seg noe fra de andre to: de henter mindre fra representant, men mer fra markedsanalyser og andre kilder. Men

<sup>3</sup> ANOVA forteller i hvilken grad det er signifikante forskjeller mellom de grupper som analyseres.

forskjellene er ikke utslagsgivende og den teoretiske begrunnelsen for at det skulle være forskjeller er vanskelig å få tak på!

#### 4.3.3 Ressurser

Her er hypotesen at jo større internasjonalt engasjement bedriften har, jo mer vil den bruke *alle* former og kanaler for markedsinformasjon. Hovedargumentet for denne hypotesen ligger i den strategiske viktigheten som informasjon fra markedene innebærer ved økt eksportengasjement. Det er mange måter å definere ressurser på. I vår sammenheng har vi valgt å ta utgangspunkt både i eksportandel og omsetning som et uttrykk for hvor meget ressurser som bedriften har lagt ned i eksportarbeidet.

Vi har delt utvalget inn i fire ulike grupper mht. eksportstadier: nybegynner (0-15% eksport), ”ungdom” (16-40%), viderekommen 40-90%), internasjonal (90-100%). Tabell 4.6 viser oversikt over respondentene.

Tabell 4.6: Fordeling av respondentene mht. eksportstadium

	Antall	Gjsn. eksp.andel	Gjsn. salg*
Nybegynner	67	6%	601
Ungdom	78	33%	177
Viderekommen	68	76%	240
Fullvoksen	61	98%	177

\*Salg i millioner NOK

Tabell 4.7 viser at det er store forskjeller i adferden mht. eksportstadium. Dels ser vi at det først og fremst synes å være bedrifter i stadium 3 som har det bredeste informasjonstilfanget – og da spesielt gjennom representanten. Dette gjelder særlig markedsinformasjon, men også i noen grad kontrollinformasjon. Årsaken til at de fullvoksne (med eksportandel på 98%) ikke lener seg i like stor grad mot sin partner ute kan ligge i det at de har kommet så vidt langt i sin internasjonalisering at de overlater mer av detaljene til den lokale representant. Interessant nok ser det ikke ut til at inngangsstrategien er vesentlig forskjellig mellom de ulike gruppene, så denne forklaringen (at nybegynnere selger via agent, mens de lengre fremskredne selger gjennom datterselskap) kan forkastes. Videre noterer vi at det er lite som skiller disse gruppene mht. bruk av markedsanalyser (som for øvrig er lite brukt generelt sett).

Tabell 4.7: Informasjonsadferd som funksjon av eksportstadium

	Nybe- begynner	Ungdom	Videre- kommen	Full- voksen	Sign.
Informasjon om marked fra					
- representant	3,9	4,1	4,6	4,0	0,000
- andre kilder (nettverk, kunder)	3,1	3,6	3,7	3,7	0,001
Informasjon gjennom markedsanalyser	2,0	2,2	2,2	2,4	ns.
Informasjon om representant fra					
- representanten selv	3,8	4,0	4,2	4,0	0,071
- andre kilder	2,5	3,0	3,2	3,2	0,000

ns.=ingen signifikante forskjeller mellom gruppene

Til slutt slår vi fast at nybegynnerne i vesentlig mindre utstrekning enn de andre innhenter data fra andre kilder om markedet eller om representanten. Det viser seg da også at det er disse bedriftene som har dårligst lønnsomhet i eksportarbeidet (ikke vist i tabell). Vi vil hevde at begrenset eksporterfaring (som ville ha gitt økt forståelse av viktigheten av informasjon) hemmer disse bedriftenes muligheter til å etablere et godt informasjonsnettverk og dermed også grunnlag for fornuftige beslutninger. Vi legger også merke til at nybegynnerne ikke nødvendigvis er de små bedriftene, snarere tvert imot: de er signifikant større (på 0,10 nivå) enn de andre gruppene.

Om vi så ser på adferden mht. bedriftsstørrelse, får vi et annet bilde. Tabell 4.8 viser en oversikt over fordelingen av utvalget i forhold til størrelse (omsetning).

Tabell 4.8: Fordeling av respondentene mht. bedriftsstørrelse

	Antall	Gjsn. salg*	Gjsn. eksp.andel
Små bedrifter (0-20 mill. NOK)	67	10	49%
"Melloms små" bedrifter (21-50)	78	37	46%
Mellomstore bedrifter (51-150)	68	96	54%
Store bedrifter (>150)	61	960	56%

\*Salg i millioner NOK

Resultatene tyder på at det er store forskjeller mht. bedriftens størrelse (se tabell 4.9).

Tabell 4.9: Informasjonsadferd som funksjon av bedriftsstørrelse

	Små	”Mellom-små”	Mellom-store	Store	Sign.
Informasjon om marked fra					
- representant	3,8	3,2	3,3	3,3	0,002
- andre kilder (nettverk, kunder)	3,3	3,4	3,7	3,6	0,016
Informasjon gjennom markedsanalyser	2,0	2,0	2,4	2,2	0,073
Informasjon om representant fra					
- representanten selv	3,8	3,9	4,1	4,1	ns.
- andre kilder	2,6	2,8	3,1	3,1	0,010

ns.=ingen signifikante forskjeller mellom gruppene

Små bedrifter lener seg signifikant mer mot sin partner ute for å få tak på markedsinformasjon, og bruker mindre ressurser enn de andre på å sjekke denne informasjonen (feks gjennom andre/kilder og eller markedsanalyser). Når det gjelder å følge opp representanten, bruker de små bedriftene svært begrensede ressurser. Dette gjelder særlig når de skal sjekke kontrollinformasjon mottatt fra representant.

## 5. Markedsinformasjon og nettverk: en klassifiseringsmodell

### 5.1 Introduksjon

Vi vil i dette kapitlet kort beskrive en klassifiseringsmodell for informasjonsadferd i internasjonale markeder. Modellen er i stor grad basert på de erfaringer som vi har vunnet gjennom de tidligere refererte studier og er nærmere redegjort for i vedlegg. Et viktig fundament for modellen er erkjennelsen at informasjon fra partnere og andre kilder bidrar positivt til resultatutviklingen i eksportmarkedene. Et annet utgangspunkt er at markedsinformasjon innhentet gjennom såkalte objektive markedsanalyser ikke alltid er god inf

ormasjon; forskning har faktisk vist at det *ikke* er sammenheng mellom markedsanalyse og eksportresultat (Hart og Diamantopoulos 1993). Det er flere grunner til det: for det første er det mange bedrifter som ikke har ressurser til å foreta denne type informasjonsinnhenting; for det andre er slike undersøkelser vanskelig å gjennomføre i fremmede kulturer fordi problemstillinger i andre markeder kan være fremmedartede og at man derved faktisk ikke fanger opp sentrale forhold i markedet gjennom slike analyser, hvor gode de enn måtte være; for det tredje krever denne type analyser også at bedriften faktisk bearbeider informasjonen og ikke bare lar rapporten stå i en bokhylle å ”blomstre”, som vi under våre intervjuer av og til fikk inntrykk av.

I dette kapitlet vil vi gjøre rede for de enkelte grupper av bedrifter i denne modellen, og fremsette og teste enkelte hypoteser. Disse er testet med grunnlag i det innhentede datasettet omtalt i kapittel 4. Dette ble imidlertid **ikke** etablert med utgangspunkt i denne modellen, som er utviklet senere. Det vi har gjort er derfor å teste ut enkelte hypoteser som var testbare ut fra de allerede innsamlede data. Poenget er dermed i denne omgang å vurdere om modellen i det store og det hele kan ha hold i empiriske data, mer enn å teste ut rigorøst utviklede hypoteser. Konklusjonene fra denne statistiske øvelsen får dermed også en noe spekulativ karakter, men kan bidra til å utvide vår forståelse av de fenomener som vi studerer.

### 5.2 Modell og hypoteser

Figur 5.1 viser en typologi for ulike bedriftsgrupper med hensyn til informasjonsadferd i internasjonale markeder. Vi vil i dette avsnittet komme nærmere inn på detaljene i denne modellen.

<b>“Objektiv” markedsanalyse</b>	<b>Omfattende bruk</b>	<b><i>Den analytiske bedrift</i></b> Nasjonalt orienterte, større bedrifter som trenger informasjon for sine første eksportfremstøt. Stor risiko for å gjøre ‘god’ research på gale problemstillinger.	<b><i>Den internasjonale bedrift</i></b> Store internasjonalt orienterte bedrifter med velutviklede systemer for marked intelligens. Aktiv bruk av både markedsanalyser og nettverk.
	<b>Begrenset bruk</b>	<b><i>Den intuitive bedrift</i></b> Begrenset erfaring og nettverk. Risiko for å ta gale beslutninger basert på intuisjon og ‘hearsay’. De dyktige vil nyte godt av ‘strukturelle tilfeldigheter’.	<b><i>Den nettverksorienterte bedrift</i></b> Etnisk basert handel eller spesielle ‘trades’ (fisk, shipping mm) der beslutninger tas hovedsaklig ut fra informasjon fra nettverkspartnere basert på tillit.
		<b>Lite utviklet</b>	<b>Velutviklet</b>

***Informasjon gjennom nettverk og partnere***

Figur 5.1: Klassifiseringsmodell for informasjonsadferd

Innledningsvis vil vi definere de to dimensjonene: objektiv markedsanalyse og informasjon gjennom nettverk/partnere. Selv om de to begrepene teoretisk sett er distinkte er det likevel vanskelig å klart skille dem fra hverandre i praksis. Benito et al (1993) gir oss noe hjelp på veien når de skiller mellom uformell og formell datainnhenting. Det kan imidlertid godt tenkes at i et konkret markedsanalyseprosjekt, der man har vel definerte problemstillinger, likevel også samtidig – i samme prosjekt – innhenter uformell informasjon gjennom samtaler med partnere og andre kontakter. Dermed kan det bli vanskelig for ledelsen, når den skal svare på spørsmål i en undersøkelse, å utvetydig skille den ene fra den andre. Det sentrale blir i vår sammenheng å skille på den ene siden konkrete markedsanalyseprosjekter med en klar problemstilling og klart spesifiserte informasjonsbehov, der dataene som regel blir innhentet av eksterne analysebyråer eller konsulenter, og på den annen side, forskjellige kilder som eksportøren uformelt har tilgang til gjennom sitt nettverk for å samle informasjon både for konkrete beslutninger og for å ”frame the mind” om markedet generelt. Vi skal nedenfor gå gjennom de enkelte cellene i modellen.

#### *Den intuitive bedrift*

Bedriften i denne delen av modellen har et relativt begrenset nettverk som kan guide dem i internasjonale markeder. Ei heller bruker de markedsanalyser i sin daglige virksomhet rettet mot det nasjonale markedet, da dette

for denne type bedrifter som regel er lite kostnadseffektivt. I vår eksplorative undersøkelse er det en bedrift som klart havner her, tomatplanteeksportøren. Gjennom tilfeldige henvendelser fra Sverige – etter presentasjon på en konferanse for svenske gartnere (presentasjonen hadde ikke til hensikt å tiltrekke seg kunder, men var mer ment som en faglig redegjørelse), fulgte bedriften opp konkrete ledetråder (såkalte strukturelle tilfeldigheter). Fra den eksplorative undersøkelsen har vi ingen gode eksempler på bedrifter som har gjort ting ut fra intuisjon og ”hearsay”. Imidlertid er det mange historier om (norske og andre) bedrifter som viser hvordan eksportbeslutninger tas på ”gefühlens”, og hvordan det har gått galt, men der også ”lykken har vært bedre enn forstanden”. (Vi skal heller ikke se bort fra at flere av bedriftene i vårt utvalg likevel i sin tid startet sin eksportvirksomhet nettopp med et slikt utgangspunkt. Så langt tilbake går imidlertid ikke vår analyse).

#### *Den analytiske bedrift*

Denne type bedrifter er ofte nasjonale markedsledere som har utviklet en god kompetanse på markedsanalyse i sitt hjemmemarked. Med begrenset nettverk ute, vil de ønske å foreta konkrete markedsanalyser før beslutning om engasjement tas. Deres profesjonelle erfaring med markedsanalyser fra hjemmemarkedet gjør dem trygge mht. bruk av denne type informasjonskanal. Risikoen i slike tilfelle er at bedriftene tar med seg sitt hjemlige tankegods når markedsanalyseprosjektet skal defineres. Dermed risikerer de å gå glipp av sentrale forhold som de vanskelig kunne kjenne til på forhånd. Og om de hadde kjennskap til det, så er risikoen likevel stor for at man ikke klarer å fange opp de ønskede forhold med de rette spørsmålene. Det er dette som Douglas og Craig (1999) kaller ”emic” (kulturtilpasset) versus ”etic” (pan-kulturell) dilemma i datainnsamling. Det er mange eksempler på bedrifter som har gått i denne fellen – også fra norsk eksportvirkelighet. Da Stabburet skulle lansere sitt ”Mors Flatbrød” i den ”norske kolonien” i Midtvesten i USA, fanget de ikke opp det faktum at man der ikke lenger hadde det samme forhold til den måten flatbrød spises på i Norge. Først etter en mislykket lansering, undersøkte man gjennom fokusgrupper hvordan ”Mors Flatbrød” ble oppfattet, og fikk seg en leksjon i kulturelle forskjeller (til tross for lutefiskelskende ”nordmenn” i Midtvesten).

#### *Den nettverksorienterte bedrift*

I dette tilfelle snakker vi om bedrifter som har et stort uformelt nettverk, enten gjennom lange relasjoner med sine markeds partnere, kunder og næringslivsorganisasjoner, eller gjennom familie og nasjonale bånd. Sistnevnte er tilfelle for etnisk baserte forretninger som det er mange av i verden – der vi blandt de mest iøynefallende finner indere i De arabiske emirater eller kinesere i Sørøst Asia og California. I vår undersøkelse er det flere som faller innenfor denne kategori, og da spesielt blandt fiskeeksportørene.

Makrelleksportøren som gjennom en norsk kontakt i Romania fikk etablert et kundeforhold i dette landet kan stå som et eksempel fra vår egen undersøkelse (kapittel 3). Gjennom sitt nettverk (sønn) med Statoil fikk han sjekket opp om den norsk-rumenske forbindelsen var troverdig, og dermed var han i gang. Informasjonen som skaffes gjennom slike nettverk er svært troverdig fordi nettverket er relativt gjennomsiktig og hvert medlem i nettverket har behov for å opptre skikkelig (Granovetter 1985). Dette er også i tråd med Uzzi's (1997) funn fra sine studier av tekstilfabrikanter nettverk i New York. Slike nettverk gir utførlig og inngående informasjon, og den forankring som hver og en har i nettverket gir dem tilgang til informasjon og ressurser som ellers ikke er lett oppnåelige. Mindre bedrifter som opererer i slike nettverk vil i liten grad ha behov for å gjennomføre markedsanalyser slik man lærer om det i lærebøkene. Man kan si at behovet for nøyaktig informasjon også er mindre fordi den på mange måter ligger "innebygget" i de råd som gis gjennom nettverket.

Hovedproblemet med operasjoner gjennom tette nettverk er at man strategisk sett (gjennom rutiner, kvalitetstilpasninger og produksjonsløsninger) knytter seg så sterkt opp mot sine nettverkspartnere at man risikerer å bli låst inne. Ved dramatiske endringer i de eksterne omgivelsene (f.eks. teknologiske skift eller nye eierkonstellasjoner i handelen) kan det også bli vanskelig raskt å tilpasse seg (Håkanson og Snehot 2000). For små bedrifter kan dette innebære en større risiko, da de kun har begrensede ressurser til å utvikle alternative nettverk – eller i Granovetters (1985) terminologi - svake bånd (weak ties).

#### *Den internasjonalt orienterte bedrift*

Bedrifter i denne gruppen gjør bruk av både et tett nettverk av relasjoner og profesjonelle markedsanalysetjenester. De har kompetanse både mht. å forstå det typiske i hvert lokale marked og til å gjennomføre studier for å måle preferanser, kundelojalitet, merkestyrke, konkurrentenes posisjon, selgeres holdninger etc. og styrke nok til å følge opp resultatene. Det er svært få i vårt eksplorative utvalg som kommer i denne kategorien. To bedrifter (Norway Seafoods og Norsk Hydro) har til tider gjort slike undersøkelser, men gjør ikke dette på regelmessig basis for sine beslutninger. I all hovedsak baserer også de sine beslutninger på informasjon fra sine partnere og kunder. Bedrifter som er i denne kategori har etablert et system internasjonal markedsefterretning (*market intelligence*) der informasjon skaffet formelt (markedsanalyser, salgsrapportering) og uformelt (samtaler med partnere og nettverkskontakter) blir tatt hånd om på en organisert måte, behandlet i organisasjonen og brukt aktivt i beslutningsprosessen.



For de fleste norske bedrifter er etablering av slike system å ”skyte over mål”. Det sentrale må være at bedriften etablerer forskjellige informasjonskanaler som bidrar til å skaffe ledelsen et nyansert perspektiv på sin markedsposisjon og sine fremtidige muligheter i markedet. Vi har da også sett (kapittel 4) at bedrifter med lange relasjoner med sine partnere bedrer sine resultater ved å lene seg mot flere kilder enn sine partnere. Undersøkelsen sier derimot lite om dette er ”objektive” markedsanalyser eller andre kilder til informasjon.

Ut fra ovennevnte resonnering kan vi fremsette følgende hypoteser:

H1: Den nettverksorienterte bedrift har større tillit til sine partnere ute enn de andre bedriftene.

H2: Den nettverksorienterte bedrift er i større grad enn de andre bedriftene orientert mot salg av råvarer.

H3 Den internasjonale bedrift er den som i størst utstrekning aktivt bruker informasjonen fra de ulike kildene.

H4: Den internasjonale bedrift oppnår best resultat fra eksportvirksomheten, mens på de neste plassene kommer den nettverksorienterte bedrift, den analytiske og til sist den ”intuitive”.

### 5.3 Resultater

Vi har valgt å definere dimensjonene informasjon gjennom nettverk og informasjon gjennom objektive markedsanalyser med utgangspunkt i variablene 1 og 2 (nettverk) og 3 (analyse) presentert i tabell 4.2. Fordelingen mellom de ulike kategoriene er gjort med utgangspunkt i mediansvarene for de to dimensjonene. Dette gir oss følgende fordeling (tabell 5.1).

Tabell 5.1: Fordeling på de ulike gruppene

	Antall	Gjsn. Salg*	Gjsn. eksportandel
Den ”intuitive” bedrift	82	271	34
Den analytiske bedrift	63	653	54
Den nettverksorienterte bedrift	46	130	62
Den internasjonale bedrift	94	226	59

\*Millioner NOK

Forskjellene er signifikante både mht. eksportandel ( $p=0,000$ ) og salg (svakt signifikant;  $p=0,099$ ). Det betyr at vi kan hevde at den ”intuitive” har mindre eksporterfaring enn den analytiske, og denne sistnevnte i sin tur har mindre erfaring enn de to andre. Det betyr også at det ikke nødvendigvis er de internasjonale bedriftene som er de største. Snarere tvert i mot. I vårt utvalg kan vi si at store bedrifter generelt sett er mer hjemmemarkedsorienterte enn små!

Hypotesene ble testet med ANOVA-analyser (se tabell 5.2) og t-tester (tabell 5.3).

Tabell 5.2a Hypotesetesting – T-tester: H1 og H2

	Tillit	Råvare
Den intuitive bedrift	4,0	3,0
Andre bedrifter	3,7	2,8
P-verdi	0,025**	0,274
T-verdi	2,254	1,097
Hypotesetest	Støttes	Støttes ikke

Tabell 5.2b Hypotesetesting – T-tester: H3

	Infobruk
Den internasjonale bedrift	4,0
Andre bedrifter	3,5
P-verdi	0,000***
T-verdi	3,734
Hypotesetest	Støttes

Tabell 5.3 Hypotesetesting – ANOVA: H4

	Resultat	Post hoc tester*		
		Intuitiv	Analytisk	Nettverk
Den intuitive bedrift	3,4	-		
Den analytiske bedrift	3,7	.053*	-	
Den nettverksorienterte bedrift	4,0	.000***	.028**	-
Den internasjonale bedrift	4,1	.000***	.002***	.396 ns.
P-verdi	0,000***			
F-verdi	14,387			
Hypotesetest	Støttes			

\* Innebærer parvise tester mellom de enkelte grupper

Tabellene 5.2 a og b, samt 5.3 viser at H1, H3 og H4 støttes av vår analyse, mens H2 ikke støttes. Tendensen i testen for H2 går imidlertid i forventet retning. Videre kan vi slå fast at nettverksorienterte bedrifter oppnår stort sett samme resultat som de internasjonale.

#### **5.4 Implikasjoner**

Hovedkonklusjonen av denne lille øvelse blir dermed at klassifiseringsmodellen kan gi nyttige signaler til hvordan ulike bedriftstyper kan (bør) utvikle sin strategi for innhenting av markedsinformasjon. Dette er kanskje spesielt viktig for de to første bedriftsgrupper (den "intuitive" og den analytiske bedrift). Det er disse to gruppene som bør ha behov for et vel fungerende støtteapparat (f.eks. Norges Eksportråd, Eksportutvalget for fisk). Et slikt apparat kan gjennom sine kontakter bidra til å gi bedriften relevante nettverk. Det sentrale arbeidet for Eksportrådet blir dermed å *videreutvikle sitt nettverk* i sentrale markeder, slik at den gjensidige tillit som ligger i slike nettverk kan fungere på vegne av "de intuitive". Dette krever naturligvis også at disse siste lever opp til forventningene, slik at Eksportrådet på sin side ikke mister verdi for *sitt* lokale nettverk. Dermed blir det sentralt at støtteapparatet *kvalitetssikrer de bedrifter* som til slutt mottar støtte.

Også for de analytiske bedrifter kan støtteapparatet være til nytte, men da kanskje mest som kulturell rådgiver, der man hjelper bedriftene til å erkjenne forskjellene i kulturelle forhold som bestemmer kjøpsadferd. Dette er ikke minst viktig i et område som mat, som kanskje er det område der ulikheter i kulturelle uttrykk blir mest synlig (Askegaard og Madsen 1995). Men det gjelder naturligvis også andre områder enn kjøpsadferd. Også mht. søk av og relasjoner med partnere bør deres lokalkunnskap være relevant. På lik linje med "Den intuitive" bør denne type bedrifter geleides inn i nettverk som kan gi dem trygghet for god og riktig informasjon.

## 6. Oppsummering og konklusjoner

Informasjon står sentralt når beslutninger om eksportengasjement skal fattes. Hovedkonklusjonen fra våre analyser er da også at jo mer informasjon bedriften har tilgang til, jo bedre resultater vil den også oppnå i internasjonale markeder. Det er imidlertid lite som indikerer fra våre undersøkelser at (norske bio-) eksportører handler etter det som mange vil karakterisere som et rasjonelt mønster mht. innhenting av informasjon fra markedet. Et slikt handlingsmønster ville innebære en nøye analyse av informasjonsbehovet, en vurdering av ulike kilder og fremgangsmåter for å få tak på relevante data, innhenting av dataene og tolkning av disse, for så til slutt å ta en beslutning. Vi har snarere observert at informasjonstilfang i hovedsak er basert på tillit til den lokale markedspartneren og markedsnettverket forøvrig. Vi kan også konstatere at denne måten å ”angripe” markeds- og kontrollinformasjon på har positive effekter på bedriftens resultater.

Det er særlig de helt *små* bedriftene som velger å forholde seg til sine partnere mht. markedsinformasjon. Selv om de på denne måten løper en viss risiko for opportunisme fra partnerens side, har de ikke ressurser til å innhente informasjon fra andre kilder, det være seg øvrig nettverk, kunder eller gjennom mer ”objektiv” markedsanalyse. De små bedriftene har hverken større eller mindre tillit til sine partnere enn andre bedrifter<sup>4</sup>, så vi kan fastslå at det mer dreier seg om ressurser enn om tillit i dette tilfelle. Når det gjelder *nybegynneren* er også denne i mindre grad enn de andre opptatt av informasjon fra tredjepart. Dette beror neppe på begrensede ressurser (målt som omsetning), da denne gruppen faktisk har den høyeste omsetningen. Vi vil hevde med støtte i ”Uppsala-skolen” at lavere kompetanse og begrenset innsikt i markedsnettverk spiller inn som en avgjørende faktor i denne sammenheng. Nybegynneren – uavhengig av størrelse – har ikke tilstrekkelig forståelse for den rolle informasjon fra tredjepart spiller, ei heller et tilstrekkelig nettverk som kan sikre slik informasjon. Bedrifter med *lenger erfaring* satser i betydelig større grad på informasjon fra andre kilder og får uttelling for det i form av et mer nyansert bilde av markedet – hvilket til syvende og sist omsettes i et bedre resultat.

Vi har også sett at ”objektiv” markedsanalyse kan ha sine begrensinger. Dette gjelder f.eks. når bedriften ikke har et vel fungerende nettverk i markedet (partnere, kunder, andre) som kan gi dem hensiktsmessig informasjon om kritiske forhold. Dette nettverket hjelper ledelsen til å sette

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<sup>4</sup> Vi kjørte en ANOVA-analyse og fant ingen signifikante forskjeller mellom de ulike størrelsesgrupper av bedrifter mht. tillit.

markedsanalysen inn i et riktig perspektiv. Det er meget som taler for at informasjon gjennom nettverket gir vel så god bakgrunn for beslutninger som den som man oppnår gjennom markedsanalyser. Dette er et tankekor – både for eksportører og for markedsanalysebyråer. Særlig den ”intuitive” bedriften er utsatt. Dette er ofte nybegynnere, uten nettverk og uten kompetanse til markedsanalyser. Her tror vi at organisasjoner som Eksportrådet og Eksportutvalget for fisk kan spille en mer aktiv rolle enn i dag. Men også mer drevne bedrifter mht. markedsanalyse behøver assistanse når deres nettverk er dårlig utbygget. Disse trenger hjelp til å rette sine analyser inn mot reelle og relevante problemstillinger i markedet.

Vi vil avslutningsvis komme med noen betraktninger om hvordan norske eksportører ”passer inn i” ulike teoretiske forklaringer på informasjonsadferd. Tabell 6.1 gir en kort oppsummering av premissene og prediksjonene til de ulike teoristrenger som er lagt til grunn i denne studien. Vi kan kort konkludere med at alle disse teoretiske forklaringene på hver sin måte finner støtte i det empiriske materiale. Dog har vi ikke testet sammenhengene ut fra et P-A perspektiv (hvordan informasjonsinnhenting påvirkes av incentive-strukturen).

Tabell 6.1: Teoretiske forklaringer på informasjonsadferd - oppsummering

<i>”Skole”</i>	<i>Premiss</i>	<i>Prediksjon</i>	<i>Støtte</i>
Internasjonaliseringsprosessen	Bundet rasjonalitet og begrensede ressurser	Læring gjennom egen erfaring i markedet. Bedriften blir gradvis bedre informert om markedet.	Får støtte i våre data
Nettverksteori	Bundet rasjonalitet og begrensede ressurser	Tillit til aktørene i nettverket gir bedre informasjonsgrunnlag.	Får delvis støtte i våre data
Transaksjonskostnadsteori	Informasjonsasymmetri; Hierarki reduserer kontrollkostnader	Opportunisme om man ikke kontrollerer partneren. Info fra andre kilder enn partner blir viktig.	Får støtte i våre data
Prinsipal-agent teori	Informasjonsasymmetri Incentiver løser potensielle målkonflikter.	Opportunisme om man ikke etablerer en kontrakt som sikrer felles måloppnåelse. Info fra andre kilder enn partner blir viktig.	Ikke målt kontrakt. Dog indikasjoner på støtte.
Markedsorientering	Rasjonell adferd mht. datainnsamling, spredning og beslutning	Jo mer informasjon jo bedre grunnlag for beslutninger, jo bedre resultat (1). Objektiv markedsanalyse gir godt grunnlag for beslutninger (2).	Får delvis støtte i våre data (1 men ikke 2)

Tabellen krever kommentarer. Funnene gir støtte til de grunnleggende premissene i internasjonaliseringsprosessen (læring, ressurser). Mht. nettverksteori finner vi støtte for at informasjon gjennom andre kilder enn partner (f.eks. nettverk) gir bedre resultater (gjennom rikere informasjons-tilfang). Dog ser vi at tillit til partner i sterk grad bidrar til å ”rasjonalisere informasjonsfangsten”, og at andre kilder (som f.eks. nettverket for øvrig) blir nedgradert. Analysen indikerer at dette har med begrensede ressurser og erfaring å gjøre, hvilket dermed knytter an til internasjonaliseringsskolens perspektiv.

Når det gjelder TCA, har vi riktignok ikke målt opportunisme som sådan. I den grad vi kan si at tillit står i motsetning til opportunisme (om det ikke er dets antonym) kan vi likevel fastlå at hypotesen med utgangspunkt i TCA (info fra andre kilder blir viktig for å kontrollere opportunisme fra partneren) får støtte: i kapittel 4.2 er en av konklusjonene at informasjon fra andre påvirker positivt bedriftens resultater. Her bør vi likevel reservere oss noe, da vi impliserer likhetstegn mellom gode resultater og fravær av opportunisme<sup>5</sup>. Prinsippal/agentteori forutsetter informasjon for å kontrollere agenten – enten hans virksomhet eller resultatet av denne. Når eksportøren søker kontrollinformasjon fra andre kilder, kan dette være en indikasjon på støtte til PA.

Selv om bidragene fra markedsorienterings-litteraturen kanskje først og fremst ligger på det modellkonseptuelle plan, mer enn på det grunnleggende teoretiske, finner vi støtte for hovedhypotesen at jo mer informasjon jo bedre resultat. Imidlertid er nok en underliggende premiss i denne litteraturstrengen at markedsanalyse er en viktig informasjonskilde for markedsbeslutninger. Vi har observert at dette kun i enkelte situasjoner (bedrifter med stort nettverk som brukes til informasjonsinnhenting) kan være tilfelle.

Vi har sett at ulike bedriftsgrupper velger ulike strategier mht. informasjonskilder. Vi tror at avgjørende i denne sammenheng er en samlet vurdering av ressurser, kompetanse, risiko, beslutningenes betydning for bedriften og de kostnader som er forbundet med informasjonsinnhenting. Det er ikke åpenbart at det er entydige svar på denne ”ligningen”. Vi for vår del hevder å ha funnet at tillit til markedspartneren spiller en avgjørende rolle i denne forbindelse, men at eksportøren hele tiden må skaffe seg alternativ informasjon som åpner for mer informasjonsutveksling og som i neste omgang bekrefter tillitsforholdet.

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<sup>5</sup> Vi finner en svak (.177) men signifikant korrelasjon (på 0.01-nivå) mellom tillit og resultat.

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**Information collection behaviour, learning and  
control in export markets**

Paper presented at the IMP conference  
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## **Abstract**

The purpose of the present paper is to explore how market information from different sources affects the internationalisation learning process of exporters. It attempts to combine three streams of literature – internationalisation process, market orientation and channel relationships - in order to develop a model of information behaviour in international markets.

Whereas the internationalisation literature (Johanson and Vahlne 1990) is concerned with the learning process through marketing experience (and thereby in the final analysis by export performance), the market orientation literature (Kohli and Jaworski 1990, Narver and Slater 1990) is more interested in market information as such, as an input to the strategic processes internal to the firm. However, this latter stream of literature does not make any distinction between different types of information. This issue is addressed by the present paper which differentiates between three categories of information sources: 1) Information from partner (distributor or agent), 2) Information from network other than partner (for instance direct contact with customers or other players in the market) and 3) Information through formal market research (primary or secondary). Hence the literature on marketing channels (Hunt and Nevin 1974, Gaski 1984, Heide 1994), and particularly marketing channels in export markets (Johnson and Raven 1996, Karunaratna and Johnson 1997) becomes of prime interest. A number of propositions are being offered:

It is posited that exporters tapping into a variety of information sources will display superior exporting competencies (and therefore superior performance) and will perceive lower risks in the export venture than exporters with more limited information capture.

Furthermore, exporters with scant resources (both financial and managerial) are to a lesser extent, than resourceful exporters, supposed to use formal market research. They are also supposed to have a more limited network. For both these reasons these exporters will to a greater extent recur to the partner for market information. The internationalisation learning process and development of exporting competencies will in these instances be contingent upon the trust between the exporter and its partners.

Finally, controlling the partner in export markets requires information from other sources than from the partner itself. Hence we propose that information from other sources than the partner will increase the perceived control by the exporter in those markets.

Case studies of twelve companies are carried out to substantiate the model.

## Introduction

Information about markets (macro-environment, customers, competitors, etc) is believed to be one of the critical factors leading to business performance. All text books in marketing emphasize this truth with a lot of energy, and subsequently, texts on market research tell us in very stringent ways how the information should be gathered. Good market information leads to good marketing decisions and accordingly to improved performance. In foreign markets - though things tend to get more complicated - the same principles are true.

This truism is so well established both among academics and practitioners that no one seems to ask where decision makers get their information, or the extent to which the issue of the origin of the information matters in the decision process or in strategy development. Indeed, it has been stated that informal channels of information are by far the most important source of information. Olaisen (1990, p. 199) asserts that “nothing can replace the ‘face value’ of information or the importance of informal networks or ‘invisible colleagues’”. Also, Benito, Solberg and Welch (1993) found that informal information gathering was the most widely used method of gathering export market information by 221 Norwegian exporters. But few studies have investigated the effects of the source of information on the knowledge building within the firm and the ensuing performance inherent in the propositions made by the internationalisation school of thought (Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul, 1975; Johanson and Vahlne 1977 and 1990). When discussing the challenges confronting exporters in an increasing number of markets, Piercy, Katsikeas and Cravens (1997) assert that: “It is reasonable to expect that the practical reality will be that faced with limited information” (p. 74). In other words, the exporter has to bridge the information gap. This can be done by the exporter in three ways: by entrusting local marketing decisions to a local representative with insights into local marketing conditions, by gathering the information necessary to make qualified decisions on his/her own, or a combination of the two.

The purpose of the present paper is to explore how market information from different sources affects the internationalisation learning process of exporters. It attempts to combine three streams of literature – internationalisation process, market orientation and channel relationships - in order to develop a model of information behaviour in international markets. Whereas the internationalisation literature (Johanson and Vahlne 1990) is concerned with the learning process through marketing experience (and thereby in the final analysis by export performance), the market orientation literature (Kohli and Jaworski 1990, Narver and Slater 1990) is more interested in

market information as an input to the strategic processes internal to the firm. However, these streams of literature only to a limited extent, if at all, make distinctions between different types of information. This issue is addressed in the present paper which differentiates between three categories of information sources: 1) Information from partner (distributor or agent), 2) Information from network other than partner (for instance direct contact with customers or other players in the market) and 3) Information through formal market research (primary or secondary). Hence the literature on marketing channels (Hunt and Nevin 1974, Gaski 1984, Heide 1994), and particularly marketing channels in export markets (Johnson and Raven 1996, Karunaratna and Johnson 1997) becomes of prime interest.

### **Literature review**

Many streams of literature deal with information in some way or another. Whereas the marketing concept traditionally has been linked to the idea of customer satisfaction, coordinated activities across functions and profitability (King 1965, Barksdale and Darden 1971, McNamara 1972, Kotler 1994), the marketing orientation literature the last ten years or so introduces the information construct as an integrated part of the marketing concept. Narver and Slater (1990) maintain in their influential article that "market orientation consists of three behavioural components - customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination - and two decision criteria - long-term focus and profitability. Customer orientation and competitor orientation include *all of the activities involved in acquiring information about the buyers and competitors* in the target market and disseminating it throughout the business(es)" (p.21, emphasis added). Similarly, Kohli and Jaworski (1990) define market orientation as "the organisation-wide *generation of market intelligence* pertaining to current and future customer needs, *dissemination of the intelligence* across departments, and organisation-wide responsiveness to it" (p. 6, emphasis added). Although the definition highlights the importance of information processing regarding customer needs and preferences, the scope of information is more widely defined. Both end users and distributors are included, and it is explicitly stated that information regarding exogenous factors "such as government regulations, technology, competitors and other environmental forces" should be taken into account. However, the market orientation literature is virtually void of any allusion as to how the information has been gathered.

This is also partly true of the internationalisation literature, most of which is more concerned with the *type* of information required for export decisions

(for a review, see Leonidas 1997). Indeed, this stream of literature treats different sources of information, but mostly indirectly as cues for decisions or as barriers to export. For instance, the information embedded in “unsolicited orders” from foreign customers has led many exporters to hesitantly start their internationalisation (Bilkey and Tesar 1977, Welch and Wiedersheim-Paul 1978, Piercy 1981). Moreover, the lack of market information is cited as one of the main inhibitors to exporting (Seringhaus and Rosson 1990). Not only the lack of information but also the selective information behaviour that characterises non-exporters and newcomers (Wiedersheim Paul et al, 1978) may constitute barriers to exports. When market information is sought, it is not always relevant for the newcomers, simply because they do not have adequate competence to properly define their information needs. Indeed, Burton and Schlegemilch (1987) suggest that non-exporters have a negative precondition of exporting, leading to screening of relevant information about export opportunities.

One study (Benito et al 1993) finds that customers and internal reports from sales people and representatives constitute the most prominent sources of information for Norwegian exporters. Their study also shows that secondary data sources and the use of consultants are much less valued. Moreover, they found that “low dependency exporters” use sources like the Norwegian Trade Council and external (Norwegian) consultants significantly more than “high dependency exporters”. Furthermore, firms in the latter category tend to use secondary data much more than the former. These findings indicate that the newcomer seeks information sources which are both “closer to home”, and easier to understand and control, thereby reducing the level of uncertainty embedded in secondary information and information from “distant sources”. However, Benito et al (1993) did not enter into the field of information sources and learning effects.

The main tenet of the incremental internationalisation school of thought is that of “experiential knowledge” (Johanson and Vahlne 1990), but only scant allusion is made to the different kinds of information sources for this knowledge (other than “experience” through marketing activities in foreign markets). Yet, using the internationalisation framework, one may propound that - *ceteris paribus* - the closer the exporter is to the end user, the better its market knowledge will be (because of operational market experience). In turn this will make the exporter more successful, and allow for higher control over its marketing strategy (including the handling of the middleman). Conversely, following this train of thought, relying on middlemen may inhibit this knowledge development. As we shall see later, it is possible to alleviate this latter assumption, bringing in the relationship marketing concepts: the more the exporter commits its resources to the



development of close relations with its marketing partners in foreign countries, (thereby creating opportunities for cooperation and trust, and consequently a fertile climate for information exchange and market knowledge build-up), the more successful the exporter will be.

The internationalisation theory posits that the learning process comes about primarily through experience in the market. "Experiential knowledge generates business opportunities and is consequently a driving force in the internationalisation process" (Johanson and Vahlne, 1990, p.). Forsgren (1989) argues that the internationalisation model is applicable in the early stages of the process, but when the firm has gained a certain level of experience and knowledge (through activities in a number of countries), management can allocate resources on the basis of "real" market conditions. In the same vein, Seringhaus and Rosson (1990) argue that:

"The company that is knowledgeable about exporting will be able to determine what information to collect and how to use it, to a greater extent than their less knowledgeable counterparts. While based on information then, knowledge is clearly a much broader concept, guiding the company in all its endeavors. In a sense knowledge is a special resource that is present to varying degrees in companies. Like other resources, we should recognize that, without husbanding and replenishment, export knowledge will be depleted over time". (pp. 154-55).

Thus, they indirectly make the link between the internationalisation process (Johanson and Vahlne 1977 and 1990), market information/ market knowledge and market orientation (Kohli and Jaworski 1990, Narver and Slater 1990).

Comparing the internationalisation process literature with the market orientation literature, the common denominator is the importance attached to information gathering and knowledge generation. The market orientation literature specifies to a larger extent the scope of information required (consumer, distributor, competitor etc) but does not place much importance on the *method* of information collection. As we have seen, the internationalisation process literature underlines the importance of experiential knowledge and it has been demonstrated empirically that exporters to a large extent rely upon personal and informal ways of gathering information. The market orientation concept is multi-dimensional, and information gathering is only one of three dimensions regarded as equally important. The dissemination and implementation dimensions are more implicit in the internationalisation process literature. Furthermore, work in

the market orientation tradition is much more concerned with developing rigorous measurement models for the concepts involved.

We have briefly alluded to the role of the middleman in the information chain. Channel theory, with its emphasis on information asymmetry and opportunistic behaviour, leading to - in the final analysis - conflict between channel members is of relevance here (Lambert 1983, Gaski 1984, Eisenhardt 1985, Klein and Roth 1990). In international markets the problem of information asymmetry is compounded by both physical and cultural distance (Klein and Roth 1990), at the same time as “the geographic separation of channel partners may dilute a power-dependence influence of the exporter on the [intermediary]” (Karanuratna and Johnson 1997, p. 12). Lambert (1983) suggests that the information asymmetry between trading partners may lead to opportunistic behaviour by the intermediary in the short term, the remedy being a conscientious pre-contractual screening of potential intermediaries (Aaby and Slater 1989). In the long term, however, the exporter and its intermediaries in foreign markets will learn about each other and will therefore develop an entrusting relationship (Lambert 1983). Open communication between the trading partners will eventually lead to increased trust in the relationship (Wilson 1995, Morgan and Hunt 1994), and convergence of beliefs resulting in reduced tension and manifested conflicts (Brown, Lusch and Smith 1991, Anderson and Weitz 1989, Sachdev, Bello and Verhage 1995).

Based on the above stream of literature, Karanuratna and Johnson (1997) suggest a framework of an exporter-intermediary relationship including factors like pre-contractual screening, monitoring and co-ordination leading to goal congruence (or reduced conflict) between the partners. In particular they hypothesise that there is an association between non-coercive monitoring by the exporter on one hand and channel co-ordination and goal congruence on the other (and eventually channel performance), stating that “information exchange and non-intrusive monitoring may be more effective in reducing the [intermediary] opportunism rather than forcing the [intermediary] to accede to demands for information” (p.19). The framework presupposes exchange of information between the channel members, but it does not consider other sources of information for intermediary control. Bergen, Dutta and Walker (1992) state that a principal must “choose an information-gathering strategy to determine accurately a potential agent’s true characteristics” (p.6), but none of the writers on channel relationships discuss the exporter’s need for monitoring information external to the exchange between the trading partners in an *ongoing relationship*.

The channel literature stresses information asymmetry and its effects on conflicts between trading partners, hence its emphasis on monitoring and control. On the other hand, the internationalisation literature focuses more on the potential inadequate *learning effects* at the exporter/ headquarter level as a consequence of working through middlemen (Solberg 1995). Without this learning effect taking place, the internationalisation process is supposed to be impeded. The question is whether or not the local representative promotes or impairs direct relations between the exporter and its customers, or intentionally withholds critical market information. In the early phases of internationalisation, the exporters do not necessarily have a sufficient understanding of their information needs, partly because of the lack of insight and partly because of faulty resources (it is easier to leave all the decisions to the local representative). When they start “climbing the ladder of internationalisation”, they are sometimes caught in a “trap” whereby the intermediary holds the key to the development of their marketing relationship, merely because of its superior marketing information base. The crucial issue in this context is therefore the “optimal” balance of information between the trading partners. The exporter may never fully comprehend all the facets of the local market situation in any given market, but it should understand enough of this situation to be an intelligent and critical interlocutor with its local representative, so that it is able to independently develop its international marketing strategies. In fact, many cases have been observed where exporters are being led into a diversity of local marketing strategies as a consequence of differing demands placed upon them to customise their strategies to local conditions (Solberg 1997). The end result of complying with local demands is often a “patchwork of local strategies” and hence a lack of uniformity and economies of scale so much lauded as competitive imperatives in the wake of globalisation (Levitt 1983). It is noteworthy though that we do not necessarily talk about ill will or opportunistic behaviour by the middleman in these cases, but this development may just as often be the outcome of a faulty market information base at the exporter level (Burton and Schlegemilch 1987).

Rangan (1998) offers an interesting contribution in the field of information behaviour, introducing the cost of search and deliberation. His main argument is that firms relying on their networks are more capable of identifying business opportunities than firms relying on “objective” market research only. Referring to Granovetter 1973) he maintains (p. 6) that “such networks can aid efficient and successful search because they are more likely to interconnect actors with non-redundant and pertinent information., ...in reality, networks offer a cost-effective way of enhancing the probability of uncovering at least some of the relevant but latent economic opportunities out there”. The main argument is that information search is tremendously

facilitated through social networks, and the commitment and trust inherent in such networks ensures the reliability of the information provided. When discussing trusted informants (through social networks) with whom one has previous business experience, he cites Granovetter (1985, p. 490) stating that:

“This is better information for four reasons: (1) it is cheap; (2) one trusts one’s own information best -- it is richer, more detailed and known to be accurate; (3) individuals with whom one has a continuing relation have an economic motivation to be trustworthy; and (4) departing from pure economic motives, continuing economic relations often become overlaid with social content that carries strong expectations of trust and abstention from opportunism”.

Conversely, extending on Rangan (1998) one may assert that independent market research involving definition, identification, gathering, assessment and distribution of information - in the absence of social networks which is often the case of international marketing - is not only more costly but also associated with more uncertainty than recurring to the information embedded in social networks. As a consequence, firms with managers that actively use their networks in order to get information or verify it may experience lower information costs and/or superior information quality than firms without such networks.

## **Methodology**

The main purpose of this paper is to explore different relationships between information behaviour, learning and performance and to build a model where these constructs are defined. The model is supposed to behave differently according to firm characteristics and relations with channel members. Since only a few of these constructs have been dealt with in the literature (market orientation, channels) and since we are studying a particular industry (bioproducts) we have decided to carry out in-depth interviews with a number of firms in that industry. Although “full fledged case studies” were not deemed necessary for the research purposes of the present study, it has features akin to the case study method. Yin (1989) devices a five step approach to case studies. Three of these steps are relevant in the present research: 1) Define the research questions, 2) Select the cases and the unit(s) of analysis, 3) Establish criteria for interpreting the findings.

### Research questions

Based on the literature review a certain number of research questions have been put forward. First of all we wanted to understand the way in which the partner was selected, what selection factors were important, how did they screen the partners, what information did they seek and so on. Next we were interested in the way in which the exporters co-operate with its middlemen, which included details about the contract, control systems, cooperative climate, trust, and the extent to which the two partners have invested in the relationship. Thirdly, we wanted to know the information gathering behaviour and the way in which the information is processed within the firm. Finally some information about export strategies and performance were asked. The interview guide is enclosed (appendix 1). At each question, the interviewers probed the respondent in order to identify specific features of the phenomena under study.

### Case selection

Given the exploratory nature of the research, the holistic - multiple case design (type 3) approach was chosen (Yin 1989). Furthermore we decided to concentrate on the food sector of the bio industry in Norway. The Norwegian food industry is dominated by the important fishing sector, Norway being one of the largest fish exporters in the world. This sector consists of a multitude of exporters, traders, processors, fish farmers and more or less integrated companies (like Nestlé and Frionor/Norway Seafood). On the other hand, a number of other firms in a variety of sectors were approached: alcohol production, horticulture, dairies cooperative, meat processing. Altogether 11 firms have been interviewed. The interviewed firms are as follows:

*Table 1: Firms involved in the exploratory interviews*

<i>Firm</i>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>Sales mill NOK</i>	<i>Exports mill NOK</i>
Arcus	Alcohol/Aquavite	580	15
Brødrene Jangård	Klipfish	820	99
Kortnes Gartneri	Tomato plants	8	10
Norsk Hydro Seafood	Farmed salmon	1.600	90
Norway Royal Salmon	Farmed salmon	750	90
Norway Seafood	All kinds of fish	2.500	90
AS Pals	Margarine, marcipan	250	10
Pelagic Partners	Herring	200	100
Tine Meierier	Cheese products	2.500	10
Trøndermat	Processed meat	250	10
West Fish	Frozen and dried fish	1.800	90

As can be seen from the table, more than half of the respondents represent the fishing industry, and the remainder represent diverse sectors of the food industry. The firm size varies from 7 million NOK (Kortnes) to several billion NOK (Hydro Seafood, Norway Seafood, Tine and Arcus), and the export (or international sales) ratio to total sales varies from some 10% (Pals and Kortnes) to more than 90% (fishing industry).

The interviews were carried out during the last half of 1998. Generally, we interviewed the marketing manager or the general manager, depending on the size of the firm. The interviews lasted approximately two hours, enough time to go through the interview guide and to probe on specific issues.

### **Criteria for analysis**

Transcripts of the taped interviews were analysed through the grounded theory approach described by Easterby, Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991) in order to identify possible patterns in the data: 1) Familiarisation, 2) Reflection, 3) Conceptualisation, 4) Cataloguing concepts, 5) Recoding, 6) Linking, 7) Re-evaluation. Using this methodology, the analysis will primarily attempt to understand how the firms operate with regard to variables like entry modes, countries served, information sources used, relations with trading partners abroad etc.

## **Results**

We have analysed some 30 firm-market combinations. The majority of the cases are concerned with markets in Western and Central Europe: the Nordic and Baltic countries, UK, Germany, France, Portugal, Greece and Italy. Two firms are operating in the US and one firm is heavily involved in Eastern Europe, and another one in Brazil and Africa. The general impression is that most of the firms for their marketing decisions pertaining to an *ongoing* marketing involvement rely mainly on information from their partners (distributor or agent), the remaining information being procured through secondary data (statistical reports, newsletters, trade journals etc) and network connections (competitors, customers, trade associations). In fact, many of the firms have long relations with their partners in export markets. These have either been “inherited” from earlier “regimes” in the firm or they have emerged as partners as a consequence of different network connections or even coincidences. In some cases the same distributor is engaged for more than thirty to forty years, and the sons of the firms involved are now dealing with each other as their fathers did before them. Indeed, some firms report a pre-screening phase before selecting the partner, and recount market information activity in this context.

In some of the cases the entry modes - and thereby the role of the partner - do not necessarily follow the “standard” categories that are treated in textbooks or analysed in scientific research (for a discussion, see Benito and Welsh 1994). For instance, some of the firms sell directly to a large customer (like a salmon smokery, tomato grower), which in many respects may be defined as a processor-distributor. In other cases the exporter is not the producer of the goods, but rather an export trading organisation for a number of suppliers (fish exporters). Still in other cases, the firm is both a producer and a trader. Nevertheless, all the interviewed firms act on their own behalf in the market, with their own products, prices and identity, and not as middlemen.

This section describes the findings pertaining to selection of partner, caption of market information, distribution and processing of that information, working with, relating to and controlling the partner. In the present context the term partner encompasses both distributor, agent, joint venture and so on.

#### **Screening and connecting with partners**

We have stated that in many cases the firms link with partners more or less incidentally and through their network. The following example – a Norwegian exporter of mackerel and herring - is perhaps an extreme case of the lack of pre-screening information, but it does illustrate the strength that lies in the network.

“Well, incidentally we met a Norwegian businessman [in the oil trade] married to a Rumanian and working in Romania - and he set up a meeting in Bucharest. We met with some 7-8 people and I reckoned ‘If you get one or two of them, then you are a lucky man’. You know, you always meet a lot of people, but most of them fade away somehow. ... Then half a year passed and then one of the people we met - and his partner came and visited us in Norway. They bought some 160 tons, and have come back several times buying more”

“We did not have any references other than that he had a serious partner, the local exclusive Dole dealer (the fruit company). He showed us a huge banana storage hall, and we thought that ‘if he can afford this he should also be able to settle our bills!’. And up till now he has been paying very promptly. That’s all we can say, but it sounds a bit odd - doesn’t it?”

“We made some check on the Norwegian oilman. My son is working in Statoil and he checked through his network and could confirm that the man was *bona fide*”.

This case illustrates the strength of a good network. Objective information through market research is difficult to get hold of so they have to rely on their network sources, including the family. Also by using a local Norwegian in Romania gives the exporter some foundation for trust. Somehow one may talk about a limited - but still existing - Norwegian diaspora which links people of the same nationality together (Kotkin 1992) and helps to cross the “uncertainty bridge” of international trade. Of course, the manager of this company was not a newcomer to the trade, and intuition earned through many years of experience helps him make the necessary assessments. Still, in this part of the world, where the development of a somewhat limping market based economy is coupled with less honoured business practices, there are reasons to be suspicious of unknown potential business partners.

Another case – an exporter of bakery products - where networks seem to be at work is the appointment of a distributor in Estonia. In this case, the Estonian firm had come across the products of the Norwegian exporter in Sweden. If the initial contact was unsolicited by the exporter, the pre-screening activities from both sides were indeed quite extensive and characterized by personal relationship building through visits and product testing.

“A representative of the firm visited Norway in a business delegation, or something of the sort, and had heard about us, and had worked with our products in another firm in Sweden, and she wondered if she could represent us in Estonia. Maybe they will sell for some one million NOK, I am quite anxious to see. I have visited them and seen their warehousing facilities and she seems to be quite well organized. She has been here, and we have been present at a Trade Fair in Estonia, and she has sent her head baker to make a test run - so it is quite hot”.

Others have a long history with their distributors and agents, and they really don't remember how they first got in touch with their partner:

“We have worked with the same partners for years. The situation has evolved somewhat though. Our agents have some places quit the firms they used to work with and established their own business, like in the UK. Or there has been a major reorganization, but by and large, we have been working with the same people”.



“In 1975 we were very passive in exporting. Our present partner approached the local Norwegian Trade Council office in Hamburg and made an inquiry. So it was basically their initiative.”

Still another fish exporter operating in a variety of markets, especially in the Third World, chose to work with a local bank employee in Congo. They had formerly worked through an agent, but decided for various reasons to quit the cooperation with their partner. During their operations they were acquainted with the bank clerk in connection with settlements and he appears to be the “perfect agent” in Congo. As the following statement indicates that in some cases there is a great degree of satisficing behavior in export development and partner search. The company tried to do it the “structured way” by asking the Norwegian Trade Council for assistance in identifying potential partners in France, Spain and Italy. However, they failed to enter these markets, partly because they did not find the right partner.

“Our experience in asking the Norwegian Trade Council in Madrid [may illustrate the problems in getting the right partner through a structured approach]. It was not because of the NTC... They investigate[potential partners] .. ok there are fourteen firms distributing these products, and the market looks like this etc. .... When they tried this in France and also to some extent in Italy and Spain, to be more structured, then we saw great potentials for our products, how to enter these markets and how to take a share... Well, we have not been that professional - we have tried, but we did not really succeed.....

But it is a long and costly way to go for a firm with relatively limited exports, and then I feel that we are in a preferential situation by our access to the market through our established networks, either through imports [or through our established exports, so we don't put so much effort into finding new partners]”.

The lack of success may be ascribed to the lack of follow up by the exporter, and the lack of follow up may in turn be attributed to the more or less trepid interest of engaging more heavily in international markets (the company exports some 10% of its output).

Summing up this section, the screening process seems to vary with both the market and the firm. One may tentatively suggest that the more risky or distant the market - both in political, economic and cultural terms - the more the company will recur to its network for information about the partner and the market itself. The reason for this behaviour pertains to the balance between the costs of gathering and processing reliable information from

distant markets through market research, and the relatively low cost usage of its network (Rangan 1998). Moreover, the less internationalised the company, the less structured its approach in finding partners. This is in line with the general assumption of the incremental internationalisation school of thought (see for instance Johanson and Vahlne 1977 and 1990).

### **Capture of market information**

Market information is gathered for different reasons. This section deals with information for strategic marketing decisions (hereinafter termed market information) as opposed to the information gathered to control the partner (control information). The distinction may not be very clear because evidently the same piece of information may be used for both purposes. On the other hand, the sources for the information may for obvious reasons differ in the two cases, the exporter wanting to operate anonymously in the case of gathering control information. Generally speaking, the role of the partner seems overwhelmingly dominant in market information capture. The following statement illustrates the importance of nurturing good relations to the partner in this respect.

“Through the relationships that you build on the personal level with the individual distributor, you will inevitably get good market information, which of course does not vanish [if the relationships are kept]. On the other hand, it takes time to build relations, and should we start from scratch it will certainly take us one or two years to get to the same level of market information”.

The distance factor does not seem to play any role in how much one relates to ones partner. The following statement from a fish exporter shows the emphasis he places on the daily contact with his agent:

“It is not equally easy to have personal relations with our agent in Congo than it is in Portugal. But he is often here, and we are in touch with him more or less every day through satellite telephone, so that we have direct contact even if there is a war. We try to visit them as often as possible, but we have to prioritize markets: with Mexico, for instance, we are dealing mostly over the phone...”

Too much of a good thing may hamper the development of personal relations:

“If the chemistry doesn’t work properly then it will not function anyway. I once had an agent in Spain. He was selling all right, but the

chemistry didn't work. He was such a pain and pest [giving and asking for information all the time]”.

Even though the partner seems to be the most important source for market information, direct contact with customers also plays a significant role, both in getting market information and in forging the relations with the partners.

“We are always in direct contact with the customers, it's so much more simple and you avoid misunderstandings etc.... The agents have [of course] most of the contact with the customers, but we talk with these latter every now and then in order to see how things are going. If there are any problems with the quality, then we go directly to the customer. In Greece for instance, we have customers who want to deal directly with us. And that's fine, but we always pay the commission anyway to the agent, and make allowance for that in the price”.

“We are more active in Portugal, participating at Trade Fairs [together with our partner] with new ideas and recipes. ... Perhaps not every time, but at least every other time [the partner participates at a Trade Fair] we would like to be there too”.

“But we also get feedback from our agents about market developments. Furthermore, we get information about the markets when we visit our customers. We also visit the stores and observe how people behave [when they buy our fish] ”.

Some companies use reports from their partners as their most important source of market information.

“In existing markets we get the essential information from our importers, and this happens in regular meetings and in particular our yearly meetings where they present whatever they have collected of market information. Then we get an overview of what products are traded, of new products etc. We get a folder with information *not* about the hotel and restaurant market, but about the “foodway” markets. Therefore you have some guesswork to make for the remainder. However, we know that there is generally a 50/50 split between the restaurant and the foodway markets, so by deduction we get the trends for the whole market.... But we do nothing special to research the markets where we already are being represented”.

“The kind of information we gather from the markets is typically indices, test results. Things like competitive actions, prices etc we will normally get from the agent, through their reports.”

The respondents seldom use external research institutes or secondary data to gather information on a continuous basis. As one of them stated: “When you work in the market you will get an updating through your sales people” (Norway Seafood p. 21). Another manager stated:

“We talk with our US agent every day, asking him how things are going, what he thinks will happen, what he expects etc. We get information from both our agent and our customers, but we don’t carry out research in the market ourselves. ... But we try to be more clever to gather data from the market. We subscribe to 80 different trade journals, and we sometimes use students to map markets. But the customers and agents are the most important source of information”

Another manager confirms this picture, and reveals that secondary data from existing markets is used to ‘frame the mind’, rather than to make any operative marketing decisions:

“The information we gather from sources other than our agents is more general things like internationalisation of the industry, raw material reports, production, pricing reports etc, you know things which you normally get in international publications”.

One of the respondents differentiates their data capture activity according to the nature of their business:

“To sum up: the less processed the fish, the more dependent we are on personal relations. The market for less processed fish is fairly open that everyone knows the price level: You can’t fool a person more than once! It is based on trust and personal relations. In markets where we deliver more processed fish we are more dependent on a professional organisation, with clearer demands on delivery time, skills and of course price. It’s rather an industrial kind of work, more professional. This is why you see so many different solutions in our different markets. But we are also forced to analyse the markets much more in detail, the closer we get to the end distributors and the [supermarket] chains”.

Very few respondents seem to use external research institutes. The one exception was a marketer of branded fish who at undefined intervals initiates

dedicated research such as surveys, in order to capture the trends in the market:

“Of course we have to adapt to the customers, and normally we get continuous feed back from customers about products. Sometimes we may need a ‘bigger thing’, such as we did last year in Germany, a relatively comprehensive study.... We initiated the study, and were responsible for it together with the German subsidiary.... Germany is a big market for us, quite a complicated market, and tough, so we really needed a closer look to see where we could grow in the future”.

In other words, for big strategic decisions (for instance pertaining to customer and product development) the headquarter in this particular case plays an important role in both initiating and carrying out market surveys. The local subsidiary then plays the role of the practical implementer of the study, together with the local research agency.

#### **Working with and controlling the partner**

The normal procedure to control the partner is through monthly/ bimonthly reports. All the respondents receive information from the partners on the development of sales.

“We establish a yearly budget based on agreed sales forecasts from every market, and then it is followed up every month. We need this for our production planning and for our stocks.”

“From Lithuania we have monthly reports on sales, and if things happen in the market, we are being informed about this, either orally or in writing, so we are constantly being updated about this. We also try to arrange meetings locally in the market, in order to - through these meetings - capture the things that happen. We feel that this is quite important. ....

...Both I myself and an assistant go. I am travelling quite a lot so I have an assistant who steps in - who either travels himself or with me. I feel that - these regular meetings where you feel the pulse of the development, are the most important way of being updated, either you talk about own sales subsidiaries or independent distributors.”

Most of the respondents took a very pragmatic view on the working relationships with their partners.

“If problems arise, you just have to find out of it. Is it the market, the product or the agent? We try to push the agent as well as we can. And we also get monthly reports on exports from the country through the Export Committee for Fish Products - type of fish, volume, prices, markets. ... This information is sent over to the agents, so that they know how they are positioned.. This is important information”.

In other words the partner may be regarded more or less as an integral part of one's organisation where control information is openly exchanged. In this respect the difference between a subsidiary and an agent or distributor may not be all that large:

“Personal relations play a paramount role - both with our subsidiary staff and with our distributors. It is they who do the work in the market. Then it is important that we have good relations and work toward the same objectives, that have a good atmosphere, so that we easily can make out any jarring...

If you have good relations you will receive early warnings of things that happen, if something is getting out of control or becomes a problem. Particularly the distributor, if they have a difficult time, cash problems or the like, [then it is important to have good relations]...

Our relations with our subsidiaries in Germany and Australia are much stronger than with our distributors in Lithuania and Poland.... Not necessarily because of the ownership relations, but it is evidently easier to have relations to own companies ... But also because of the size of the former two markets compared to the latter two”.

The following statement comes from a manager with extensive contacts in the market, both through customer visits and through extensive networks in the industry:

“We don't really have a system for controlling our agents. We will pretty soon find out if an agent is performing or not. Does he sell fish or doesn't he? Often we visit the customer directly and we will fairly soon discover if the 'chemistry' between the agent and the customer isn't there”.

“Normally we write a contract only for the first two-three years. Thereafter there are no more contracts, then it is 'business as usual'. If something then happens, neither he [the agent] nor we have any bonds, because there is no contract. It is in their favour because they are well

aware that we know all the customers and that if we want to, we can go directly to all the customers.”

Not all the firms are exercising the control function equally stringently, as exemplified by the following statement:

“If he [the partner] expected or ended up in poor results, then we would have to action, if we then had not ‘forgotten’ the market and concentrated on other markets, that’s probably the way in which we had acted, rather than trying to save... [the sales]. .... You may say that we use ‘mild pressure’ [to achieve the budgeted sales volumes]”.

It needs to be added here that in this particular case its partners have long relationships with the company and that many of these relationships have been inherited from their fathers.

Some of the respondents have also some check on the partner through their network. The following statements illustrate this:

“In this world, you get a lot of feedback from your competitors. If your partner perform poorly in one market, you will know it within a short time period. There are many trade fairs and conferences and quite a ‘close family’ in the industry and they meet each other quite often. We meet the Swedes who may have been in Germany meeting people who have seen ‘something’ in France, and if you have an agent who is not up to par you will hear about it!”. Tine (14)

“In many ways, it is quite a ‘dense’ industry, so it is possible to talk with people in the trade, and you can talk with competitors and test them out on their experience when you get to know them better”. (Arcus p. 14)

“When you start working with an importer... - even if we say that 80-90% of the information is acquired from the importer - we are aware of the possible trap of [relying to much on him for information]. There is always a question of how many resources you should use on this kind of jobs. Our export department is a small one, and we should rather deploy our forces to get orders and earn money...

If we are in an established market, I believe that we - due to scarce resources - stick to the information that we get from the importer”. (Arcus p. 14).

“We regard the information that we get from our distributor as being of high quality .... yes indeed we do. It does happen, nevertheless, that I check his image in the market with my network. It is not so easy to talk about, so it is more simple to ask others in the market about these things. But we don't feel that he is lying a lot [rather on the contrary]”. (Pals p. 25).

“We need other channels [of information] to correct our partner, and tell him that also others may have an opinion ... through newsletters and analyses that are available in the market, so that we get a more balanced discussion. ... we actually get information about the Japanese market that we later on give to our partner in order for him to have the same basis on which to make his own assessments.

So they know that he has given information based on newsletters to our customers, and we have given information about Norwegian databases on these things, so they can read the newsletters and statistics and thereby get a more complete picture of our information basis. Again we talk about relationship building, we exchange information so that we end somewhere in the middle in a balanced case... If we feel that we receive the wrong information from our partner, then we action and correct so the partner knows that we have a broader information base than the things he sends us. It does not need to be ill will but rather his personal opinion, so we get a balance and show him that we are up and going”. (Royal Norwegian Salmon, p. 9).

“[We don't see any danger in transferring knowledge to our Japanese partner]. This is rather a pronounced policy from our part. We travel a bit around and check on the market, and we are fully open about our cost position and the whole lot. .. They know that we are working with biology .... and that the different sizes [of the fish] are ready for slaughter at so or so time, so they present new supply models to us all the time”. (Royal Norwegian Salmon, p. 9).

“In Europe I think it is all different. .... The moment we ask for some feedback, they get suspicious and they wonder if something is wrong and if they could claim some discounts. Getting feedback is difficult. It has to do with communication, and we are talking passed one another. Fat and colour are extremely important in Europe, and there is no standard measurement method for these. Then it is of course difficult to communicate”. (Royal Norwegian Salmon, p. 9/10).



The general impression is that the conflict oriented attitudes that prevail in some of the literature is unfamiliar to many of the exporters in the present project. Most of the firms have monthly or bimonthly reporting as a standard procedure, and many have indeed some checkpoints in order to be informally advised about their partners and their performance. But rather than controlling their partners for obtrusion or ill will they mostly nurture good working relations with them. If - for some reason - it is difficult to cooperate with the partner they end the relations, without any further fuss.

1. Exporters tapping into a variety of information sources (partner, other network and formal market research) will display superior exporting competencies (and therefore superior performance) and will perceive lower risks in the export venture than exporters with a more limited information source usage, given the same level of information volume. Using all three sources of information the exporter is supposed to get a more varied and less biased view of the marketing situation.

Furthermore, exporters with scant resources (both financial and managerial) are to a lesser extent than resourceful exporters supposed to use formal market research. They are also supposed to have a more limited other network. For both these reasons these exporters will to a greater extent recur to the partner for market information. The internationalisation learning process and development of exporting competencies will in these instances be contingent on the trust between the exporter and its partners. Finally, controlling the partner in export markets requires information from other sources than from the partner itself. Hence we propose that information from other sources than the partner will increase the perceived control by the exporter in those markets.

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## **The role of trust in shaping information collection behavior of exporters<sup>6</sup>**

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by

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## **Abstract**

Consistent with the literature on market orientation and interorganisational relations, this study develops and tests a conceptual model for performance in export relationships. Information generation is the first of the three market orientation dimensions discussed by Kohli and Jaworski (1990). The behaviour of exporters in collecting information is posited to be influenced by the exporter's trust in its foreign channel partner. Data from 285 Norwegian exporters in the "bio"-industry (food and wood) was collected. We find that trust correlates positively with information collection from the representative and negatively with information collection from other sources. However, information from both these sources contributes positively to export performance. The longer the relationship has lasted, the more effect information gathering from other sources will have. Implications for management and research are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

Companies aiming to attain success in exporting face a wide range of decisions. Initially, a choice has to be made concerning the type of product to be launched internationally, the most appealing export market(s) and the most suitable entry strategy in the chosen market(s). The various decisions are obviously interrelated in the sense that a given decision at one stage has implications for the decision to be taken at the next stage. Sound decision-making requires the gathering of information concerning the likely outcomes of the different alternatives available at a given stage. The type of information and the sources used will vary according to the stage of the decision process. When screening possible export markets, secondary data published by governmental sources or international organisations may be relevant and useful, while the appropriate marketing-mix in an established export market will require other types of information and other sources.

Exporters often rely upon foreign intermediaries and establish a channel relationship with agents or distributors to achieve their objectives (Sachdev, Bello and Verhage 1995). At a general level, the middlemen chosen as partners are also one of the most important sources of information (Benito, Solberg and Welch 1993). Obviously, the partner does not have to be the sole source of information. Conceivably, the exporter may choose to gather relevant information from other sources (e.g. final consumers, other middlemen, competitors) to supplement the information provided by the partner. The total amount of resources that should be devoted to information gathering - invariant of the source - is also worth considering. Once established in an export market with a foreign intermediary as partner, there are at least two reasons why information is needed by the exporter. First, the scope as well as the extent of information needed will depend upon the functional «division of labour» between the exporter and the middleman. The less responsibility left to the partner the more information is needed by the exporter to make appropriate decisions. Second, the exporter may want information to control the performance of the partner. Lack of trust and fear of opportunistic behaviour are the driving forces in the latter case.

The aim of the present paper is to analyze the relationship between the exporters' information behaviour and export performance. The two focal questions are to what extent - if any - information behaviour exerts a separate influence on export performance, and whether trust in the partner influences information behaviour. We are not aware of any studies that have addressed this issue specifically, but there are at least three streams of literature that are relevant in our context. In the next section, a short review of the literature concerning the *internationalisation process, the market*

*orientation* literature, and *channel relationship* studies is undertaken. Building upon this review, a model and a series of hypotheses are put forward, and then tested empirically. The paper concludes with implications for management and research.

## **2. Literature Review**

The importance of information - or more generally knowledge - in the process of internationalisation was pointed out by early contributors to the «internationalisation process school» (Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul 1975; Johanson and Vahlne 1977). The «internationalisation theory» suggests that companies gradually build up increased knowledge about foreign markets, which leads to increased commitment to internationalisation by the managers. The process is continuous, and as more knowledge is acquired the perceived risk of deeper involvement is reduced and the company will enter more distant (measured by psychic or cultural distance) markets as well as utilise more resource-demanding entry modes.

Knowledge is a more general concept than information. Seringhaus and Rosson (1990) argue that « the company that is knowledgeable about exporting will be able to determine what information to collect and how to use it, to a greater extent than their less knowledgeable counterparts. While based on information then, knowledge is clearly a much broader concept, guiding the company in all its endeavours. In a sense knowledge is a special resource that is present to varying degrees in companies. Like other resources, we should recognise that, without husbanding and replenishment, export knowledge will be depleted over time» (pp.154-55).

The internationalisation process theory posits that the learning process primarily depends on experience in the market. Johanson and Vahlne (1990) maintain that «experiential knowledge generates business opportunities and is consequently a driving force in the internationalisation process». Experiential knowledge is acquired as part of a process you are involved in, and cannot be attained by formalised market information systems without involvement. It is reasonable to assume that a major part of the experiential knowledge has to be generated in informal ways. The importance of informal information gathering is supported by a number of studies. Cunningham and Spiegel (1971) identified personal visits of company executives to their overseas markets as the main source of market information. Benito et al. (1993) also found that in general informal information gathering was the most widely used method of gathering export marketing information. On the other hand, notable differences were found

between companies. In particular, large companies that relied heavily on exports used more formal information sources. The sources of information were also to a larger extent external to the exporter-middleman dyad (foreign consultants, industry associations, statistical information etc.) while the smaller firms mainly relied upon their local partners.

For our purpose, the importance attached to market knowledge by the internationalisation process literature is worth noting. The main focus of this literature is, however, on the decisions that are being made in the initial stages of internationalisation (e.g. choice of market, choice of entry strategy). The literature does not analyse information behaviour as such, but mainly regards information and knowledge as byproducts of the internationalisation process. The prominent position given to experiential knowledge in this literature is corroborated by the many studies that have found that informal information sources are particularly important for small companies with limited exports.

The importance of information gathering is an integral part of the market orientation concept, which recently has attracted a lot of interest in marketing. By the late 1980s, market orientation was typically identified as market information collection and usage (Siguaw et al. 1997). Two contributions - by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990) - have since exerted great influence on the literature. Marketing orientation was defined by Kohli and Jaworski (1990) as "the organisation-wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs, dissemination of the intelligence across departments, and organisation-wide responsiveness to it" (p.6). Though the definition highlights the importance of information processing regarding customer needs and preferences, the scope of information is defined wider. Both end users and distributors are included, and it is explicitly stated that information regarding exogenous factors "such as government regulations, technology, competitors and other environmental forces" should be taken into account.

Narver and Slater (1990) maintained that "market orientation consists of three behavioural components - customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional co-ordination - and two decision criteria - long-term focus and profitability. Customer orientation and competitor orientation include all of the activities involved in acquiring information about the buyers and competitors in the target market and disseminating it throughout the business(es)" (p.21). In later studies (e.g. Slater and Narver 1994), market orientation has been limited to the three behavioural components, while long-term focus and profitability are viewed as consequences of market orientation. In doing this, the approach originally suggested by

Narver and Slater is modified and brought closer to the definition proposed by Kohli and Jaworski. As the literature on market orientation has evolved, a number of refinements of the original definitions have been put forward by various authors, and different measurement scales have been developed (Deshpandé and Farley 1996; see Sandvik 1997 for an in-depth analysis of the market orientation concept).

The market orientation literature is general in the sense that the theory is not developed specifically for companies facing international challenges, let alone for exporters in particular. Comparing the internationalisation process literature with the market orientation literature, the common denominator is the importance attached to information gathering and knowledge generation. The market orientation literature specifies to a larger extent the scope of information required (consumer, distributor, competitor etc) but does not place much importance on the *method* of information collection. As we have seen, the internationalisation process literature underlines the importance of experiential knowledge and it has been demonstrated empirically that exporters to a large extent rely upon personal and informal ways of gathering information. The market orientation concept is multi-dimensional, and information gathering is only one of three dimensions regarded as equally important. The dissemination and implementation dimensions are more implicit in the internationalisation process literature. Furthermore, work in the market orientation tradition is much more concerned with developing rigorous measurement models for the concepts involved.

Empirical work has demonstrated that exporters - in particular small companies - to a large extent rely upon market information from their channel partners in foreign markets. These middlemen may provide information about their own needs as well as the needs of the ultimate consumers, inform about competitor actions, governmental regulations etc. While collecting information from all of these areas are considered part of the market orientation construct, this stream of literature does not address the *source* of information utilised by the company - in our case the exporter. In principle, the information collected concerning for instance trends in consumer preferences may be acquired in a number of ways. One of these ways is to rely upon reports from the middleman that the exporter is currently working with in the market. Another way may be to undertake independent research, either in-house or by soliciting external agencies. The choice of information strategy pursued by the exporter is deemed to depend on the relationship established between the exporter and the middleman, both when it comes to the functional responsibilities of the two partners contained in the contract (explicit or implicit) and the degree of trust established between them.

The observation that lasting relationships often develop between exchange partners has formed the basis for a reconsideration of the traditional focus on *transactions* in marketing (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987). Even if the emergence of long-lasting relationships may be explained based upon an «economics of organization» type of reasoning, the relationship marketing paradigm typically relies upon behavioural concepts like commitment and trust (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Stern and Reve (1980) argued that the traditional disparate economic and behavioural approaches to channel research should be viewed as complementary, each focusing on a part of the relevant entity only. In accordance with this view the use of trust has been regarded as an alternative to price and authority in governing a relationship (Braddach and Eccles 1989; Haugland and Reve 1994).

In an export channel context, Johnson and Raven (1996) have explored how *relationship quality* will affect export channel outcome as measured by satisfaction and performance. Relationship quality may be defined in various ways, and constructs like trust, absence of opportunistic behaviour, co-operation and stability may be included (Johnson et al. 1993). In Johnson and Raven (1996) it was examined in terms of fairness, commitment, co-operation and communication intensity. Communication intensity was found to result in more co-operation and commitment, but no support was found for the proposed link between communication intensity and satisfaction and for the proposed link between communication intensity and performance.

### **3. Conceptual Model**

Based upon the literature review information collection should have an impact on performance. Reliable and valid information is necessary to make optimal decisions and we assume that the exporters will not engage in information collection for its own sake. Information is a multi-dimensional construct, and in this study we have decided to focus on the sources of information used by the exporters. The setting is established exporter – representative dyads. It seems reasonable to assume that the more the exporter trusts his/her representative, the more he/she is used as a source of information regarding the market and the less other sources are consulted. Exporter performance is, however, likely to improve with more information regardless of the source utilised. In this context, the duration of the relationship may have a moderating effect. Collecting information from other sources may be more important when the relationship has lasted for a long time. Information provided by the partner may be more reliable initially in the formative stages of the relationship. If the exporter continues to utilise

the representative as the sole provider of information, he/she may be tempted to conceal "unpleasant" pieces of information and dedicate less resources in general to promoting the interests of the exporter. The general model is depicted in Figure 1.

**Trust and Information Collection:** Trust in the intermediary should play a significant role in exporters' international involvement, since the level of uncertainty and risk is normally higher than in their domestic and more familiar markets. It has furthermore been maintained that trust and relations contribute to increase companies' competitive ability (Geyskens et al. 1998; Uzzi 1997). Trust is seen as developing over time, when the companies involved in exchanges learn to know each other (e.g. Håkansson 1982).

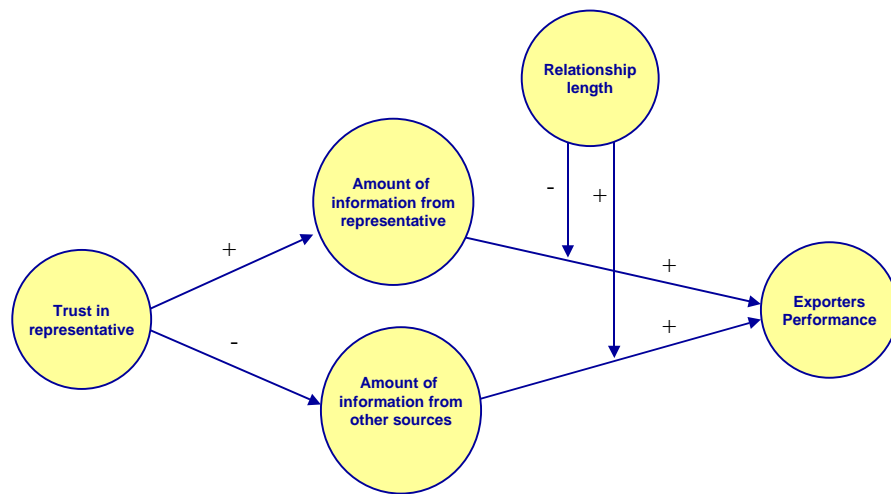


Figure 1. The conceptual model

Relationships involving trust have many benefits (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Not only do they facilitate communication across organisational boundaries, but, in a trusting atmosphere, companies are more prone to disclose information which they under other circumstances would conceal. This again may reduce the tendency for opportunistic behaviour. Trust has been called "a fundamental relationship model building block" (Wilson 1995) and

involves confidence that the other party will behave in a fair, non-coercive, concerned manner (Rotter 1967). As argued by Siguaw, Simpson and Baker (1997) individuals trust organisations that allow open communication and the opportunity to participate. The access to valid information from the partner will therefore be greater when there is high trust. Moreover, trusting behaviour creates trust. Exporters who trust their partners will be likely to rely on information collected from the partner, rather than from other sources.

Rangan (1998) introduces the cost of information search and deliberation (or processing/adoption). His main argument is that firms relying on their networks are more capable of identifying business opportunities than firms relying on “objective” market research only. Referring to Granovetter (1973) he maintains (p. 6) that

“[s]uch networks can aid efficient and successful search because they are more likely to interconnect actors with *non-redundant and pertinent information*. ...in reality, networks offer a cost-effective way of enhancing the probability of uncovering at least some of the relevant but latent economic opportunities out there”. (emphasis added).

The main argument is that information search is tremendously facilitated through social networks, and the commitment and trust inherent in such networks ensures the reliability of the information provided. Discussing the advantages of such information, Granovetter (1985, p. 490) maintains that:

“This is better information for four reasons: (1) it is cheap; (2) one trusts one’s own information best -- it is richer, more detailed and known to be accurate; (3) individuals with whom one has a continuing relation have an economic motivation to be trustworthy; and (4) departing from pure economic motives, continuing economic relations often become overlaid with social content that carries strong expectations of trust and abstention from opportunism”.

Given the resource constraints of exporters, it is expected that they will seek the most cost efficient way of collecting information, ie. through trusted networks. In many cases, and in particular in the early phases of market entry, it is assumed that the intermediary is the most important network member. This leads to our first hypothesis:



*Hypothesis 1: The higher the trust in the representative the (a) more information is collected from the representative and (b) less information is collected from other sources.*

**Information Collection and Performance:** Export performance has been the subject of a growing body of studies (see for instance Madsen 1987; Axinn 1988; Aaby and Slater 1989; Cavusgil and Zou 1994; Bello and Gilliland 1997; Diamantopoulos 1998; Shoham 1998). It has been linked to factors such as export commitment (Aaby and Slater 1989), adaptation of marketing mix as well as distributor support (Cavusgil and Zou 1994) and control (Bello and Gilliland 1997). However, as far as we know the possible link between performance and the information collection behaviour of exporters has not been investigated. Indeed, Benito et al. (1993) examined the impact of export share – a performance measure used by some authors (Cavusgil and Zou 1994) - on such behaviour, but they found only scant differences between different groups of exporters.

In an unfamiliar and changing environment the exporter needs information to be able to make the optimal decisions. Information collection is an important dimension of the market orientation construct, and it is argued in that stream of literature that more market orientation will entail an increased performance. We assume that exporters will not collect information without utilising the information as a basis for decisions, and therefore information dissemination and implementation - the two other dimensions of market orientation – have not been measured.

Information should have a positive influence on performance irrespective of the source utilized, given that the information acquired is reliable and valid. In our conceptual model we have made a distinction between the representative in the foreign market and all other sources of information. In both cases we expect more information to be beneficial:

*Hypothesis 2a: There is a positive correlation between the extent of information collection by exporters from their representative and export performance.*

*Hypothesis 2b: There is a positive correlation between the extent of information collection by exporters from other sources and export performance.*

**The moderating role of relationship length:** Ford and Rosson (1982) suggest that the exporter-foreign representative dyad goes through a number of phases – new, growing, troubled, static, inert. Lye (1998) suggests a “smoother” development pattern – from introduction to decline - akin to the

relationship development process taking place between buyer and seller as suggested by Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987). During the build-up and development of the relationship from the introduction to the mature phase, the exporter learns the “ins and outs” of the representative and vice versa, through extensive exchange of information, and build up of knowledge through learning by doing. In the present context this implies that an exporting company new to a market have to make short-cuts in its information collection, leaning chiefly on the one link it has to the market: its local representative. Initially, in the formative stages of the relationship, information provided by the representative may play a relatively larger role and be perceived as the only reliable source of information, and consequently, it will have a greater impact on the firm’s export performance.

Conversely, as the relationship matures and the exporter develops its knowledge base over time, information from the representative might be supplemented with information from other sources. Even though, as the exporting company gets more embedded in the relationship with their partner, they have also learned more about the partner and the market from interaction with that partner, uncertainty and risk are reduced and performance is more easily assessed. It might therefore - as a result of experience - be easier to supplement information from the partner through access to other sources of information and different networks of other players in the market (Seringhaus and Rosson 1990). If the exporter continues to utilise the representative as the sole provider of information, the partner may be tempted to conceal “unpleasant” pieces of information and dedicate fewer resources to promote the interests of the exporter. Thus over time, alternative information sources are important to control the partner and develop the exporter’s knowledge base further. Furthermore, the capability of the exporter to adopt the information collected is deemed to be better for “old timers” than for “newcomers”, as the former are supposed to have better skills in sorting out relevant information. Furthermore, close relationships based on unilateral trust and commitment toward the partner might actually create some problems for the exporter. A major problem with trusting a partner related to information collection is that “... all links between the customer and supplier activities make it more difficult for both parties to establish alternative links and ties as the companies becomes embedded into specific others” (Håkansson and Snehota 2000, p. 81). Therefore, not only will the control information suffer from being collected from no other source than the partner, but the information obtained may also be obsolete or misleading because the partner may “belong to the wrong network”. Hence:

*Hypothesis 3a: The effect of information collection from the representative on performance will be **stronger** in relationships having lasted a short time than in relationships having lasted a long time.*

*Hypothesis 3b: The effect of information collection from other sources on performance will be **stronger** in relationships having lasted a long time than in relationships having a lasted short time.*

## **4. Method**

### **Research setting and sample**

The research hypotheses were examined in the context of Norwegian exporters of bio-products and their relationship with their local representatives in their most important export market. Based on Kompass Norge (1999 edition) – a Norwegian industry directory and a list received from The Norwegian Seafood Export Council, we randomly selected and interviewed altogether 285 Norwegian exporters among 1,089 firms in the combined sample frame. These were distributed as follows: (1) Fishing industry n= 151, (2) Forest related industry n=117 and (3) Agriculture industry n=17. The interviews were carried out by telephone.

### **Measures**

*Performance:* A number of writers have operationalised and examined export performance from different angles (see for instance Madsen 1987; Axinn 1988; Cavusgil and Zou 1994; Bello and Gilliland 1997; Shoham 1998; Styles 1998). The present survey has adapted the scale developed by Styles for its robustness in a cross-national comparative study (UK and Australia). The items used were: 1) You have achieved a good foothold in this market, 2) You have strengthened your market share in this market, 3) You have better profitability in this market than the overall profitability of the firm, 4) You have good profitability in this market, 5) The exports to this market has succeeded particularly well the last five years, 6) Your most important competitors would claim that your firm has succeeded especially well in this market. The items are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

*Amount of information:* The measures of information collection were developed for this study as formative scales. We assessed the different sources of information directly by asking about the amount or degree of information collected from the representative and from other sources about the specific market and about the partner. The measures are; to what degree is the information that you possess about this specific market collected from:

(1) The representative (2) Other sources. To what degree is the information that you possess about this representative and the results that the representative obtains collected from: (1) The representative (2) Other sources. This gives us four items that reflect both the amount of information from whom and about what. The items are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from “to a small extent” to “to a large extent”.

*Trust in representative:* This scale is mainly based on the Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande (1992), and reflects trust in a way that is closely related to risk. The measures are: (1) Your company is willing to let the representative make important market decisions without your involvement. (2) Your company trusts the representative to get the job done right without the need for monitoring during the relationship. (3) Your company trusts the representative to do things that we can't do ourselves. (4) The representative is reliable. (5) We generally trust our representative to a great extent. Item 1, 2, 3 and 5 is based on Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande (1992) and item 4 is added based on prior research on trust and the formal definition of trust suggested by these authors. The items are scored on a 5-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

*Relationship length:* Relationship length was measured by the following question: “How long have your company exported through this representative?”. The exporters were asked to indicate the number of years the relationship had lasted. In the data analysis the sample is split in two: short-term relationships (less than five years) and long-term relationships (more than five years).

## **5. Analysis and results**

*Measurement model:* The development of the measurement model was conducted in several phases. First we used factor analysis in SPSS to examine the items. The information items were tested by the use of principal component analysis as extraction method and oblimin as rotation method. The results from the test are reported in table 1. The items loaded on two distinct factors. Further we tested all constructs in LISREL 8 one by one. All constructs showed satisfactory construct validity (the results from these tests can be obtained from the authors).

*Table 1: Discriminant validity of degree of information collection*

	Amount of Information from partner	Amount of information from other sources
Representative about market	.917	
Representative about partner	.813	
Other sources about market		.873
Other sources about partner		.805

*Reliability:* The reflective constructs trust and performance all show a satisfactory reliability. The results are provided in table 2.

*Table 2: Reliability and descriptive data*

	Number of items	Alpha	n	Mean	Standard deviation
Amount Information from partner	2	na	250	3.7	1.1
Amount Information from other sources	2	na	256	2.7	1.1
Trust	5	.73	250	4.0	0.8
Performance	5	.78	285	3.8	0.8
Long-run ties	1	na	244	8.6	9.3

*Discriminant validity:* Discriminant validity of the constructs deals with the extent to which the constructs are different from each other, and thus non-redundant. Table 3 provides the results, and none of the constructs are highly correlated, and thus discriminant validity can be claimed to be satisfactory.

Table 3: Correlation matrix of the constructs

	Performance	Trust	Information from representative	Information from other sources	# years
Performance	1.000				
Trust	.127	1.000			
Information from representative	.152*	.278*	1.000		
Information from other sources	.047	-.237*	-.352*	1.000	
# years	-.004	.147	.112	-.103	1.000

\* significant at the 0.01 level (one-tailed)

*Test of hypotheses:* Since the test of convergent and discriminant validity above were satisfactory the conceptual model can be tested. We tested the five hypotheses outlined earlier by using regression analysis. First we tested the effect of trust on the two sources of information. Then we tested the effect of both sources of information on performance. Tests of the moderating effect of relationship length were also conducted. The results are listed in table 4 through 7.

Table 4: Regression analysis for the effect of trust on exporters information collecting and performance

	Amount of information from representative	Amount of information from other sources	Performance
Trust in representative	0.28 <sup>a</sup> (4.58) <sup>b</sup>	- .24 (- 3.79)	.12 (1.80)
Amount of information from representative			.21 (3.01)
Amount of information from other sources			.12 (1.72)
R <sup>2</sup>	.08	.06	.06
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.07	.05	.05
F-ratio	20.49	14.39	5.20
dfn, dfd	1, 244	1, 242	3, 239

<sup>a</sup> : Standarized regression coefficients, <sup>b</sup> :T-values > 1.282 are significant p < 0.10, T-values > 1.645 are significant p < 0.05, T-values > 2.326 are significant p < 0.01 (one-tailed test).

According to the results in table 4, H1 is supported. More trust in the partner leads the exporter to collect more information from the partner (beta = .28, p < 0.01) and less information from other sources (beta = - .24, p < 0.01).

Furthermore, the figures indicate that amount of information from the representative (beta = .21, p < 0.01) and from other sources (beta = .12, p < 0.05) has a positive and unique influence on exporter performance. Hypotheses 2a and 2b are therefore confirmed. The effect of trust as a control variable on performance is also significant (beta = .12, p < 0.05).

Table 5 indicates that relationship length has a moderating effect. Amount of information from partner has a stronger effect on performance in relationships that has lasted less than five years (beta = .31, p < 0.01) than in mature relationships (beta = .18, p < 0.05). Hence, H3a is supported.

Hypothesis 3b is also supported. The effect of amount of information from other sources on performance is higher in relationships that have lasted longer than five years (beta = .25, p < 0.01) and insignificant for relationships that have lasted less than five years (beta = .02, NS).

**Table 5: Regression analysis tests of the moderating effects of relationship duration**

	Relationship Length	
	Longer that 5 years	Less than 5 years
Amount of information from partner	.18 <sup>a</sup> (1.93) <sup>b</sup>	.31 (3.19)
Amount of information from other sources	.25 (2.67)	.02 (0.16)
R <sup>2</sup>	.07	.09
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.05	.08
F-ratio	4.23	5.95
dfn, dfd	(2, 115)	(2, 116)

<sup>a</sup> : Standardized regression coefficients <sup>b</sup> : T-values > 1.296 are significant p < 0.10, T-values > 1.671 are significant p < 0.05, T-values > 2.39 are significant p < 0.01 (one-tailed test).

## 6. Discussion and Implications

The analysis shows that information behavior is affected by exporter trust in its partner and that information plays a role – albeit limited – in explaining export performance. The low explained variance is not surprising given other factors (strategy and environment) having a far greater direct influence on performance. Also it is conceivable that relationship length exerts a greater *direct* and positive influence on performance than through information collection. However, the main thrust of this article is to analyse the role of trust on information behavior thereby supplementing all three strings of literature - interorganisational relations, internationalisation and market orientation literature - with more nuances concerning the importance of the *source* of information.

An important implication of these findings is that information - although the explained variance is limited – correlates positively and significantly with performance. In other words it pays off to collect information, both from the partner and from other sources. The greater importance of information from the partner may be “economic” in the sense that the exporter generally has



limited resources and that “it is not necessary” to get information from alternative sources as long as the partner is trustworthy and knowledgeable. On the other hand, using information from other sources enhances export performance. Therefore exporters should consider complementary information even in cases of good relationships with their partners.

The data also suggest that trust in mature relationships may be hazardous. We found that information collected from other sources has greater impact ( $\beta=0.25$ ) on performance in long lasting relations than information from the partner ( $\beta=0.18$ ). On the other hand we found that trust correlated negatively with search through this source of information ( $\beta=-0.24$ ). One may therefore presume that too much trust leads the exporter to rely solely on information from the representative and that – as a result – it will be subject to opportunistic behaviour by the latter. The control element that is embedded in “other sources” seems to be particularly important in situations where the exporter trusts the partner. Also, there is a risk that the exporter is getting myopically entrenched in a particular network, with its own paradigms and explanations of market developments, that in the long run – because of the compounded effect of limited resources and a trusting (and complacent?) atmosphere – divert the exporter from seeking other sources of information. Our findings suggest that firms that actively use alternative information seem to be more apt to meet changing market environments.

Whereas the length of the relationship seems to be a critical moderating factor, we have not examined whether length of presence in the market (as the exporter may have switched partner over the years) has some moderating impact on the role of different information sources. The effect of experience in the market (and not only with the representative) should be the object of a follow up study. Furthermore, the information constructs used in this research should be supplemented with other measures such as satisfaction to see if they behave in the same way. Also, we have earlier in this paper argued that control information (on the partner and its activities) differs from market information (about general market conditions). The two load together in the present factor analysis. However, theoretically the two concepts are distinct and – given the appropriate operationalisation – should be analysed separately.

## **7. Conclusions**

Our analysis confirms that trust in the export partner seems to play an important role in the choice of information source used by the exporter. The more the exporter trusts its partner the more it will rely on the latter to collect market information. In the same vein, the less it trusts its partner the

more information will be sought from other sources. The data also suggest that information from partners has a greater effect on performance (beta=0.21) than information from other sources (beta=0.12). However, the length of the relationship moderates the effects of information collection on performance: the longer the relationship the greater the effect of information from “other” sources on performance.

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**Market information and the role of networks in  
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## **Abstract**

Market information is a major problem in international markets, particularly for small firms and newcomers (Seringhaus and Rosson 1990). This paper discusses two main sources of international market information: objective market research and information provided through network relations. It is posited – in line with sociological economists (Granovetter 1973 and 1985 and Burt 1992) - that this latter source of information in many cases is more reliable and useful than research provided through market research. This stance is however contingent on the quality of the network and the skills of the firm in carrying out or commissioning marketing research. A typology of four different kinds of firms is developed and discussed, based on the two dimensions. The four categories are: the small beginner, the established beginner, the network-oriented firm, the international firm.

## Introduction

Sound marketing decision-making requires information on a range of subjects such as technology, costs of operations, customers, competitors, regulations etc. This information reduces the uncertainty under which decisions are made. For firms operating in international markets – with increased number of unknown factors – the level of uncertainty is normally higher and the subsequent need for information greater than in the domestic market. Yet, exporters' market research seems to be much more subjective and less precise than research in domestic markets (Cavusgil 1985). This paper endeavours to cast light on the role of different kinds of market information to firms operating in international markets. In particular, it will explore "objective" market research as a source of information as opposed to market information acquired through networks, termed "market intelligence" by Diamantopoulos and Souchon (1999).

We will in the following section describe the model in more detail. Marketing research is seen as a key discipline in marketing and any curriculum in marketing includes a compulsory course in marketing research. In spite of this, and in spite of the increased uncertainty in international market environments, exporters seem to exhibit a rather "tepid" stance to systematically gathering information from foreign markets, let alone carrying out marketing research (Diamantopoulos et al, 1990, Schlegelmilch et al, 1993). Drawing on literature on incremental internationalisation (Johanson and Vahlne 1977 and 1990, Bilkey and Tesar 1978, Cavusgil 1984) two explanations may be offered: 1) exporters, and in particular newcomers to foreign markets, generally lack the resources necessary to carry out market research of any magnitude (Douglas and Craig 1983); 2) exporters also lack the necessary insight into relevant local marketing issues, making it challenging for export management to define the *real* need for information to make sound decisions. It is maintained in this paper that the lack of research by exporters does not necessarily harm their export development and that the insistence by academicians and consultants that market research should be obligatory before entering any new market is not only exaggerated, but it may in some instances also be counter-productive.

The paper will after a brief literature review, develop a model and discuss implications for research.

### **Literature review**

Market oriented firms achieve supposedly better performance than firms that are not, and collection of market information is a key variable in explaining market orientation of the firm (Kohli and Jaworski 1990, Narver and Slater 1990). Therefore it is important to study the processes to acquire market information. Moorman (1995) discusses different aspects of market information processes, suggesting that they take place at the individual level and organisational level. However, she fails to introduce the inter-organisational level of information processes, which is the hallmark of this paper. She also divides the information process into four distinct phases: acquisition, transmission, utilisation and implementation. Nonetheless, the perhaps most important phase in any market information gathering project, problem definition, was left out in her discussion. We believe that neglecting this important phase of the marketing research project will lead us to overlook a major issue in *international* marketing research: the emic (culture specific) vs etic (pan-cultural) approach in research (Douglas and Craig 1983). As a result, inexperienced firms in international markets risk to end up with ill-defined projects when they are confronted with new and unknown marketing situations.

A number of authors discuss information behaviour of exporters. Diamantopoulos and Souchon (1999) identify three sources of export market information: market research, export assistance and market intelligence and develop and test measures of these information sources in relation to the use of information (conceptual/instrumental and symbolic use). Hart, Webb and Jones (1994) divide international market information into three categories: 1) Market feasibility information; 2) Adaptation information and 3) Country background information. They find that the use of international market research is "rather marginal". Benito, Solberg and Welch (1993) discuss four categories of market information according to degree of formality and use (ad hoc decisions or continual surveillance). They found in a survey of Norwegian exporters that informal information gathering prevail and that formal market intelligence systems are rather rarely established. Based on the same data, it has been found that the more the firm is knowledgeable about international markets, the more it appears to seek market information (Solberg and Andersen 1991). Furthermore, Benito et al (1993) observe that information from customers and partners and sales subsidiaries by far outweigh any other sources, and that use of consultants (market research) and export assistance relatively seldom are used by exporters. The larger the firm, the more formal the information gathering procedures, and the more export dependent the more the firms tend to use internal sources. McAuly (1990) found that experienced exporters tended to concentrate their information gathering activities on relatively fewer sources than newcomers,

the explanation being that “it takes time to identify and screen those sources which are most relevant and useful” (p. 60).

Also type of business seems to play a role. In a study of market orientation in Norwegian shipping companies Solberg (1988) found that only four out of 22 companies used marketing research, all of them being in the cruise or liner business. The remainder, generally in tanker, bulk or car shipping only occasionally or not at all resorted to market research, suggesting that (international) market research is a function of industry. In the bulk markets (such as tanker shipping for instance) or in industrial markets with a limited number of players (such as car shipping), the need for “objective market research” is marginal. Two different explanations may be offered: In the first case – given the relatively atomistic structure of that market - most of the information is embedded in the price; in the second case – a market characterised by close relationships between buyers and sellers – information is to a larger extent gathered through the network.

In a survey of US multinationals, Keegan (1974) found that the lion’s share of the information gathered from international markets is based on person-to-person informal sources. The study highlights the relatively modest role of documentary information such as publications, information services, reports and letters. None of the managers in that survey used any form of formal system for monitoring published information, the result of which was duplication and redundant monitoring within the same organisation. Also, the respondents were divided concerning their interest in such a system. One may conclude from the survey that formal information gathering from foreign markets is seldom being implemented in US multinationals.

Concerning the role of marketing research as such, it has been alleged that managers and market analysts represent two distinct “worlds” or communities (Deshpandé and Zaltman 1982 and 1984), the former seeing themselves as businessmen and the latter as scientists, each with separate norms and languages. For instance Martilla and Carvey (1975) note that problems arise because words have different meanings in the two groups. Terms such as “correlation”, “significance”, “standard deviation” and “variance” are probably present only as faint reminiscences from their statistics classes years back in the minds of managers, whereas they for researchers have distinct meanings. The result of this divergence between the two “camps” is often mutual mistrust between them (Caplan, Morrison and Stambaugh 1975), which in turn may lead to underutilisation of both market research as such and – if carried out – its results. It could also lead to “a clash of professional values as to how much research is needed and to what

degree it should replace or complement managerial intuition” (Desphandé and Zaltman 1984, p. 33).

In fact the inclination of managers to trust their intuition rather than relying on “hard facts” extracted from market research is often observed. This intuition is generally based on long experience in operating in the market, discussing with their peers in the industry and their own observation of effects of their decisions and ability to implement them. If carried out, market research is often used symbolically to justify decisions already made (Diamantopoulos and Souchon 1999). The role of interaction between the two communities has been confirmed by Deshpandé and Zaltman (1984). This factor plays a major part in explaining the use of market research in firms, followed by political acceptability of the results. In other words, if managers like what they see, then they will use the results; if not, well .....

Hart and Diamantopoulos (1993) investigated performance effects of international market research among British manufacturing firms, finding at the outset no correlation between extent of use of market research – both in house and commissioned - and company performance. Contrary to their expectations they did not find any difference between large and small firms in this respect. Nor did they find any difference between high and low performers concerning type of information and source of information. It is worth while noting that it is not necessarily the market research activity as such that counts, rather “the crucial question is *how good* is the information and *how effectively* it is used” (Hart and Diamantopoulos 1993, p. 68). This is in line with Cooper (1988) and Hill (1990) who – in a product development setting (in many respects akin to a market development, ie. export, setting) – found that market research as such was not a significant discriminator between successful and failed product launches; however, the quality of its execution was.

Gripsrud, Solberg and Ulvnes (2000) found in a survey of firms in the Norwegian food and forest-based industry that exporter trust in foreign channel partner significantly impacts on use of sources: the higher the trust, the more the exporter relies on the partner to be informed about local market conditions. They also note that different sources of information contribute differently to the ability of exporters to develop viable strategies (measured as export performance), depending on the length of relationship with the partner. Unpublished data from the same study reveal that commissioned market research correlates *negatively* and significantly with export performance in cases of firms with limited relations with their foreign channel partner, and *positively* and significantly when relations between exporters and their partners have lasted longer than five years. One possible

explanation to this pattern may be sought in the ability of the exporter to define research issues relevant to each local market situation. One may contend that the longer experience in the market, the more capable the exporter is to comprehend the details in the market and to commission relevant research. The data also suggest that resources explain the use of commissioned market research: the larger the firm (in terms of sales volume) the more its use of market research.

Thus, two factors seem to impact on information behaviour of exporters: their resources (in terms of size and management capabilities) and their trust in their local representative. Such trust may be institutional either through explicit and/or implicit contracts or arrangements (Granovetter 1985), or through institutions external to the partners such as legislation (Zucker 1986). Trust may also be gained through long-term relationships (Morgan and Hunt 1994, Håkanson and Snehota 1995).

Rangan (1998), discussing information behaviour, introduces the cost of search and deliberation, arguing that firms relying on their networks are better equipped to identify business opportunities than firms relying on “objective” market research only. Referring to Granovetter (1973) he maintains (p. 6) that “[s]uch networks can aid efficient and successful search because they are more likely to interconnect actors with non-redundant and pertinent information. ...in reality, networks offer a cost-effective way of enhancing the probability of uncovering at least some of the relevant but latent economic opportunities out there”. In the same vein Burt (1992) states that:

“There are limits to the volume of information you can use intelligently. You can keep up with only so many books, articles, memos, and news services. Given a limit to the volume of information that anyone can process, the network becomes an important *screening* device. It is an army of people processing information who can call your attention to key bits – keeping you up to date on developing opportunities, warning you of impending disasters. This second-hand information is often fuzzy or inaccurate, but it serves to signal something to be looked into more carefully” (p. 62, emphasis added).

The main argument is that information search is made possible and economical through social and professional networks, and the commitment and trust inherent in such networks ensures the reliability of the information provided. Networks are defined by Thorelli (1994) as “links involving economic performance, technology transfer, diffusion of know-how and expertise, and forging or exploitation of trust and the flow of legitimacy” (p.

447). Discussing trusted informants (through social networks) with whom one has previous business experience, Rangan (1998) cites Granovetter (1985, p. 490) stating that:

“This is better information for four reasons: (1) it is cheap; (2) one trusts one’s own information best -- it is richer, more detailed and known to be accurate; (3) individuals with whom one has a continuing relation have an economic motivation to be trustworthy; and (4) departing from pure economic motives, continuing economic relations often become overlaid with social content that carries strong expectations of trust and abstention from opportunism”.

Conversely, extending on Rangan (1998) one may assert that independent market research involving definition, identification, gathering, assessment and distribution of information - in the absence of social networks as is often the case of international marketing - is not only more costly, but also associated with more uncertainty than recurring to the information embedded in social networks. As a consequence, firms with managers that actively use their networks in order to get information or verify it may experience lower information costs and/or superior information quality than firms without such networks.

Newcomers to international markets without any history with their partners must however recur to “institutional trust” (Zucker 1989) or make use of an extended network stretching it beyond the immediate range of their relations. One may expect the links to the extended network members to give reliable information because of the embedded nature of the network relations. According to Granovetter (1985) it is too costly for any member to engage in malfeasance and opportunism because cheating will damage one’s reputation. He observes that close-knit communities of traders “generate clearly defined standards of behaviour easily policed by the quick spread of information about instances of malfeasance” (p. 492). Therefore it seems critical for exporters new to a market to get an inroad into extended networks where they can access trusted information. It is here relevant to draw on Granovetter’s (1973, 1982) and others’ discussion on the strength of different ties. Granovetter (1973, p. 1361) assert that: “the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding) and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie”. Baker (1992, p. 400) uses the terms “thick “ and “thin” networks depending on the following factors: task related communication, informal socializing, advice-giving and advice-taking, promotion decisions etc.

We may in this context distinguish different levels of network relations:

Primary networks relations where the player is directly dependent on its network partners (ie. direct supplier or customer, intermediary etc).

Secondary network relations where the player is indirectly dependent on its network partners (ie. subcontractor to the suppliers or customer's customer). Indirect network relations are accessed through direct relations, described by Burt as "ports of access to clusters of people beyond" (p. 69).

Tertiary relationships where no immediate dependence is observed, but where actors through linkage to their primary or secondary networks may be in a position to offer information or a mediating role (for instance suggesting a potential partner in an unexplored market). Examples are here trade associations, rotary or sport clubs, alumni associations, ethnic diasporas etc. We believe it is particularly this latter extended network that is relevant for newcomers to foreign markets.

Through the referencing mechanisms built in the institutional arrangements embedded in such networks it is possible to access critical information even through tertiary network relations. We may say with (Granovetter 1985, p. 489) that "[i]nstitutional arrangements do not produce trust but instead are functional substitutes for it". Thus exporters new to a market may make shortcuts to information without having to incur large outlays in form of for example commissioned market research. Also, Johanson and Mattson (1988) suggest that "if the suppliers, customers and competitors of the firm are international even the purely domestic firm has a number of indirect relations with foreign networks. Relationships in the domestic market may be driving forces to enter foreign markets. The firm can be 'pulled out' by customers or suppliers... the (international) extension pattern will be partly explained by the international character of indirect relations" (p. 302).

Finally Granovetter's (1973 and 1982) concept of the strength of weak ties should be discussed. Weak ties may be in the present context defined as relations with firms or individuals that are nurtured at least once a year (Granovetter 1973), and that constitute alternative and correctional viewpoints to the information acquired through strong ties (with for instance primary relations as noted above). We believe that many of the tertiary relationships are to be considered as weak ties, constituting an interesting, supplementary source of information to exporters. Through weak ties - the exporter may access information giving alternative perspectives on the issues at hand. The task of the exporter is then to "economize" with its management time to build a structure of network relations that are non-



redundant (Burt 1992), enhancing the richness of information available to exporters. Such networks should include both strong and weak ties, or in the above taxonomy primary, secondary and tertiary relations.

### Model development and propositions

Based on this brief review we suggest a typology of exporters and discuss key features concerning their information behaviour and strategy development. Figure 1 gives a rough idea of the main characteristics of the different categories

<i>“Objective” market research</i>	Extensive	<i><b>The established beginner</b></i>  Nationally oriented firms that need info for their first steps abroad. Risk to make “good” research on irrelevant issues.	<i><b>The international firm</b></i>  Large internationally oriented firms. Well developed market intelligence systems.
	Limited	<i><b>The small beginner</b></i>  No experience and network. Risk to make poor marketing decisions, based on intuition and hearsay.	<i><b>The network oriented firm</b></i>  Ethnic or special trades firms basing their decisions on info from trusted networks.
		Undeveloped	Well developed
<i>Information through network relations</i>			

Figure 1: Typology of exporter information behaviour

First, the two dimensions, “Objective market research” and “Information through network relations”, need to be defined. Although conceptually different, it is not easy to do a clear-cut distinction between the two when attempting to operationalise the constructs. One possible differentiation may be found in Benito et al (1993) in which they distinguish formal versus informal, and ad hoc versus continuous information gathering. We have seen that most information about international markets is gathered informally on a person – to – person basis (Keegan 1974, Benito et al 1993). At the same time different information gathering methods – such as dedicated research and informal conversations with network members - may occur concurrently in the same project (for instance evaluating entry modes and partners in a

country). Hence, it may be difficult for management (when asked in a research project) to differentiate between the two. The essence in the present context is to discern between, on one hand, market research as projects where a clear problem definition sets the need for information and where data often is gathered by external market research consultants and, on the other hand, the different sources informally accessed through different network members in order to gather information, both in general and on specific market conditions. Figure 1 features the two dimensions and four different categories of information behaviour of exporters. The next sections will describe each of the four categories in some detail.

### **The small beginner**

In this cell we find firms with limited resources deterring them from engaging in marketing research to identify business opportunities abroad (Douglas and Craig 1983, Seringhaus and Rosson 1990). Resources in this context must be understood broadly: both financial resources (or willingness to pay consultants for market research) and managerial ability to define and carry out marketing research in foreign markets, either themselves or through consultants. These companies also lack the necessary primary or secondary network relations that potentially could help them to uncover foreign market opportunities. Tertiary relations, through trade associations, rotary clubs or the like, could potentially make the link to foreign market opportunities. The first steps to internationalise will in any case be hesitant, with lack of information, scant network often established coincidentally (Johanson and Vahlne 1977, Wiedersheim-Paul and Welch 1979). The unsolicited order (Wiedersheim-Paul and Welch 1979) may play the role of the emerging network, which slowly will build around the activities of the exporter. Export assistance (Diamantopoulos and Souchon 1999) may also play a part in this phase, inviting the exporter to tie up with networks otherwise inaccessible to the exporter and providing it with meaningful information. The ability of the exporter to capitalise on these resources (networks and information) may vary with its management orientation (for instance entrepreneurial, market oriented or bureaucratic, cf. Selnes and Hårvik 1991). The case of the Norwegian furniture manufacturer, Stompa Møbler, could be a case in point: the managing director of this firm explicitly told an audience that he did not believe in market research! It was too costly, it did not tell him anything that he did not know, and it was using a language that deterred his firm from reading it. His first involvement in international market back in the 1970s was a “reluctant contract” with a French mail order distributor whom he met at a Trade Fair in Copenhagen. This firm had since gradually “climbed the internationalisation ladder” and has developed a good market position in countries like UK and Germany.

**The established beginner**

These firms have a good market position at home, and have for various reasons (globalisation, increased competition, technological advances etc) decided to expand internationally. Since their foreign network is limited – given their domestic orientation – they need to recur to market research to uncover market opportunities abroad. Often they have decided on what country to enter without any deep investigation, and the research carried out is mainly concerned with identifying a local representative.

Given their leadership position in their domestic market, these firms have often a qualified staff of middle managers and analysts that could engage in market research, either on their own or through externally commissioned research projects. However, according to Diamantopoulos et al (1990) and Schlegelmilch et al (1993) only one in two exporters conducts any form of marketing research, and even fewer engage external consultants to do so. Also, their domestic leadership position may make these firms believe that they are “invincible” and that they can transfer their successful domestic marketing practices to other countries. David Ricks’ (1983) “Big Business Blunders” gives a good account of ill-defined international marketing projects carried out by well-known market leaders. The reason for many of these flaws lies primarily in faulty marketing research, underestimating local idiosyncracies in the problem definition phase of the research project (cfr the emic approach, Douglas and Craig 1983). Network relations, although not the universal remedy to this situation, could potentially give direction to the research. Obviously, focus groups in the initial phases are one other way of achieving relevance to the research (Douglas and Craig 1983).

Firms in this cell may have well developed domestic networks, and may be skilful in monitoring and controlling their local domestic marketing activities. However, entering new markets, these attributes fall short of relevance. A case in point may be the Norwegian fast moving consumer goods supplier Stabburet who when entering the US market with its crispbread totally failed: they believed that the states in the US Midwest richly populated with Scandinavian descendents would embrace a traditional dish from the “old motherland”. They did some research, but not on the issues that really counted: the marketability of the proposed concept to its suggested target audience. Only after “going by the textbook” – using focus groups to develop an adapted concept - the venture started to show results (Solberg 1999).

**The network firm**

This group of firms consists of a variety of different kinds of trades, anything from suppliers to ethnic shop-keepers who buy from their country

of origin, to diamond traders. In Norway, the domicile of the author, both the shipping and the fishing industries have a large percentage of players who fall into this category. These are the trades where million dollar deals can be sealed over the telephone and where trust is a hallmark of the relationships between business partners. The reliability of the information provided through this network is ascertained by the transparency of the network and the need for all members to maintain their good reputation (Granovetter 1985). Contrary to the assumption by neoclassic economists, Uzzi (1997) in his study of New York textile manufacturers' network found that embedded relationships indeed are rational through positive effects like trust, fine grained information transfer and joint problem solving arrangements. He asserts that: "embeddedness creates economic opportunities that are difficult to replicate via markets, contracts, or vertical integration." (p. 37). He also shows how trust promotes access to "privileged and difficult to price resources that enhance competitiveness but are difficult to exchange in arm's length ties" (p. 43). Based on this train of thought we will assert that firms with limited resources, and that trade through trusted network members, both directly and indirectly access information that is embedded in the network. This information is not necessarily explicit, rather the trust embedded in the network relations may act as a proxy to unpronounced market information. The cost of checking the reliability of the information thus provided has to be traded off against the risks of not collecting additional information (Stigler 1968).

The downside of close relationship with one's network partners is the risk of being entangled in relations that represent technologies / organizational solutions that become obsolete. For smaller firms this risk is possibly higher as they have limited resources to develop alternative sources of information, or in the words of Granovetter (1973) to develop weak ties. The relatively higher uncertainty of export markets calls for personal relationships based on trust opening up for the risk of getting locked in with a partner that lacks relevant knowledge to develop the market further for the exporter. The main information problem with trusting a partner is that "... all links between the customer and supplier activities make it more difficult for both parties to establish alternative links and ties as the companies becomes embedded into specific others" (c.f. Håkansson and Snehota 2000, p. 81). The more a firm is engrained in a network, and the more this network represents a set of beliefs or a paradigm that are challenged by the development in competing networks, the more the firm risks to lose out in the future.

A special case of network relationships is represented by the diaspora of ethnic networks. The best examples may be found among Jewish tradesmen who for centuries have been spread out in almost any corner of the world.

Migrations of Pakistanis, Chinese, Turks and Indians have during the last half of 20<sup>th</sup> century also opened up new trading routes. It has for example been maintained that a large part of the Chinese trade surplus with the USA is due to the Chinese diaspora on the US West coast (Kotkin 1992). The underlying hypothesis is that the cultural closeness and the built-in loyalty and trust to people of the same ethnicity reduce the uncertainty normally surrounding business transactions and that it is easier to build relations based on this kind of common denominator. For a French it is easier to develop business relations with another French domiciled in Egypt, than with an Egyptian. A case in point may be the Norwegian fish trader who wanted to expand in East Europe. Through friends in Norway he got in contact with a Norwegian businessman married to a Romanian woman and settled in Bucaresti. His local compatriot carried out some investigation and made the link for him with Romanian importers. He visited the market and selected his local representative in Romania who eventually appeared to be a reliable and invaluable a business partner.

#### **The international firm**

Firms in this cell have developed dense international business network relations and carry out international market research, both to acquire information about new opportunities and to control their on-going business operations. These firms are supposedly (large) multinationals. They will *per force* need to control a variety of aspects of their international marketing activities: competitors, customer satisfaction and loyalty, sales people attitudes at the distributor level, buyer preferences, brand strength etc. and need to recur to dedicated market research in order to unveil potential opportunities and flaws in their operations. Some of this information will supposedly be readily transferred through informal discussions with network members. Schlegelmich et al (1993) found a positive relationship between effectiveness of international promotion and use of international market research but not with other marketing mix elements. They also found that international sales ratio and number of markets served is positively linked to export market research. On this background we suggest that this research in the main is carried out by large, multinational firms in order to provide them with information relevant to develop, control and monitor the promotional activities of the firm. Also, the setting up of a comprehensive and formal market intelligence system including both ad hoc market analysis and continuous market surveillance is expected to be observed in this group of firms (Benito et al 1993), possibly along the lines suggested by Kotler (1994) consisting of marketing intelligence, marketing research, internal records and marketing decision support systems. Kotler (1994) describes in this context Hewlett-Packard's Market Research and Information Center with some 30 professionals, also using outside research supplier partners,

and carrying out a number of different tasks. These consist of providing background information on industries, markets and competition and carrying out in-house ad hoc research both centrally and locally in order to identify opportunities, test proposals and track results. However, even though he illustrates how a marketing information system may be set up, Kotler's (1994) description is limited to the internal *supply* of information services, and not how different levels and functions inside HP's organisation take part in the dissemination and usage of the information. This is the hallmark of Kohli and Jaworski (1990) and Narver and Slater (1990) in their analyses of market oriented firms.

### Conclusions

This paper has discussed two main sources of information for decisions in international markets, one based on objective market research, the other on information provided through networks. It may shine through that the latter source is preferred by this author. However, such a conclusion would be quite remarkable coming from a marketing scholar. Rather the conclusion is that the usefulness of marketing research is contingent on the ability of the firm to 1) define the issues to be researched properly and 2) its skills in carrying out the research and use its results as such. It has been alleged in this paper that the first contingency may in part hinge on the firm's network in international markets. Another point made is that firms without any satisfactory network tying it up with international markets, and with limited skills in market research will have great problems in getting properly started on their internationalisation process. It may rather happen in a fortuitous way (Wiedersheim Paul and Welch 1979) and *may* be positive for the firm if – given appropriate advice by for instance governmental export promotion agencies - it is fortunate enough to find the right partner in its first export endeavour.

#### **A number of research questions may flow from this model:**

How do firms in the different cells of the model make decisions? For instance, will the small export beginner make more short cuts to export marketing decisions (given limited information base) than firms in the other cells, or will they more actively than other firms seek advice from external export promotion agencies? To what extent does "information shortcutting" lead them into ill-defined strategies?

1. Is there a particular pattern of development toward the upper right cell?

2. What network relations – primary, secondary or tertiary - are most frequently used by firms in the four different cells? Does the effect on the firms' ability to make sound export decision vary with the three different kinds of network?
3. Given that information leads to successful exporting (Gripsrud et al 2000), are firms in the “international firm” cell more successful than those in the other cells? And are firms in the “small beginner” cell the least successful?
4. Do firms in the network-oriented cell operate in industries that are more stable and more foreseeable, reducing the need to supplement information provided through the network in order to get “second opinions”?
5. Do international network relations enhance exporters' ability to properly define international market research projects? To what extent do firms use focus groups when they enter new and unknown international markets?

As far as we know, these research questions remain unanswered and open the up a plethora of new research to be engaged in concerning international information behaviour of firms.

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