

Business motivation and informational needs in internationalization

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Abstract We focus on an analysis of entrepreneurs' motivation in business internationalization. Following on from the *Regulatory Focus Theory*, two differing approaches emerge: promotion (PMF) and prevention (PVF). PMF entrepreneurs approach internationalization spurred by their own motivation as opposed to PVF entrepreneurs who engage in internationalization motivated by the competitive environment. We propose that entrepreneurs' motivational orientation depends on their prior international experience relating to business internationalization. Moreover, an internationalization strategy requires information regarding markets, barriers and support programmes. Entrepreneurs' motivational orientation also impacts their informational concerns and alertness to informative stimuli. For the empirical application, we assess the opinions of entrepreneurs working in the Spanish natural stone sector. Findings reveal that entrepreneurs' motivational orientation with regard to international opportunities changes as they gain experience, which at the same time alters their alertness and their informational concerns.

Keywords Alertness · Opportunities · Motivation · International expansion · Regulatory focus theory

Introduction

Business internationalization, or engaging in a business activity in overseas markets (either through exporting or direct investment), involves pinpointing and exploiting fresh business opportunities in a new milieu (Ripollés-Meliá et al. 2007). Firms see

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and interpret competitive environments through the eyes of their managers (Weick 1979), how the latter perceive such a competitive environment and the opportunities to emerge therein thus proving crucial to account for the way such international opportunities are taken advantage of. Research into business internationalization has therefore shifted from exploring the competitive factors which drive business internationalization and the impact of such factors at an economic level to now focus on the influence of the entrepreneur in the internationalization process (Oviatt and McDougall 1994; Zahra and George 2002; Hirsch et al. 1996). This has given rise to a field of enquiry that known as international entrepreneurship (IE). Said field merges investigation into entrepreneurship, perceived as the process of organising, operating, and assuming the risk for a business venture, and the analysis of “international business” (Ruzzier et al. 2006; Oviatt and McDougall 2005; Zahra et al. 2005). IE thus explores the process of creatively discovering and exploiting opportunities that lie outside a firm’s domestic markets in the pursuit of competitive advantage (Zahra and George 2002: 261; Acedo and Casillas 2007).

One current issue which is the focus of IE research is why some individuals exploit international opportunities while others equally well placed do not (Zahra et al. 2005). Cognitive approach has explored why certain entrepreneurs are able to identify and exploit opportunities whilst others are not. Research findings conclude that holding relevant information, entrepreneurs’ cognitive ability to recognise such information and their entrepreneurial spirit (innovation, inclination to risk and proactivity) emerge as defining elements (Shane and Venkataraman 2000). In a similar vein, research has attempted to account for why, when entrepreneurs share a common competitive space, some will embark upon international expansion whereas others are reluctant to do so. In this respect, research has sought to explain how certain variables linked to entrepreneurs’ attitude and cognitive profile impact the onset or development of a business internationalization strategy (see Acedo and Casillas 2007). However, the literature has neglected any exploration of entrepreneurs’ motivation in internationalization strategy. Business internationalization may thus at times be linked to entrepreneurs’ preferences, whilst at others it may constitute an alternative to hostile domestic market conditions (Zahra et al. 2005). This leads us to focus on analysing entrepreneurs’ motivation in the process of international expansion. Specifically, we draw on the Regulatory Focus Theory which explores individual motivational trends and in particular two alternatives: promotion vs. prevention. Promotion orientation is linked to behaviour aimed at achieving success and prevention orientation to behaviour which seeks safety and fulfilment of professional obligations. Promotion orientation is furthered by success, whereas prevention is reinforced by experiencing failure. As a result, we feel that entrepreneurs’ motivational orientation linked to international expansion will be shaped by their prior experiences or by how they gauge the international expansion of firms operating in their environment.

Developing an internationalization strategy also involves considering information related to other aspects: current as well as potential future growth of overseas markets, market size, issues regarding export procedure and techniques, overseas investment, as well as support offered by various bodies for promoting internationalization. However, such information is not available equally to all entrepreneurs. It has been evidenced that many of the problems to emerge in business internation-

alization are due to entrepreneurial decision makers being unaware of information and its sources (Katsikeas and Morgan 1994). If information is to prove useful, being available is not enough; it must also be recognised by the entrepreneur. In this respect, the literature points out that entrepreneurs' cognitive skills, as well as their interests and preferences, play a determining role in individual recognition of informative stimuli (Nadkarni and Barr 2008). Entrepreneurs' motivation vis-à-vis internationalization is thus seen to shape their informational interest and the effort they are willing to make to gather such information.

In our research, we focus on an analysis of entrepreneurs' motivation with regard to international expansion. Specifically, we explore whether prior experience impacts entrepreneurs' motivation and how their motivation impacts their informational attention. To conduct our study, we structure the research into various sections. Following on from the "Introduction" section, the "International opportunities: Motivation and informational needs" section provides a review of the most relevant literature addressing international opportunities, entrepreneurial motivation and information needs. We also explore how motivation affects the interest shown by entrepreneurs towards information. In the "Empirical application" section, we posit the empirical application and offer the findings. The empirical study is carried out based on a questionnaire conducted amongst entrepreneurs in the Spanish natural stone industry. The work closes by offering the main conclusions to emerge from the research.

International opportunities: Motivation and informational needs

International opportunities identification

International business expansion is linked to entrepreneurs' identifying opportunities in overseas markets. Yet, when faced with the same competitive environment, some entrepreneurs are able to recognise and exploit the opportunities afforded to them by foreign markets whereas some are not. At this point, the question needs to be asked whether opportunities, in our case opportunities in overseas markets, are either discovered or created.

In certain instances, opportunities are objectively available to all entrepreneurs and simply need to be recognised, whereas in other cases a particular skill is required to see which existing resources may be merged in an innovative fashion in order to make them more valuable (Butler et al. 2010; Vaghely and Julien 2010). Along similar lines, Zahra et al. (2005) state that some opportunities are located and discovered, while others are the result of a process of enactment where the entrepreneur conceives an idea and gives it meaning. Two lines of research thus emerge, one affirming that opportunities exist and that entrepreneurs either see them or do not, and the other highlighting the fact that business opportunities arise due to the deliberate intervention of entrepreneurs (Vaghely and Julien 2010). In the first instance, opportunity recognition is linked to entrepreneurs' willingness and ability to identify information (Shane 2000, 2003; Baron 2004, 2006). It might be said that opportunities are objective but that perceiving them is subjective (Casson 2005). In this regard, research into opportunity identification leads us to the signal detection

theory (Swets 1992). Opportunities are identified through strategic stimuli (signals), in other words, events which contain information concerning in which direction environment will develop (Haukedal 1994). The problem lies in the fact that entrepreneurs are not able to assimilate all strategic stimuli, only a few (Ocasio 1997). One of the entrepreneur's key functions is therefore to focus attention on informative stimuli (Ocasio 1997: 197). In this regard, the literature states that entrepreneurs' alertness (Kirzner 1973) is a key condition for ensuring effective perception of opportunities (Ardichvili et al. 2003; Minniti and Bygrave 2001; Minniti 2004; Dimitratos and Jones 2003). Alertness is linked to an active search for opportunities and to the amount of time and effort entrepreneurs devote to seeking information (Gaglio and Katz 2001; Kaish and Gilad 1991). Alertness thus refers to entrepreneurs scanning, guided by their motivation in the search for opportunities.

In the second instance, it is the deliberate action of the entrepreneurs that gives rise to opportunities (Sarason et al. 2005; Krueger 2000, 2003). As a result, the emergence of opportunities appears to be closely linked to entrepreneurs' motivation. In this case, entrepreneurs construct a reality using information from the environment to create opportunities (Vaghely and Julien 2010). In this vein, Fitzsimmons and Douglas (2011) point out that entrepreneurial action depends on a combination of two forces; the entrepreneur's desire and the perceived feasibility of a new idea. This leads us to distinguish four situations: no entrepreneurial action (low desire and feasibility), natural entrepreneurial action (high feasibility and desirability), accidental entrepreneurial action and inevitable entrepreneurial action. Accidental entrepreneurial action refers to situations of high feasibility and low desirability. This is referred to as accidental or "reluctant debutant" since entrepreneurs are driven towards taking advantage of an opportunity despite a certain lack of desire or motivation. The conclusion in such cases is that the opportunity is stimulated externally (Bhave 1994). Inevitable entrepreneurial action refers to cases in which desirability is high and feasibility is low. The opportunity is then said to be created internally by *the entrepreneur's motivation* (Bhave 1994).

Entrepreneurial motivation

The individual motivation plays a key role, both in recognising as well as creating the opportunity. Firms' motivation for exploiting international opportunities spans a wide range. Certain entrepreneurs embark upon international expansion with the idea of becoming wealthy, others are keen to test the viability of a new idea, whereas some simply wish to break out of the hostile conditions of the domestic market (Zahra et al. 2005).

The need to consider entrepreneurial motivation as a key factor in the exploitation of international opportunities thus emerges. As a reference, we take Higgins' *Regulatory Focus Theory* (RFT; Higgins 1997, 1998). RFT highlights how people strive to bring together their obligations, objectives and motivational trends when attempting to secure their objectives. The theory's states that all individuals seek to procure pleasure and avoid pain, but that there are two means by which this may be achieved. The theory specifically posits two contrasting options: the promotion focus (hereinafter PMF), and the prevention focus (hereinafter PVF). Promotion and prevention differ in the underlying motives which people try to satisfy, the nature of

the objectives they strive to achieve and the kinds of results (Brockner et al. 2004; Baron 2004). PMF individuals are concerned with progress, development and success, and try to shield themselves from errors of omission (Tseng and Kang 2008). Moreover, they display openness to change, strong ideals and a willingness to assume risks. PVF individuals are more concerned with safeguarding, being right when rejecting and avoiding errors of commission. They also display a preference for stability and evidence a strong commitment to obligations. The motivational intensity of promotion individuals is maintained or enhanced by success yet diminishes in the face of failure, in contrast to individuals who display a prevention orientation (Idson et al. 2000). PMF individuals strive to accomplish personal objectives, in other words goals which reflect their hopes, wishes and aspirations, whereas PVF individuals pursue goals which are more closely linked to obligation, duty or professional responsibility (Crowe and Higgins 1997; Brockner and Higgins 2001). Both approaches are required for success in business. A promotion approach is more suited to certain aspects, whereas for others an attitude oriented towards prevention will prove more adequate (Brockner et al. 2004).

Entrepreneurial orientation (promotion or prevention) shapes the firm's position regarding internationalization and international opportunities. We feel that PMF entrepreneurs are likely to evidence a willingness to exploit any opportunities that may appear in overseas markets and will display an active approach in the search for such opportunities. It could be argued that internationalization in this instance corresponds to an inherent motivation within the entrepreneur. Taking the Fitzsimmons and Douglas (2011) classification as a reference, such entrepreneurs would engage in what might be called "inevitable business internationalization". We interpret that entrepreneurs displaying PVF adopt a more cautious stance towards internationalization, and only embark upon such a process when faced with the threat of losses or restrictions in conventional markets, and adopt less risky alternatives. These are entrepreneurs who thus engage in internationalization spurred on by competitive circumstances, in other words guided by external motivation. Following the proposal of Fitzsimmons and Douglas (2011), the strategy of such entrepreneurs might be termed "accidental business internationalization" since they are pushed into internationalization by the competitive conditions surrounding them.

Individuals differ in their predisposition towards promotion/prevention for a variety of reasons (Higgins and Silberman 1998). The literature specifically states that such an orientation depends on dispositional and situational factors (Baron 2004; Brockner et al. 2004). In other words, entrepreneurs' orientation may vary when faced with contrasting situations (Lieberman et al. 1999). An orientation toward internationalization may not necessarily concur with an orientation toward innovation. The impact of the individual's own personal history of success in this context has also been underlined (Crowe and Higgins 1997). Promotion orientation is heightened by prior experience of success and triumph whereas past failures intensify prevention orientation.

The entrepreneur's past experience, in this instance in the area of international expansion, is thus seen to shape their orientation in this respect. Put differently, entrepreneurs with a positive prior experience are more likely to display a promotion orientation, whereas those with previous negative experience are more likely to opt for a prevention orientation. However, entrepreneurs not only learn from their own

experience but also draw on that of others. Firms lacking experience tend to fall back on the knowledge and experience of others to justify their own behaviour (Gaba et al. 2002). Such a spread of knowledge may come about as a result of interaction amongst entrepreneurs and give rise to the industry as a whole acting as a learning mechanism (Lee and Brasch 1978, Tanny and Derzko 1988). Entrepreneurs operating within the same industry create a series of shared beliefs—industry recipes—which are the result of common perceptions concerning the competitive environment and the impact of messages appearing in the media (Spender 1989; Boyd et al. 1993; Abrahamson and Fombrun 1994; Santos and García 2008). In sum, entrepreneurs seem to possess a kind of “prior international experience” which merges both their own experiences of internationalization as well as their appraisal of other firms’ experiences thereof. Thus, when entrepreneurs have enjoyed positive previous experiences and when they appraise positively other firms’ experience of internationalization, they are more likely to adopt promotion orientation. However, when previous experiences have proved unfavourable and when there is a negative perception of the expansion undertaken by other firms in the industry, entrepreneurs are more likely to follow a prevention orientation. This leads us to our first hypothesis (Fig. 1):

H₁: Entrepreneurs’ motivational orientation (promotion versus prevention) depends on their prior international experience relating to international expansion.

International opportunities and information needs

Developing an internationalization strategy requires information on a range of areas. Yet, information is by no means evenly distributed nor is it perceived equally by entrepreneurs. In this regard, the literature states that in individual recognition of informative stimuli, it is both the informative stimulus itself as well as the entrepreneurs’ cognitive skills that play a role (Haukedal 1994). Information related to internationalization is wide ranging and relates to a number of quite different aspects which we might group together in three thematic areas (Claver and Quer 2001; Santos and García 2009): information concerning the appeal of overseas markets, information concerning barriers or hurdles relating to international expansion, and information concerning support programmes made available by various public and private bodies to promote business internationalization. Appeal relates to issues concerned with the size of markets and their growth. Obstacles are defined as attitudinal, structural, operational or any other kind of barrier hindering or preventing a firm’s wish to undertake, develop or maintain its overseas activities

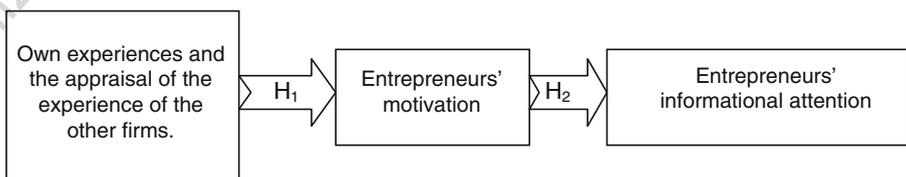


Fig. 1 Model of analysis

(Leonidou 1995: 13). Support programmes are those provided by various bodies to facilitate company internationalization. The content of these programmes may vary (Calderón and Fayos 2004), offering information or advice, promoting trade (attending fairs, missions, sounding out markets), providing help in starting up exports, personalised services for firms, training, funding and insurance, etc.

However, it is not enough simply for the information to be available. It must also be recognised and acted upon by the entrepreneur. Too much information, ambiguity in stimuli and individuals' cognitive limitations can lead to entrepreneurs recognising only a part of the information available (Baron 1998). Entrepreneurs create subjective and simplified representations of the competitive environment, said representations thus shaping their decisions (Santos and García 2010). The literature points out that recognising informative stimuli is shaped by the entrepreneur's centre of attention (Ucbasaran et al. 2009), this centre of attention referring to various domains, areas or issues which entrepreneurs focus their attention on. The centre of attention will thus determine the likelihood of an informative stimulus impacting the firm's strategic agenda (Cho and Hambrick 2006; Dutton and Jackson 1987; Huff 1990). Thus, entrepreneurs do not devote the same attention to informative stimuli from the competitive environment (Nadkarni and Barr 2008, Ucbasaran et al. 2009). PMF entrepreneur behaviour directs its efforts towards seeking success, in this particular instance conquering overseas markets. By contrast, PVF entrepreneurs focus their behaviour on company stability and on ensuring the absence of failure in international expansion. It can therefore be deduced that differing motivational orientation dictates entrepreneurs' centre of attention. These motivational trends will thus condition entrepreneurs' interest towards the various informative centres of interest, the strategic appeal of markets, barriers and support programmes representing the centres of interest linked to international expansion.

It therefore seems reasonable to assume that entrepreneurs will, depending on their interests and preferences, in other words, their motivational orientation, be interested in certain aspects or others. In other terms, depending on their motivational orientation they will value the various kinds of information differently. We thus posit the second hypothesis:

H₂: entrepreneurs' motivational orientation (promotion versus prevention) will shape their interest towards various kinds of information related to internationalization.

It seems reasonable to think that entrepreneurs displaying a PMF orientation might show a greater interest in any information related to the appeal of overseas markets which will undoubtedly help them to engage in a proactive internationalization strategy. Entrepreneurs displaying a PVF orientation are likely to show an interest in issues related to the obstacles which will enable them to reduce the number of hurdles and the risk involved in exploiting international opportunities. As regards information concerning support programmes, we are unable to imagine who is likely to show a greater interest, PMF or PVF subjects. Both groups will probably be interested, although for different reasons. PMF individuals may deem information concerning support to be interesting as a source of opportunities. PVF individuals, however, may take an interest in information related to support programmes as a means of reducing the risk involved in internationalization.

Empirical application

The Spanish natural stone industry

The Spanish natural stone industry is a long-standing and consolidated sector currently having to face up to the shifting international economy, increased competition from emerging countries, the launch of new products, and the need for technological renovation. In this sector there are 792 firms devoted to extraction (concentrated particularly in Galicia, Catalonia and Castilla y León), and 4,831 devoted to transformation of stone industry and distributors (located mainly in Andalusia and the regions of Valencia and Galicia). In both cases, these are mainly small and medium enterprises. Specifically, 58% of the extraction companies and around 80% of firms dedicated to the industrial side correspond to microfirms, in other words companies employing fewer than ten workers. Being so small restricts firms' strategic alternatives.

The Spanish natural stone industry is a world leader and ranks sixth in terms of production at a global scale. Spanish production value reached a peak in 2007, after which business fell due to the crisis in the Spanish building sector. Current data reflects a worrying decline with national production dropping to 1998 levels. In gross product terms, Spain is the third largest exporter and fourth largest importer. In 2009, Spanish exports fell 18.9%, although the decline in import levels has been even greater due to the lack of domestic demand. This accounts for the fact that in the same year the coverage rate grew from 3.14 in 2008 to 4 in 2009. France, Germany, the USA, China and the UK are amongst the major consumers of natural Spanish stone.

The global crisis in the sector coupled with the huge downturn in the construction industry in Spain have hit business hard, and entrepreneurs in the sector are now actively engaged in the search for new international markets and are striving to boost their international position. This is why we chose this particular sector for the empirical application of the research. Moreover, the sector is amongst those enjoying greatest support from various public bodies¹ involved in promoting business internationalization.

Variables

Empirical application seeks to: (1) characterise entrepreneurs' motivational orientation in the natural stone sector (promotion/prevention), (2) assess the impact of prior experience (in the company itself as well as in other firms) on motivational orientation, and (3) explore the impact of orientation on the entrepreneur's informational interests. To achieve this, we conducted a telephone survey amongst Spanish firms working in the natural stone industry in which we included firms engaged in extraction, as well as transformation and distributors. The survey was carried out in May 2010, and 298 valid questionnaires were obtained.

¹ At a national level, the ICEX classifies it as a preferential sector and it is included in the HABITAT plan. This sector appears in the II Business Internationalization Plan for Firms in Castilla y León.

The empirical study centred on entrepreneurs' motivational orientation. To ascertain this orientation, we included two questions in the questionnaire, one in which entrepreneurs were asked to state at what point the firm should consider international expansion (when faced with opportunities in overseas markets or when the domestic market is saturated), and another in which they were asked to state which markets they would focus on when considering internationalization (markets offering enormous growth/markets with few barriers). The answers to these questions enable us to characterise entrepreneurs' motivational orientation. We therefore identified PMF entrepreneurs as those who stated that branching out into international markets should be considered when opportunities arise overseas and who display a preference for markets evidencing potential growth. Those who state that expanding into an international market is an option when the domestic market is saturated and opt for markets with fewer barriers are those we classify as PVF entrepreneurs. This classification is by no means clear cut. In other words, there are entrepreneurs who do not fall into either the category of PMF or PVF since they evidence positions which are unclear or seem contradictory. For instance, there are those who state that branching out into overseas markets should ensue when interesting opportunities arise but when choosing do not give priority to markets with the highest growth. This group would also include those who state that expanding into international markets is an option when the domestic market is saturated, yet do not indicate a preference for markets with fewer barriers.

We included three blocks of questions in the questionnaire:

1. The first block contains questions aimed at providing control variables: number of employees (size), whether the firm is a family business or not, type of activity. As regards the nature of the activity, we established three categories which we ordered depending on their degree of market orientation: extraction, transformation and distribution.
2. In the second block, we gathered information concerning entrepreneurs' prior international experience, regarding both their own experience as well as their appraisal of the experience of other firms. With regard to their own experience, we considered three situations, those who have never engaged in international operations, those who have had some experience, and those who evidence wide experience. With regard to experience of other firms, we considered three possibilities: those who state that in most firms the experience proved positive, those who state that in most firms branching out overseas proved negative, and those who point to a range of experiences in international expansion. In both, the variable for own experience as well as for the experience of others, there are three levels with which we generated dummy variables allowing us to assess each level separately.
3. In the third block, we included the information question. We specifically asked interviewees to imagine they had 100€ to buy information. They were asked to distribute the money amongst the various kinds of information: market appeal, barriers and obstacles to internationalization and support programmes. We thus gleaned information concerning the resources which the entrepreneur is willing to devote to the three kinds of information: markets (RDM), barriers (RDO) and support programmes (RDSP).

The empirical application is organised in three consecutive stages. In the first, we characterised the groups and evaluated whether the control variables hold any relation with motivational orientation. In the second, we explored the impact which the entrepreneur's prior international experience has with regard to international expansion. Finally, at the third stage, we assessed whether the motivational orientation is related to the entrepreneur's informational interests.

Results

Based on entrepreneurs' responses to questions dealing with when exploitation of international opportunities should be considered and which markets they would opt for, we determined their motivational orientation. The results to emerge are reflected in the grouping of the sample into the three blocks shown:

- 0 indefinite: individuals displaying no clear motivational orientation, 134 cases (45%)
- 1 PMF: entrepreneurs with a promotion orientation, 131 cases (44%)
- 2 PVF: entrepreneurs with a prevention orientation, 33 cases (11%).

Findings indicate that we are unable to identify the entrepreneur's motivational orientation clearly for almost half the sample, and that in the remainder the main orientation is promotion (44%) compared to prevention (11%). We therefore conclude that in the natural stone sector exploiting international opportunities is mainly related to entrepreneurs' internal motivation, and that only rarely is it perceived as being motivated externally by competitive conditions. In other words, accidental IE appears in the sector as a minority option. This finding seems logical since the nature of the entrepreneur is more inclined towards a PMF rather than a PVF orientation, as McMullen points out (2003).

The control variables in the results indicate that PVF entrepreneurs tend to be found in smaller firms, whereas entrepreneurs displaying an indefinite orientation work in larger firms. Those who are promotion oriented are therefore found in medium size firms although one noteworthy feature in this group is the enormous dispersion in size. Descriptive statistics indicate that almost 73% of firms are family concerns, the majority of which are promotion oriented and only 11% prevention oriented. The distribution is therefore similar to what appears for the sample as a whole. As regards the kind of activity, firms involved in transformation are the most common, followed by those engaged in extraction and finally those involved in distribution. Only in extraction firms is promotion orientation prevalent, as in the rest the most frequent orientation is not clear. Prevention orientation reaches the greatest proportion amongst distributors and the lowest amongst extraction firms (Table 1).

Results from the difference of means test and non-parametric test help us to understand whether there any significant differences amongst the groups identified (Table 2).

As expected, the findings indicate that variables related to characterising firms (size, nature of the activity or family business) reveal no significant differences amongst entrepreneurs displaying different motivational orientation. In other words, entrepreneurs' motivational orientation corresponds to an inherent personal

Table 1 Control variables: summary statistics of three groups identified

		Indefinite	1: PMF	2: PVF	Total
Size	Mean	18.7	17.9	12.8	17.7
	SD	29.6	34.7	11.2	30
FAM	SI	93	100	24	217
	NO	41	31	9	81
Type	Extraction	29	33	6	68
	Transformation	76	75	18	169
	Distribution	29	23	9	61
Total		134	131	33	298

characteristic rather than to the kind of firm. Only size was seen to have a major impact on PVF entrepreneurs. Specifically, we ascertained that prevention orientation is linked to small firms, which is understandable since the smaller the firm, the less available are resources and therefore the greater the need for security, typical of a PVF orientation.

We now analyse whether entrepreneurs' "prior international experience" shows any dependency with their motivational orientation. To ascertain this, we assessed the effect of entrepreneurs' personal experience as well as their appraisal of the internationalization undertaken by other firms in the sector. To do so, we calculated the difference of means test and non-parametric test, results of which are shown below² (Tables 3 and 4).

Findings indicate that promotion and prevention orientation are related to different variables. PMF orientation is linked to an evaluation of other firms, and PVF orientation to the entrepreneur's previous own experience. Specifically, PMF is linked to a negative and diverse appraisal of other firms' experience of internationalization. In particular, entrepreneurs with a promotion orientation most frequently evidenced a divergent evaluation with regard to the internationalization undertaken by other firms. As regards a negative appraisal, they concur with the PVF in a much higher proportion than those who are undecided. With regard to PVF orientation, findings show that the proportion of entrepreneurs who mention ample previous experience is significantly lower than the rest. The descriptive variable reveals that PVF entrepreneurs also more frequently point to little or no experience, although the differences with the rest are not significant.

We then assessed how entrepreneurs distribute the resources amongst the different kinds of information considered and whether the PMF–PVF orientation impacts allocation of resources. We also calculated the distances between the various concepts: the gap between the amount spent on support programmes and on markets (D-SPM), the gap separating expenditure on markets and obstacles (D-M.O), and the gap separating support programmes and obstacles (D-SPO; Table 5).

² The difference of means test enables us to explore the link between entrepreneurs' motivation and the variables that are representative of "prior international experience" without the results being affected by the relationship between "own experience" and "evaluation of other firms' experience". Tests carried out using other techniques (regression models) provide very similar results.

Table 2 Difference of means test and non-parametric test

	Promotion			Prevention		
	<i>F</i>	Sig.	Non-parametric tests* Z (Sig. Bilate)	<i>F</i>	Sig.	Non-parametric tests* Z (Sig. Bilate)
Size	0.672	0.413	-0.17 (0.86)	3.016	0.086	-11.14 (0.025)
Fam.	0.026	0.871	-0.16 (0.87)	1.64	0.203	-1.28 (0.201)
Type	0.698	0.404	-0.861 (0.389)	0.337	0.563	-0.57 (0.569)

Data reveal that resources are mainly devoted to information concerning the support programmes available to facilitate business internationalization, followed by money spent on information relating to overseas markets (appeal, size, potential growth), and finally barriers and obstacles (operational issues, procedure and paperwork). As a result, the findings show that the largest gap in the allocation of resources occurs between expenditure on support programmes and barriers.

The results to emerge from the difference of means and parametric tests show that the resources which entrepreneurs devote to the various kinds of information differ depending on their motivational orientation (Table 6). Results specifically reveal that differences between PMF and PVF prove significant in variables reflecting resources devoted to information on markets and support. Moreover, the gap between expenditure on markets and support programmes also differs significantly between PMF and PVF entrepreneurs. It therefore appears that PMF entrepreneurs devote far more resources than PVF to information concerning support programmes and significantly less on information regarding markets. Further, the gap between expenditure on support programmes and markets is notably higher in PMF entrepreneurs.

In sum, we find that entrepreneurs' motivational orientation does play a key role with regard to their interest in information concerning the process of internationalization. Specifically, PMF entrepreneurs seem to show an interest in the opportunities afforded by the various public and private bodies in the programmes supporting internationalization and are keen to find out about and to access such programmes. By contrast, PVF entrepreneurs are less concerned with such programmes, preferring to invest in learning directly about overseas markets. They are therefore more alert to gathering direct information on markets and only attach secondary importance to support programmes. The interest aroused by informative stimuli regarding barriers and obstacles is clearly

Table 3 Prior international experience: mean values for the three groups identified

	<i>N</i>	EXP0	EXP1	EXP2	V1	V2	V3
0	134	0.52	0.28	0.20	0.32	0.007	0.37
PMF	131	0.50	0.26	0.19	0.39	0.06	0.67
PVF	33	0.54	0.36	0.09	0.36	0.06	0.55
Total	298	0.51	0.28	0.18	0.35	0.37	0.6

Table 4 Difference of means test and non-parametric test

	PROMOTION			PREVENTION		
	F	Sig.	Non-parametric tests* Z (Sig. Bilateral)	F	Sig.	Non-parametric tests* Z (Sig. Bilateral)
EXP0	0.214	0.644	-0.463 (0.643)	0.418	0.520	-0.649 (0.51)
EXP1	0.372	0.542	-0.610 (0.542)	1.211	0.274	-1.099 (0.27)
EXP2	0.013	0.909	-0.114 (0.909)	4.302	0.041	-2.038 (0.042)
V1	1.149	0.285	-1.072 (0.284)	0.844	0.361	-0.919 (0.358)
V2	3.861	0.050	-1.956 (0.051)	1.268	0.263	-1.125 (0.261)
V3	3.285	0.071	-1.806 (0.071)	1.750	0.189	-1.317 (0.188)

less and the differences apparent between entrepreneurs displaying contrasting motivational orientation do not prove relevant.

Conclusions and limitations

Business internationalization may be interpreted as exploiting international opportunities. Pinpointing such opportunities seems to be closely linked to entrepreneurial motivation. Regulatory Focus Theory states that, when seeking objectives, individuals follow contrasting motivational orientation: promotion focus and prevention focus. The former corresponds to those driven by success, whilst prevention orientation corresponds to those keen to avoid failure. The literature indicates that motivational orientation may depend on each situation or context as well as on previous individual experience. If we transfer these proposals to an

Table 5 Entrepreneurs' interest towards the different kinds of information: summary statistics

		N	Mean	SD		Mean	SD
RDM	0	134	36.97	24.81	D-SPM	2.25	47.86
	PMF	131	30.56	25.74		18.46	55.81
	PVF	33	39.21	26.17		-1.90	50.41
	Total	298	34.40	25.52		8.91	52.31
RDB	0	134	23.80	15.97	D-M.O	13.16	32.94
	PMF	131	20.40	17.22		10.16	29.58
	PVF	33	23.48	16.03		15.72	34.20
	Total	298	22.27	16.57		12.12	31.60
RDA	0	134	39.22	25.63	D-SPO	15.41	34.76
	PMF	131	49.03	32.29		28.62	44.91
	PVF	33	37.30	26.72		13.81	35.46
	Total	298	43.32	29.22		21.04	40.06

Kinds of information: markets (RDM), barriers (RDO) and support programmes (RDSP)

Table 6 Difference of means and parametric test

	F ANOVA	Sig.	Chi-squared ^{ab}	Sig. asymptotic	Z ^c	Sig. asymptotic (bilateral)
RDM	2.776	0.064	6.991	0.030	-1.952	0.051
RDO	1.499	0.225	3.341	0.188	-1.360	0.174
RDSP	4.628	0.010	6.764	0.034	-1.995	0.046
D-SPM	4.058	0.018	8.039	0.018	-1.993	0.046
D-M.O	0.538	0.584	0.478	0.788	-0.449	0.653

Kinds of information: markets (RDM), barriers (RDO) and support programmes (RDSP)

^a Kruskal–Wallis test

^b Grouping variable: 0, PMF, PVF

^c Grouping variable: PMF compared to PVF

analysis of the exploitation of international opportunities, entrepreneurs may be grouped according to their motivational orientation: promotion focused entrepreneurs and prevention focused entrepreneurs. PMF entrepreneurs approach internationalization spurred on by an inherent motivation whereas PVF entrepreneurs engage in internationalization driven by the requirements of the competitive environment. Motivational orientation thus shapes entrepreneurs' interests and preferences and consequently their alertness to the various informative stimuli available (Tang et al. 2011). We therefore conclude that motivational orientation impacts entrepreneurs' informational concerns regarding various aspects linked to international expansion.

The present research focuses on an analysis of motivational orientation amongst entrepreneurs in the Spanish natural stone industry. Findings reveal that in many cases a clear motivational orientation cannot be determined, but that in the rest the main orientation is PMF. We thus conclude that exploiting international opportunities is more closely linked to entrepreneurs' personal motivation than to the demands of the competitive environment.

PMF entrepreneurs show differences compared to the rest in their appraisal of the success other firms in the sector have had when embarking on internationalization. PVF individuals, however, evidence differences regarding the extent of their own experience. They specifically claim to have had "*wide experience*" more often than other entrepreneurs in the sample. In other words, for PVF entrepreneurs it is the weight of their own experience which prevails whereas in PMF entrepreneurs it is the evaluation attributed to the internationalization undertaken by other firms. Put differently, when entrepreneurs lack previous experience, they are more likely to adopt a PMF position, although once they gain experience and become more aware of the difficulties involved in business internationalization they tend to adopt a PVF stance. This finding bears out hypothesis H₁ and, at the same time, shows that own experience and the experiences of other firms prove to be exclusive in the entrepreneur's prior international experience. In other words, when entrepreneurs lack any experience of their own, they resort to that of others (Gaba et al. 2002), yet when they do possess their own, the experience of others proves irrelevant.

With regard to informational concerns, the entrepreneurs consulted displayed a clear preference for information related to support programmes, followed by issues linked to a knowledge of markets. Nevertheless, entrepreneurs evidencing different orientations display quite differing informational concerns, as posited in hypothesis H₂. Whereas PMF individuals are willing to devote a large part of their resources to familiarising themselves with support programmes, the PVF opt to devote the bulk of their resources to learning directly about markets, contrary to what we had posited. This finding indicates that entrepreneurs displaying a range of differing motivations evidence contrasting states of alertness. We may therefore conclude that the extent to which different informative stimuli impact entrepreneurs is determined by the latter's motivation. The findings would thus seem to suggest that bodies involved in promoting internationalization should adapt their efforts in communication to the differing motivations displayed by entrepreneurs.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that PMF entrepreneurs, who link exploiting international opportunities to personal motivation and admit to limited experience, seek opportunities in the content of the support programmes offered by the various bodies promoting internationalization. By contrast, more experienced entrepreneurs, who link exploiting international opportunities to the demands of a competitive environment, PVF individuals, seek opportunities directly in the market conditions. We therefore conclude that entrepreneurs' motivational orientation with regard to international opportunities changes as they gain experience, which at the same time alters their alertness. These findings account for the differing informative needs posited by entrepreneurs with varying levels of previous experience (Politis 2008, Westhead 2008).

The study concludes that research into opportunities in general and international opportunities in particular should focus on exploring entrepreneurial motivation. This would enrich the analysis of the determining factors involved in pinpointing opportunities (either through recognition or through construction) as well as the various means which entrepreneurs pursue to exploit them.

The research is not without its limitations which restrict the validity of the findings to emerge. The study focuses on the analysis of entrepreneurial motivation in internationalization. Yet, it is difficult to expound the eminently practical behaviour of the entrepreneur in an analysis model, which is why we posit a simplified model. Entrepreneurs' motivation and their informative preferences undoubtedly depend on a number of factors. However, our specific concern is not to pinpoint said range of factors but to ascertain whether one in particular, prior international experience (either their own or that of other firms) shapes said motivation and whether this motivation affects their alertness, a relationship borne out through the findings to emerge but which must be seen in the light of other more detailed studies which take account of other possible factors. Moreover, the elements included in the model are difficult to reflect in specific variables. As a result, we are forced to research new measures which will provide us with as refined a representation as possible of the aspects we explore. Conducting studies which focus on such issues will no doubt enable us to enrich the theoretical model posited and to design representative variables for the analysis. However, we believe that the present research opens up new insights to further our knowledge of both the analysis of international entrepreneurs' motivation and how their motivation impacts their informational attention.

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